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THE SHAPING OF AN EDUCATED HEART

**Address
by
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During a lecture at State University's Downstate Medical Center in 1966, Arnold Toynbee observed that we have conquered nature and now our great unfinished task is to conquer self. "Man," he said, "is our most formidable enemy. He is more formidable than wild beasts (man's earliest foe) and more formidable than disease, which for the most part we now control."

"The time has come," Tounbee said, "for mankind as a whole to unite against the enemy in itself."

He noted in conclusion that the greatest irony of our time is that man may be destroyed, not by his madness but by his carelessness, by his wanton disregard for himself and his special relationship to the planet Earth.

Toynbee's warnings hang over us like a chilling cloud. In addition to the rape of physical resources he warned, of the crisis of the human spirit.

Today there is spread across the land, a vast uneasiness one can almost feel and touch. It's like a kind of prickly ball in the pit of our stomachs telling us something is not right. And the daily news makes us alternately angry and depressed.

More than fifty years ago, Josiah Royce described the conditions of his time in terms that are shockingly prophetic of our day as well.

- o Royce said of an earlier day that we have become "more knowing, more clever, more skeptical, but seemingly we do not become more profound or more reverent."

Today we begin an unusual conversation. We have left our schools to talk about the place of values in education--a topic this is so painfully difficult, precisely because it is so urgent.

I'm troubled that my own remarks will sound to shallow, even sentimental. And yet I am constrained to say those of us in education -must-somehow confront more systematically than we do, the ethical and moral crisis of our time and consider ways to strengthen such old-fashioned virtues as truth--and justice--and integrity--and human decency. But just how can our schools instill these conditions which our grandparents would have called the qualities of the human spirit?

Let me suggest three steps that might focus on qualities of the human spirit and help strengthen the moral fiber in new life.

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I.

First, I suggest that--as a moral obligation--the time has come for us to underscore the unity of life on this spaceship Earth. Some years ago William Arrowsmith declared that education is

"unconsciously helping to create a new and special modern chaos in which the environment as a whole is nobody's business and bears nobody's design--a conglomerate whose total disorder is exposed by the ruthless unrelatedness of the parts."

There is some truth to this charge. For, with all of our academic subtleties and our countless categories of knowledge, we frequently study all questions except those that matter most. And while we are doing well the essential business of transmitting fragments of information, there is another obligation that is substantially ignored--searching out and highlighting the interlocking threads of human knowledge.

The fact is that students come to school at a time in their lives when the biggest questions press in on them, and yet rarely in the academic programs are these transcendent issues met head on. And this leads, for some at least, to acute frustration and disappointment.

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- o Somerset Maugham in the "writer's notebook" writes poignantly of the mountaineer who struggled to reach the top of the highest peak only to discover that instead of seeing the sunrise he found only fog, at which point the writer suggests "he wandered down again."

It was Tolstoi who, as a young man, identified the issues that seemed relentlessly to press in, and the list is relevant yet today. Tolstoi troubled himself with such questions as:

- o "Why live at all?"
- o "What is the cause of my existence and of everyone else's?"
- o "What is the meaning of the cleavage into good and evil which I feel within myself, and why does this cleavage exist?"
- o "What should be the plan of my life?"
- o "What is death, how can I transcend it?"

Where in the programs of our schools can such universal questions be asked? How can students develop the art of wise decision-making which as Walter Lippmann says, "cuts across all specialities."

This sort of wisdom transcends the disciplines, for again in Lippmann's words,

"it can be possessed by anyone who has an imaginative feeling for what really matters to human beings, whether they travel in jet planes or walk on foot--whether they are craftsmen in little workshops or hired hands in an automatic factory run by a computer."

The point is clear enough. We must, through what we have called general education- help students understand that they are not only onomous individuals but also members of a larger community to which they are accountable.

At a recent meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Dr. Lewis Thomas, acknowledging that these are not the best of times for the human mind, went on to observe:

"I cannot begin to guess at all the causes of our cultural sadness, not even the most important ones, but I can think of one thing that is wrong with us and eats away at us: we do not know enough about ourselves. We are ignorant about how we work, about where we fit in, and most of all about the enormous, imponderable system of life in which we are embedded as working parts."

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II.

Secondly, in our quest for values in education, the climate and the process of education must be improved. In our relation with each other we must underscore the point that people are important.

This statement is so simple, it borders on the sentimental. Yet in our busy world of increased emphasis on technology, of pressures and problems on every side, of almost hourly crises, one of our most difficult tasks still remains--that of dealing humanely with one another.

Surrounded, sometimes even mastered, by our inventions, it becomes all too easy to put people into categories. We tend to speak of "engineers," "professors," "bus drivers," the "middle class," the "silent majority," and on and on we go.

And as we pigeonhole, we distort and the schools become less humane. We lose sight of the fact that we are engaged with people--individuals who laugh, who love, who have unique talents and deep aspirations, who grow old and lonely, who have fears and doubts in the dark of night. We live out Eleanor Rigby--popularized in the Beatles' tune. Eleanor, as you'll recall, waited at the window "wearing the mask she keeps in a jar by the door." We, too, wear our masks, acting out our roles as two-dimensional people, wearing a "face" we keep in a jar by the door.

There are, of course, great teachers and great administrators who touch the lives of students. Some months ago I tried to recall all of the teachers I had had. Several dozen come to mind. I then tried to focus on the great teachers and I remembered four-- and oh, I thought about Miss Rice and Mr. Wittlinger and Professor Tade and Dr. Wilson it seemed clear that what made them great was not their mastery of the discipline--although they were all scholarly and well informed. These teachers were outstanding because they were truly human, revealing not only the facts but their feelings. They dicussed not only what they knew but what they didn't know, as well.

The point isthis. If values are to be taught they must be lived and this means a climate of condor and integrity and honest in the schools.

It seems to me that the sickness of our physical environment is, at last in part, a mirror of a social sickness a--reflection of the pervasive notion that life is cheap and an unwillingness to be more self revealing.

o Indeed it is here--at this very point--that our rebirth must begin.

And the classroom is-in my opinion a place where integrity must be demonstrated everyday- in the assignments given in the standards we maintain, and in the respect extended and in the performance we expect of every student.

III.

I now turn to my third suggestion, one that seems even more exclusive. In exploring values in education we consider how students can be encouraged to make responsible judgements, to form convictions, and to act boldly upon the values we hold.

- o It is not enough merely to see the world wholly and sensitively.
- o It is not enough simply to have a climate where integrity is valued.
- o We also have classroom experience where students can develop and refine the capacity to achieve "what is good and what is best."

I understand that when ever a discussion finally turns to values we all clutch up a bit. A strange embarrassment seems to overtake us all. The topic seems at once both threatening and out of date.

And yet we cannot delude or students by suggesting that they can be responsible people without ever taking sides, without expressing firm convictions about fundamental issues.

In his penetrating book, Faith and Learning, Alexander Miller commented rightly on this curious timidity whe he wrote:

"A decent tentativeness is a wholesome expression of scholarly humility. We seem to have a sort of dogmatic tentativeness which suggest that (in matters of moral judgment, at least) it is intellectually indecent to make up your minds."

It is true, I suspect, that wer are too often caught up in the thich of thin things, and confused by all of the confusing signals.

But I also believe there is a hopeful side to all of this. We now realize that, as George Steiner has reminded us, a man who is intellectually advance can at the same time be morally bankrupt.

- o We now realize that, as George Steiner has reminded us, a man who is intellectually advance can at the same time be morally bankrupt.
- o We now know that such a man can listen to Bach and Schubert at sundown, he can read Goether in the evening, and the next day go to his daily work at the concentration camp to gas his fellowmen.

- o "What grows up inside literate civilization," Steiner asks, "that seems to prepare it for the release of barbarism?"

To put it very simply, we are beginning to understand that education does not inevitably humanize.

We are losing faith in the childish notion that all education, regardless of its quality or thrust or purpose, will lead to virtue.

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IV

All of this is well and good. Everyone is for values in the abstract. But whose values does the school espouse?

Without begging the question, I conclude that what is called for is a process in the classroom in which the wrestling with big issues and complex values is made fully legitimate--a place where the climate does not push for particular conclusions, but makes honorable the quest.

This is not to suggest a program of indoctrination that suffocated the spirit, neither does it mean theory courses that become only speculative and remote. Indeed, the process I have just described can take place not necessarily in a special course called "value" but in a study of MacBeth, or Plato's Apology or John Osbornes play Luther or Thomas Paines, The Crisis or Thoreau's Civil Disobedience or The Rebel by Comus.

Students might examine the ethical implications in public policy decisions. Consider for example the decision of President Andrew Jackson to remove the native american population from Georgia and the other southern states. How was the decision made? What social forces shaped it?