

## Anthropology in the Humanities

*helps man discover his humanity.*

THE most important single thing any society can do, in the long run, is to honor the life of the mind. All man's material progress, from the use and making of fire to the latest exploits in space, and all that he has created in music, art, literature, or religious and philosophical systems are ours because man has the mind to do things that no other animal can do.

To be sure, human beings have to do the things other animals do—eat, sleep, find shelter, protect themselves from enemies, procreate and rear the young—but only man can explore the physical world, the nature of his own mind, and the society he has created. Only man can marvel at a cloud formation or a sunset, create and enjoy a painting, a poem, a sonata or a cathedral. Only man can record what he sees and thinks, feels or believes and thus give continuity to the life of the mind. Only man can cherish values and only he is capable of what has been called the greatest of all human adventures: looking for the truth about things and about life.

Only by honoring the life of the mind can a society be assured of people who will seek to know, to contemplate and

to create. If this be true, the primary concern of a society, and hence of education, is not the making of persons into more efficient animals but into more effective human beings, at least some of whom must be committed to the search for the truth. The main business of any society should be the increasingly human use of human beings.

Such a value orientation would put at the heart of the school curriculum those things that have to do with man's search for knowledge about himself and the universe. Because such knowledge is cumulative, man must not only examine the world around him but must find out what other men in other times and places have thought, felt and believed to be true. In short, no man can be called educated and no man has fully claimed his heritage if he has been deprived of those areas of learning we commonly call the humanities.

Yet the humanities as generally defined have been too narrowly limited in time and space. In most areas of knowledge, but more particularly in the humanities, Western man has largely limited himself to Western culture. We have not only ignored the deeper roots of our own heritage; we have been almost totally unaware of the religious and philosophical thought and experience of a

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major portion of mankind. The average American college graduate knows next to nothing of Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tzu, or Mencius; the *Koran* is only a word, and the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad-Gita* are not even that. Other treasure houses of ancient wisdom remain not only untapped but even their existence is largely unknown. We are equally ignorant of the breadth of human potentiality and human experience in the world today. In recent decades anthropologists have studied hundreds of the simpler societies whose languages, religions, arts and ways of life open up whole new worlds of experience of which we are almost totally unaware.

Our understanding of man and the universe is further limited by our compartmentalization of knowledge. In his *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*,<sup>1</sup> C. P. Snow complains of the ever-widening gap between the physical sciences and what we are here calling the humanities. Actually this problem is an old one, though it increases in magnitude as there is more to be known and understood. And it applies, though perhaps in a lesser degree, to the biological and social sciences in their relation to the humanities on the one hand and to the physical sciences on the other. The anthropologist would insist that the search for truth must encompass the totality of human experience, for only thus can we hope to understand human beings in all their variety and human society in all of its manifestations.

It is not the purpose of this article to go into the larger problem of the relationships among the various aspects of the world of knowledge, or to do more than reaffirm the necessity of our finding some way to bridge the gaps separating

the various areas. Rather attention is given here to only one aspect of the problem: the importance of both the humanities and the behavioral sciences in the understanding of man and the universe. Limitations of space as well as personal familiarity lead to giving major consideration to the role of anthropology.

### Role of Anthropology

Anthropology can contribute to the humanities—and to other areas of knowledge—a number of new dimensions. It can extend our experience backward through time and, by expanding this experience to include the many cultural streams, either tributary to or outside of the mainstream of Western civilization, anthropology can put at our disposal the whole of man's accumulated knowledge. It can bring together the various experiments in living represented by the existing cultures of the world and thus give new insights into the various ways human behavior can be institutionalized and human problems met. It can give new perspectives on our own culture for as we see the various life ways of other peoples we are able to develop new insights into, and achieve a new objectivity about, our own ways of doing things.

Moreover, anthropology can help man discover his own humanity. By combining the knowledge of what is physical and what is cultural and by including all mankind in its scope, anthropology gives a broader understanding of the nature of man and the human potential. People who see man from only one point of view, or as a participant in only one culture, are likely to get as distorted a picture as the fabled blind men, each of whom felt and described a different part of the elephant.

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<sup>1</sup>New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959.

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In an earlier day a total view of man was not possible. For one thing, peoples in many areas of the world were limited to a knowledge of their near neighbors and intercommunication was difficult at best. Furthermore, the cultivated life was possible for the few only at the expense of the many. Philosophers, creative writers, artists, and even skilled craftsmen could pursue their chosen ends in large measure because there were masses of men, women and children to perform the drudgery necessary to living in a machineless culture. In many, if not in all, stratified societies the more privileged classes rationalized their positions on the basis of an assumed biological inferiority of the masses. When peoples of the more complex civilizations first encountered peoples of the simpler cultures the same biological rationalization was often resorted to as an explanation of cultural differences.

Whatever social or economic necessity may once have existed for such differentiation of whole categories of people, it can no longer be justified today. Slowly through the centuries man has used his mind to master his environment and human beings need no longer serve as beasts of burden or be condemned to endless, back-breaking toil. Nor can we any longer justify the exploitation of any category of people on the basis of the innate inferiority of any race, class or sex. The stupid, the ordinary and the gifted are found among both sexes, in all races and at all economic levels. Only the ignorant, the naive or the self-seeking now contend that the amount of pigment in the skin, degree of curl in the hair, or the social and economic status of one's ancestors are in themselves relevant factors in human behavior.

Given freedom from the necessity of

endless toil, a knowledge of the general human capacity for culture, and the means of global intercommunication, man now has before him the possibility of a world with totally new dimensions. It is a world in which he is faced with the possibility of wholesale destruction; but he can, if he chooses to use the resources now available to him, create not a world culture but a world civilization with many cultural facets to enrich the whole.

For the first time it is possible to see the whole development on which modern civilization rests. We can see the long road man has traveled and the many races and peoples whose separate cultures contributed to the main stream. Western man can now look beyond the civilizations of Greece and Rome and can draw on the totality of man's accumulated knowledge. The rich civilizations of the ancient East, the long neglected Islamic cultures, the New World civilizations and even the experiments in living, the legends and the lore of the simpler cultures are waiting to add richness to the whole.

### Practical Problems

If youth are to claim the rich heritage that is rightfully theirs and if they are to be prepared for planetary if not interplanetary living, they must get a sense of the wholeness and continuity of life. Man is dependent on the physical world and on other living things that are a part of his total environment. He is one with the rest of his fellow men whatever their race or culture, and he is what he is because in various times and places generations of his predecessors made contributions to the common store of knowledge and experience that make up his cultural heritage.

How does one open up these new dimensions? Certainly the answer does not lie in anything so simple, and yet so difficult, as adding a single anthropology course to an already crowded high school curriculum, nor in anything so superficial as adding here and there a few references to Buddha and Confucius, or to the Navaho or the Dobuans. Scattered bits of information, unless set within their proper historical framework or within their cultural context, are worse than useless. Nor is specific information in itself enough. The type of briefing known as "area orientation" doubtless has some value but this can never substitute for the basic understanding of what culture is, what it does, and how it operates.

In most situations the more useful procedure would seem to be the adding of new dimensions to the existing curriculum or, better still, the revamping of the total curriculum along lines that are both broader and more fundamental. New developments make the latter procedure almost imperative. While there is more and more to be known about each specific area of knowledge, the number of areas with which one must have some familiarity increases. Literacy in the physical sciences is necessary to survival but in an ever shrinking world it is equally necessary that we have a knowledge of human behavior in all of its manifestations. And if practical knowledge is acquired at the expense of those things that give life meaning and value we may find that existence bought at such price is hardly worth the having.

If these imperatives are to be met there must be ruthless elimination of the trivial and the ephemeral and more efficient procedures for teaching the basic factual materials so that time and energy may be freed for broadening and deepening

the curriculum as a whole. The effectiveness of such curricular changes is in turn dependent on the quality and training of the teaching personnel and the kinds of instructional materials available. A first step would be to add these new dimensions to the education of teachers and curriculum writers and to make such dimensions a part of the continuing education of those already in service.

In conclusion, it may be well to repeat that knowledge is one and that rivalry between arbitrarily defined disciplines is not the answer to our problems. In the words of Robert Redfield, "Understanding, and her apotheosis, wisdom, are the true gods within the temple; science is not; she is only a handmaiden, and serves with many others."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Redfield. *The Little Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955. p. 168.

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## Psychology

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humanities, if taught for the purposes described above, can contribute to reducing the discrepancy between the perceived self and the concept of adequacy and thus enable a student to become more adequate.

Literature ranging from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* through Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* explores problems which can help youth resolve some of their own feelings through vicarious experience. Again, the purpose should be to enable the student to explore a problem and come to understand something about himself. This exploration should not be graded but rather understood and encouraged by the teacher. Various artistic media offer vicarious outlets for the frustration and anger which adult controls arouse. Music too, if it is not aimed at perfecting skills or "uplifting"

taste, can serve as an outlet for feelings. Much of the music currently popular with adolescents is in the same tradition as the folk songs and ballads of our cultural heritage. By giving recognition to such music, we may help youth to gain feelings of worth and of being understood. The key point which should be reiterated is that if the course content and the behavior of the teacher are consistently aimed at helping individuals to become more adequate, students will be motivated and will learn.

We have said, then, that the self concept guides an individual's behavior. This concept grows out of the interactions between the child and his world, and, most importantly, with the people who are reacting to him in a close relationship. As the self concept grows, there arise discrepancies within it, mainly between his picture of what he is like and his concept of what he should be like, but also within each of these two conceptions.

These discrepancies are the source of the basic motivation to learn. The learning which persists is that which reduces these discrepancies. Persisting learning in the humanities will take place only as it is presented in a way which helps the child to reduce these discrepancies and come to see himself as more adequate. Specifically, these learnings must help him increase his understanding of his worth as a human being, serve as a means of expressing his self, and provide a resource for the creative-integrating of his own personality.

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