

A Philosophical Base for Curriculum Decisions

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NEW forms must be devised for shaping curricular events. Historically rooted curriculum designs cannot even meet the challenges facing today's schools, let alone those of the future. Educators must not busily continue to rearrange the furniture while the house is burning down! I propose instead that curriculum be based upon a new model—a model of Man in his potential rather than his lived reality.

Man as a Basis for Curriculum

The philosophical model presented here originated from the stimulus of the first of three questions posed in the introduction to the curriculum project *Man: A Course of Study*.¹ It seems to me that to inquire "What is human about human beings?" forces us to attend to the fact that Man is unique; unique not just in the manner in which he has adapted to his environment, but unique in the very fact of his being Man in contrast to existence in any other form.

Certainly answers which are found to questions concerning the nature of knowl-

¹ Jerome S. Bruner. *Man: A Course of Study*. Occasional Paper No. 3, the Social Studies Curriculum Program. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Educational Services Inc., 1965. p. 4.

edge, truth, and reality have significant implications for curriculum theory and design. Yet they have been tremendously overemphasized in our present conceptualizations. Today curriculum workers are facing a totally new field of forces bent on shaping the curriculum into new forms. It is imperative that educators include in their curriculum constructs an adequate view of man.² I shall go one step further, however, and defend the position that curriculum designs must *emerge* from an understanding of Man's potential humanness, and that questions of knowledge, truth, and reality are significant only when understood as human questions.

Our present view of Man. In the Western world Man the *becomer* who exists apart from the world he inhabits has nearly been obliterated by Man the *doer* who remains an integral part of the world he has built. The awesome and portentous events which characterize human interchange today are unmistakable evidence, however, that we

² Louise M. Berman. *New Priorities in the Curriculum*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968. p. 2.

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cannot be content with partial-Man, with Man the technician who has grown more and more adept in creating his own environment. Nor dare we turn to the Circean recommendations of those who advocate social control based upon behaviorist principles unless we are prepared to deny forever the concept of freedom.³ If hope for the future lies anywhere, it must be in our willingness to release the potential of Man—to permit him to become more human.

Alternatives in educational emphasis. In a perceptive analysis of the direction of educational trends, Willis Harman observed that education's major impact may not be, as so many educators presume, in the strengthening and broadening of cognitive outcomes, but through influencing beliefs, values, and attitudes. His examination of different belief systems to which men have adhered throughout the centuries led him to conclude that men have arrived at a fundamental polarization of philosophical assumptions in today's world. He characterized this polarity as the "positivist-transcendentalist dichotomy." The shape of society, Harman noted, is "profoundly affected by the set of basic assumptions around which the prevailing belief system is built." He asserted further that although it is not possible to decide whether one set of assumptions is right and another wrong, educational policy clearly hinges upon choices made among these assumptions.⁴

More recently, Leroy Troutner drew attention to a similar dilemma which he identified as the disjuncture between experimentalism, as represented in Dewey's thought, and existentialism, as exemplified by Heidegger's.⁵ Troutner insisted that educational philosophies must take note of the existential position; the educational commu-

nity can no longer be satisfied with Dewey's naturalistic, transactive approach to Man as an object "out there." Each person must be seen as a "being-in-the-world." Educators must recognize that "Being precedes knowing," and resolve one of the most difficult issues facing schools today, the alternative goals of personal growth and transmission of knowledge.⁶

Both Troutner and Harman obviously favor some sort of integration, some synthesis of ideas from which can arise a philosophical orientation to give direction and substance to educational endeavor, but neither proposed a means for achieving such a synthesis. The model presented here is aimed in that direction.

The World of Man

Man's humanity has typically been explored through one of two approaches: (a) a scientific, positivistic frame of reference which seeks to explain the human entity in terms of empirical observable phenomena; (b) a naturalistic, generic, instinctual base from which intrinsic, non-empirical formulations lead to a metaphysical, spiritual, or transcendental interpretation of Man's nature.

Abstraction. Scientific views of Man have been organized into systems of anthropology, physiology, psychology, and sociology, each of which has presented Man as an object—an object to be defined, categorized, and manipulated like any nonhuman phenomenon. This emphasis upon scientism and its empirical view of Man has been mutually reinforcing with the emerging technological rationality of the past centuries. Thus Man has become known primarily as a tool-maker, an inventor, an organizer, a representer of reality, *par excellence*.

Yet the logico-scientific view of Man as a symbolizer, an abstractor of reality, one who manipulates elements of the world he inhabits and creates new representations and images from the old, does not tell all it means to be human. Stopping there is to

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³ For such a recommendation, see, for example, B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971.

⁴ Willis W. Harman, "The Issues Behind the Issues." Paper presented at the Second National Conference for Innovative Educators, San Diego, California, December 1967. pp. 9-10. Mimeographed.

⁵ Leroy F. Troutner, "Experimentalism and Existentialism." *Harvard Educational Review* 39: 154, Winter 1969.

emulate Marcuse's one-dimensional syndrome—One-dimensional Man, One-dimensional Thought, One-dimensional Society.⁷

Subjectification. The core of being that is Man comes to be more human through still another dimension, a dimension which has been most often recognized through the intuitive rather than the scientific approach. For science has failed to cope effectively with the full potential Man has for becoming. It has had difficulty grasping and exploring that part of Man that is not of the world but in the world.

Man does more than create representations of the world he inhabits. Man interprets his world. He attaches personal meaning and worth to it. He feels as well as knows, and by subjectifying objects and events he is able to internalize the world out there—to create an inner world of value and feeling. This he demonstrates empirically in his approach-avoidance patterns, in his attitudes and beliefs.

Fortunately more and more educators are beginning to recognize the existence of a second dimension of Man, and they are now speaking of "affect" as they consider curriculum.

What then does it mean to be human? At least a part of the answer lies in these two dimensions. For humanness is bound up in the potential to abstract and to subjectify lived reality. Yet I would argue that we must proceed still further. *Abstraction* and *Subjectification* are necessary but not sufficient parameters. If we are fully to understand the nature of humanness, we must consider yet three more dimensions.

Survival. A third aspect of humanness is that capacity of Man to perpetuate his own being. This is the *sine qua non*, the potential upon which is based the extension of Man's temporality both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, as well as the possibility of increasing his humanness through the realization of any other dimensions. Man's existence must necessarily precede his essence.

⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press, Inc., 1964.

Expressed through basic physiological drives, the manifestations of this dimension are easily identified: the need to eat and drink, to sleep, to breathe, to engage in activity, to have shelter from the elements. When ordered into an ascending hierarchy of deprivation needs as Maslow has done,⁸ or quantified with reference to the sustenance of intellectual and emotional life as Frymier has postulated,⁹ the manifestations are more difficult to substantiate empirically or to isolate analytically from those attributable to other dimensions. Yet the imprecision in establishing the boundaries of this dimension does not lessen the validity of its inclusion as a necessary component of the Man model. To become more human, Man must remain a dynamic, living being.

Integration. To consider Man as an entity who develops from only a triumvirate of generic potentialities still provides partial-Man. There are yet two more facets of humanness which remain to be developed if Man is to attain optimum realization.

The first of these is *Integration*, that potential of the being as a whole to engage in internally unifying acts, to belong, to attach significance to self and to other selves, and to accept and regard Man with dignity and esteem. *Integration* may have a counterpart in the union of cells into higher organizational patterns as Montagu has proposed;¹⁰ but it is best understood psychologically, not physiologically, and it manifests itself in social rather than biological forms.

Choice. A final dimension of Man which is required to complete the model is that of *Choice*. It is in this dimension that a significant factor of human uniqueness resides. For only Man has such a dimension—the possibility for defining his own existence. Despite the fact that he had no

⁸ A. H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Second edition. Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1968. Chapter 3.

⁹ Jack R. Frymier, "Conceptualizing Curriculum for the Future." Paper delivered at the Kimball Wiles Memorial Conference, Gainesville, Florida, February 1969, pp. 9-11. Mimeographed.

¹⁰ Ashley Montagu, *On Being Human*. New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1966.

part in being, Man is instrumental in his own becoming. It is this principle of personal determinism which is the core of existential philosophy, and it is the acceptance of this fundamental premise that distinguishes this model of Man from the experiential. The model does not deny the role of experience; neither does it bound Man's potential by experience.

The fact that *Choice* is intrinsic to the essence of humanness is expressed most vividly by Troutner:

I had not chosen my parents, my culture, or my particular environment; however, already "being-there" I could (and I can) choose to be taken over by the world of They, or I could (and I can) choose to become myself. . . . I can never completely allow myself to be taken over by the "They" (which is the "dis-owned" mode of being) nor can I ever completely realize a singular, resolute "I" (which is the "own" mode of being). This tension between the two, in fact, is the very stuff of existence.¹¹

Inner and Outer Worlds— The Universe of Man

Man exists because of the world in which he finds himself, and the outer world exists because of Man's being in it. The two can never have meaning separately. As Man is essential to the world out there, so is the world out there essential to Man.

As evidence of the nature of Man's becoming in relation to the coexistence of other selves and objects in the world "out there" are the complex forms which have emerged from Man's inner potential. Each dimension of Man has contributed to the development of an intricate network of relationships which in turn contribute to Man's becoming.

From Man's *Abstraction* dimension, from the realization of his potentiality to symbolize and to communicate, has come the complex web of *Information Systems* which make up the totality of knowledge which Man as a species has at his disposal and which individual men share with one another. From *Subjectification* has emerged

¹¹ Troutner, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

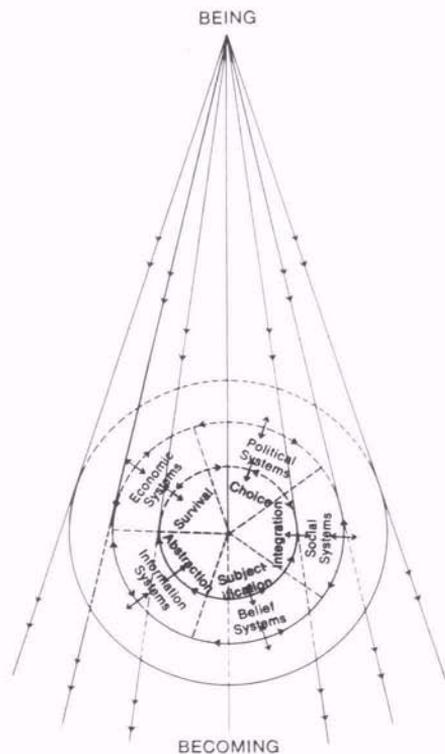
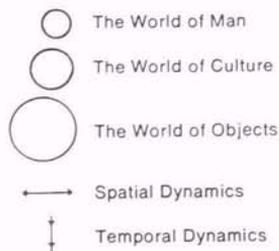


Figure 1. The Universe of Man

the broad array of *Belief Systems* through which Man builds and shares common ways of feeling, valuing, and internalizing his emotional world. Out of the *Survival* dimension have evolved numerous and varied *Economic Systems* by which he maintains, procreates, allocates, and distributes his fundamental resources. From his capacity for *Integration*

have come the multitudinous *Social Systems* ranging from family to world community, all involving forms of belonging, respecting, accepting, and unifying. And finally, out of his unique potential for *Choice*, Man has built *Political Systems* which provide complex ways of exerting influence, effecting decisions, and shaping the nature of lived reality.

These five systems interrelate as the *World of Culture* and serve as the dynamic interface between the *World of Man* and the remaining elements of the outer world, which combine to form the *World of Objects*. This latter world is the nonhuman world which includes all things, natural and manmade, which surround Man and comprise his habitat.

These three—the *World of Man*, the *World of Culture*, and the *World of Objects*—constantly interact temporally and spatially and together comprise the *Universe of Man* (see Figure 1).

Implications for Curriculum Design

More work remains to refine the model to such an extent that it can be used to generate explicit curricular statements. However, it is not too early to explore the usefulness of the construct for curriculum analysis.

If five-dimensional Man is a valid model, then each of these five dimensions is instrumental in the process of Man's becoming. Education is the means by which Man becomes more human. If schooling is the institutionalized form through which education is to take place, then curriculum designs and curriculum events must be consistent with the attainment of greater human realization. Should they neglect or unduly emphasize any dimension of Man's humanness, then to the extent that schooling is effective, the direction, strength, and scope of human becoming will be shaped according to that bias. The model, therefore, provides the justification for raising such questions as those which follow:

1. If schooling is primarily concerned with *Abstraction* and does not explicitly attend to additional dimensions of humanness, will

other educative forms be available to nurture the remaining facets of Man's potential? Does codification of curriculum events by disciplines help perpetuate a one-dimensional view of Man?

2. Even though educators may recognize the significance of *Subjectification* as a vital human dimension (typically called "affect"), are practitioners sufficiently understanding of this facet of human potential to be able to plan and implement curriculum events which will enhance rather than distort growth in this aspect of humanness?

3. Since *Survival* is a prerequisite for Man's emergence in all other dimensions, how can schools help Man become more human if the conditions of schooling are detrimental to healthful, dynamic physiological or psychological existence? Do curriculum designs adequately account for this dimension of human becoming?

4. Can the *Integration* dimension ever flourish if schooling emphasizes competition, institutionalizes failure, and encourages the formation of rigid and hierarchical social orders? Are curriculum events more destructive than helpful in releasing the student's potential to extend regard and respect to himself and others and thus to engage in integrative acts?

5. Can schools prize conformity and exemplify authoritarianism and expect students to accept the possibility of determining the nature of their own existence? Does *Choice* have the opportunity to develop *through* curriculum events, or does it appear primarily as a rejection of those events?

6. If education is concerned with Man's becoming, do we really need schools? Has schooling as an institutional form become the means for the dehumanization rather than the humanization of Man?

If we believe that Man truly aspires to the good life, that he seeks to build the good society, and that the quality we call humanness somehow is required for all this, then we must use Man himself as the organizing base for curriculum design. Even though curriculum events reflect a consideration of the total Universe of Man, their focus of necessity must remain upon the figure of Man. Otherwise, like the Universe without Man, the designs most assuredly will lack meaning. They will not foster Man's potential to become more human. □

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