Education and the Humanistic Crisis[1]

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Dire predictions about the fate of man have been made since the dawn of history. Whether there are more now than at any other period of history, and whether, if this is so, this is indicative that things are worse now than they have ever been before, may be questioned. But it has become clear that we cannot continue as we have been for very much longer without endangering human existence. Natural resources are not unlimited. The philosophy of continuing expansion and growth, which underlies our economic theories and system, is becoming untenable.

Perhaps you have heard about the study sponsored by the so-called Club of Rome, an international group of professionals who are concerned about the future of mankind. A group of scientists, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard, has predicted, on the basis of computer analyses, that under the best of a number of sets of assumptions fed into the computer, disaster will occur within the next century. Two of the half dozen major variables included in their analyses were population and pollution. Others were agricultural and other natural resources and industrial production.

The study has been criticized on many grounds-its assumptions, its methods and its data. No one denies that pollution, population, and production, and the related paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty, are problems- serious problems. But we are living in an age of technology, and there is optimism-some would perhaps feel overoptimism- about the ability of technology to solve these problems. Certainly in the past technology has come to the rescue of mankind, albeit at the last minute, if not later at times.

But I am not here to talk to you about our problems of population, pollution and poverty. There is another problem, in my opinion a far greater one. Man does not live by bread alone. Bread is necessary for life, but not sufficient for living. Man must live with other men-he cannot survive alone. If we solve the problems of population, pollution, and poverty, but do not

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solve the problem of personal relations, or interpersonal relations, we will face ultimate disaster. This is the greatest crisis facing us today, what I have called the humanistic crisis. War, crime, and violence, are manifestations of failure in human relations. The Watergate affair is an aspect of the humanistic crisis, a failure in human relations.

I am not concerned here with tracing all the specific origins of our humanistic crisis. It no doubt is related to the increasing complexity of our civilization and the increasing urbanization of our society with its resulting impersonality in human relations. We talk a lot about changing values, and criticize our so-called middle class value system. We are victims of the cult of relativity and situational ethics. (An example of situational ethics might be the White House ethics.) There are, we are told, no absolutes. There are no universal values. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, has written that there are no values warranting our commitment.

Whether or not our educational system bears any responsibility for the crisis depends on one's view of the nature and purpose of education in our society. It is easy to blame education for all our problems. Fifteen years ago it bore the brunt of our failure to be the first to launch a vehicle into space. Efforts were immediately made to improve instruction in science and mathematics. Our educational system is quite successful in producing scientists, technicians, doctors, lawyers and other professionals. But they have not solved our basic problems of human relationships, of living together.

There are those who have advocated that education has a responsibility to promote desirable social change. This is a difficult responsibility to discharge, particularly in a pluralistic society where there is little agreement on what is desirable social change. But whether we accept this as a responsibility of education or not, it would seem to be a responsibility of education to prepare people to live in the society of the present and the future, and to educate the kind of people necessary for the survival of society. We don't seem to need any more scientists, engineers and technicians. We need people who can relate to other people in ways which leads to the solution of conflicts and to the personal development of other people. As George Leonard puts it in his book "Education and Ecstasy" (p. 127), "Where the actions of one can drastically affect the lives of others far distant, it will be crucially important that each person master the skill of feeling what others feel. This skill, more than new laws or new politics, will soon become crucial to the survival of the race."

Can our educational system produce the kind of people we need? I believe it can. To do so, however, will require considerable change in

education, a change great enough perhaps to be called a revolution. The goal, not simply the methods, of education must be changed. Education must become concerned with more than the development of the intellect and the inculcation of cognitive information and knowledge. Intelligence and knowledge, it is becoming evident, are not enough. We need people who can not only think, but who can feel, who are concerned about others, who can develop and utilize all their potentials as persons-as fully functioning or self-actualizing persons. Education must actually become concerned with, and not simply give lip service to, the development of the whole person. The affective development of students cannot be left to chance, or to other agencies or institutions of society. We have assumed, and many still believe, that the family and the church should take this responsibility. But they are not doing so, and it does not appear that they can do so. To those who say that this is not a function of education in our society, I would ask: "Who determines the function of our educational institutions?" What the educational system does is not ordained or prescribed on tablets from above. It is determined by what society wants it to do. The educational system is a social institution, created to meet the needs of society. When society's needs change, then its institutions must change-or new institutions must be created to meet the new needs.

It is not possible here to consider in any detail the nature of the educational process necessary to achieve the goal of developing whole or self-actualizing persons. I have attempted to do this in a broad way for elementary and secondary education in my book "Humanistic Education." I can, however, indicate some of the basic characteristics of the kind of person we need if our society is to survive. I present these unashamedly as values. Margaret Mead has suggested that there are no values which warrant commitment; she proposes that youth accept commitment itself as the desirable goal or value. It seems obvious, however, at least to me, that the concept of commitment is meaningless without an object to which one is committed. The values which I am proposing are worthy of commitment. Moreover, they are not culturally determined or culturally related values. They are universal values, in that they are not culture bound, not time bound.

The first of these values is mutual understanding. To understand another is the first step in establishing a human relationship with him. There are, of course, many obstacles to understanding. Differences in race, color, sex, age, religion, creed, and culture are barriers to understanding. Certainly no one can completely understand another because of these differences, and because each one of us is a unique person with different experiential histories. But we have in common the fact that we are all human beings, with

the same basic needs. To see others as human persons, rather than as members of a class or group on the basis of sex, race or culture, enables us to get through these barriers. It is possible to learn to be more understanding of others-this is basic in the education of counselors and psychotherapists, but anyone can be helped to increase his understanding of others. The key to such learning is to learn to put oneself in the place of another. Atticus Finch, the lawyer in the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," tried to help his children understand the reactions of some of the townspeople to him when he took on the defense of the black man accused of raping a white girl. He said, "You can never really understand a person....until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." American Indian languages use the phrase "to walk in his moccasins." Of course one can never literally do these things. Psychologically it is possible, however.

The second value is mutual respect. This involves the acceptance of another as a person, a person of worth, without judgment or condemnation, regardless of his faults, deficiencies, or unacceptable or undesirable behavior. One can accept and respect and value a person as a human being, a person with potential, but still not agree with or condone all of his behaviors. Respect may not be adequate, even when coupled with acceptance and valuing. Perhaps concern, caring or compassion for others more closely expresses it. It is the kind of feeling I hope we still have when we hear of personal suffering and pain in a disaster, war, accident, or other catastrophe.

A third basic value is a little more difficult to define. There are a number of terms which describe it, however, terms such as authenticity, transparency, openness, honesty. The word genuineness has been widely used. But this word, and to some extent the others, could characterize a person who is not necessarily helpful or a good influence on others. An autocratic person, even though genuine and open in his behavior, does not provide the basis for good interpersonal relationships. Perhaps we should say that genuineness must be accompanied by understanding and respect and compassion..

There are, I think, some other values in addition to these which are elements in good human relationships. But these three are basic, and essential. These values are not only necessary if people are going to be able to live together and thus survive; they are necessary for the full development of individuals. They meet basic needs in human beings. Thus, persons with these characteristics facilitate the development of other persons. They set in motion a reciprocal process of personal growth and development.

If one were to use a single concept or word to summarize or capture the essence of these values, it would be the word love, in the sense of the

Greek word *agape*. Love is necessary for the survival of the individual as well as of society. Persons need to love and to be loved to realize themselves, to become what they are capable of becoming. We may have the most advanced scientific knowledge, and the highest level of technological skills, but if we don't have love we will not survive for long.

The importance of love is dramatically illustrated in an educational film produced by Columbia Pictures. The film, entitled "Saturday Morning," consists of excerpts from a week-long encounter of a group of high school students assembled at a camp. Towards the end of the week a 16-year-old boy realizes that not only does his father not love him, but he has never been loved by anyone. The significance of this is impressed upon the viewer when the boy says: "I'm sixteen years old but I'm not alive. I've never lived." He finds that one of the counselors and two of the other group members do love him, and marvels that for 16 years no one has ever loved him, but now in one day he has found three people who do. He is alive now. Man does not live by bread alone - he must have love. Bread is necessary but not sufficient. Love is necessary and sufficient - because if we have love, we will also have bread.

As I viewed the boy's discovery of the importance of love in the film, I could not help asking, why should it take sixteen years for a boy to find someone to love him? How many people are there who have no one to love them, and who thus are not really living? There are many, very many. As a matter of fact, probably the major cause of emotional disturbance and of crime, delinquency and other personal-social problems is lack of love. We know this at an intuitive level -it is expressed in our folk music-"You're nobody until somebody loves you;" "Love is the answer;" "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." We also know it at a philosophical and religious level. All of the world's great philosophers and religious leaders have agreed that love is the greatest good, the highest value, though sometimes using other terms or concepts. And now we have scientific evidence from research which shows the consequences of lack of love on the person, whether an infant or an adult.

So my hope for you is that your education will consist of more than increase in information and knowledge, more than the development of your intellect and critical abilities, more than the mastery of subject matter or of the methods of scholarship and scientific inquiry. I hope it will include the development of your affective capacities your attitudes and feelings, you ability to relate to others in ways which facilitate the development of others. I hope you will acquire a concern and compassion for other human beings. The most important thing you can learn is to love. If a generation could

learn that, then we would not have to fear another Watergate, or another war, or the continuance of poverty and unnecessary suffering.

I wish you success in your education.