

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF DR. FREDERICK BURKHARDT  
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at  
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EDUCATION WITH A DEADLINE

There is a common awareness that a new age is beginning for mankind. There is no joy in this awareness, however, because its birth was marked by the destruction of an entire city, an event which gave immediate testimony of the hideous possibilities of the future.

As a result, there is also a common awareness of a great deadline. I do not, of course, mean that anyone knows its precise date. I mean to convey by the figure only the general sense of urgency, the feeling that something must be done before it is too late. "Too late" will be the day the third world war breaks out. This is the deadline we are working against.

Not everyone is sufficiently clear about this it seems. There is still a good deal of discussion about war and peace which displays habits of mind that stem from pre-atomic or pre-bacteriological days. Take for example, the statement which appeared last week in Life magazine, in an article advocating a program for a new balance of power system:

"The first specification of our kind of world is not peace but freedom... Next, after freedom, comes justice, for large numbers can enjoy freedom only in a frame of order. Peace comes third. Peace we need and yearn for, but peace comes third, because if freedom and justice lack, we shall not ourselves be peaceful."

This might have been maintained in 1944, but not today. Today peace comes first, because freedom and justice require civilization and the human species, and modern warfare can wipe this out. At least this is so if we can believe the current prophets of doom. And in this regard, it is significant that it is precisely the best informed who are most alarmed. Cassandra nowadays sits in high places. She has degrees from many universities, and has done research in nuclear physics.

It is important to be clear about the nature of our deadline, because it makes a great difference to what we think and



do about meeting it. It is one of the major concerns of educators today to help in achieving this clarity.

But to define the nature of the deadline and to develop its implications, though important, is not the whole concern of educators; they must also work against it.

Now, deadlines are particularly uncongenial to educators, not only because they are accustomed to the long view, but because in times of great cultural stress and crises, the ways of reason are notoriously difficult.

They have, however, worked against them before and have responded to the challenge in their own way. The Hellenistic period, for instance, comes to mind at once because when the great "failure of nerves" swept the Graeco-Roman world, educators worked under psychological conditions very similar to our own. The City state had fallen and with it the traditional faith. In describing the generation living at the beginning of the period, Gilbert Murray sums up the work that lay before them as follows: "They had to rebuild a new public spirit, devoted not to the City, but to something greater; and they had to rebuild their religion or philosophy which should be a safeguard in the threatening chaos." Looking back on how this work was done, we can now observe an agreement which pervades the many different teachings of that tragic age. In all of them, the focus of education was shifted from social and political concern to an individualistic ethics and to philosophy of individual salvation.

This was the response of educators of the past to their deadline. Is there anything comparable going on in education today? I believe there is, and that the modern response shows as clear a direction as the Hellenistic one.

That something is being done is clear from the remarkable amount of activity in educational circles today, despite the pressure of great numbers which makes it difficult even to carry on as before. There is in our schools a widespread determination to change educational ways and to make them more meaningful in the world today. And when one surveys the many new plans for revision



of the curriculum one can, I think, see evidence of a common theme running through them.

The common theme is the demand that education today must provide a Science of Man which is commensurate with our knowledge and control of nature. It stems from the realization that the Science of Nature has outstripped our knowledge of man, that now invention has become the mother of necessity.

It is this urgent attempt to beget a Science of Man that runs through the plans for general education, through the plans of engineering colleges to include more of the liberal arts, through the shift to required and basic courses, through curriculums consisting of great books and the incorporation of religious teaching in our schools.

This agreement is so clear and so widespread that it can be said with justice that the search for the Science of Man constitutes the response of modern education to the deadline.

But, as in Hellenistic times there were great competing schools of thought, so today there are deep-going differences among educators, differences which arise from their convictions as to how this Science of Man is to be achieved. On this issue there are two general sides. One group believes that the Science of Man is already complete, that it is stored up in the accumulated wisdom of the past. Most of the plans I have mentioned share this assumption, and it is on this side that the preponderant forces are to be found among educators. The other group believes that the Science of Man has only begun to be worked, that it will come only as a result of the application of scientific methods of research to our social problems.

The conflict between these groups is often more apparent than their agreement in the common quest. It has produced much lively and some illuminating controversy, but it has also, on occasion, seriously affected matters of educational budgets and suspending of educational funds for educational advance.

Recently, for example, when a bill establishing the National Science Foundation was passed, all the sections relating



to research in the social sciences were eliminated. The reason for excluding them from the benefits of the greatest piece of legislation yet devised for the advancement of learning were various, but in a careful analysis of the testimony at the hearings, published in the May issue of Scientific Monthly, George Lundberg concludes: "There is always in the background of the testimony reviewed the traditional view that after all, we know the solution of social problems through historic pronouncements of seers and sages, past and contemporary, and all that is needed is more education to diffuse this lore and arouse moral fervor in its behalf."

This statement has a polemical tone, due no doubt to the fact that the author, who is a social scientist himself, is profoundly disturbed by his findings, but the evidence he has collected in the article bears out the general conclusion that this attitude did, in fact, prevail among many of those who gave testimony, and this group included a large number of educators.

The final bill, as you know, was reluctantly vetoed by President Truman because of the administrative difficulties it presented. It will certainly be revised for the next session of Congress, and this will give another opportunity for the inclusion of the social sciences. This time, it is to be hoped the testimony of educators will reflect the realization that, in the face of the deadline, it is dangerous to be so sure that we have the answers in our books; that any other effort to get light on our problems can be discouraged or allowed to die. This time, it is to be hoped their testimony will reflect the common quest for the Science of Man rather than the different positions within it.

Since the group whose testimony discouraged the inclusion of the social sciences in the bill evidently has a great respect for learning in the past, and since so many of them are physical scientists, it may be instructive in this issue to go back about three centuries to the time when modern experimental science now grown so healthy, was struggling to be born.

The parallel to the present situation looks alarmingly



close. In those days, too, there was in the universities the general conviction that their accumulated wisdom was sufficient. In reading the works of the supporters of the new way of knowing, like Bacon, Descartes, Galileo and many others of their time, one is impressed with the bitterness of their attacks on "school learning." It is safe to infer that the silence in the records of the universities of the times is due to smugness in their own wisdom and disdain for the new, rather than to lack of awareness that they were being criticized. Martha Ornstein, who has done able research on this question in a book entitled "The Role of Scientific Societies in the 17th Century" comes to the following conclusion:

"It thus would seem, from the slight progress of the universities along lines of experimental science, from the fact that the greatest scientists of the age were not affiliated with them, from the many criticisms leveled against them and from actual evidences of their conservatism extending even into the 18th Century, that the universities in the 17th Century did not lend to science that encouragement which it needed in order to take root in them."

In recollecting this unhappy page in educational history, I do not wish to be understood as suggesting that the universities have not changed a great deal since that time. As Miss Ornstein says:

"The universities today have little more in common with those of the 17th Century than the name, their general organization, and a few formalities, such as conferring degrees. The revolution in the universities which caused them to assimilate the changes sketched above, making of the university professor a modern scientist, has been the task of the two centuries which have elapsed since the 17th, and in a most real sense is still the task of our own time. This revolution has made and is making universities homes of free thought, of scientific research and instruction, places where matters most intimately connected with every-day life are fostered.

"It was the unmistakable and magnificent achievement of



the scientific societies of the 17th Century, not only to put modern science on a solid foundation, but in good time to revolutionize the ideals and methods of the universities and render them the friends and promoters of experimental science instead of the stubborn foes they had so long been."

That battle has been won. The question now is whether there is not a new one for the encouragement of an infant Science of Man.

The social sciences are, it is true, included in our universities' curriculum today, but when one considers the support and attention they have received before and after the Science of Man became the great common educational concern, there is not the great increase one might expect if they were really seriously regarded as having promise.

The real strength of my historical analogy depends, of course, on whether the case of social science today is really as good as that of natural science in the 17th Century. It is my conviction that it is, in the sense that I believe that hope does lie in the direction of the extension of scientific methods to the problems of men. I do not, however, wish to defend this personal conviction on this occasion because in view of the deadline it is not so important that we agree that their case is the same as it is to agree that we cannot be sure they are not different. It may be that the confidence in our accumulated wisdom is justified. But present confidence is not a substitute for results which are not yet achieved. So long as this is so, we must follow all possible leads. This is the great difference that the deadline makes.

Let us, therefore, carry the quest in both directions. By all means, let us scrutinize the past for answers. By all means, let us read the great books and learn as much about the heritage as we can. But let us not in doing so pre-judge the other alternative. Let us remember that we have a deadline, and that in view of it we cannot risk doing a disservice to the Science of Man.