

Dr. Joseph Sloane

The Partial Man: a plea for a new humanism

The following article is taken from Dr. Joseph C. Sloane's Phi Beta Kappa address, delivered last Nov. 26 at the Carolina Inn during the fall semester banquet. Dr. Sloane is the Alumni Distinguished Professor of Art, the Director of the Ackland Memorial Art Museum, and a former chairman of the Art Department. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1949.

It has never been easy for any man to be as whole as he, or society, might wish, but it would seem that it is becoming more difficult than ever. Perhaps it is no longer possible at all, for we are living in a highly fragmented age, marked by the symbol of the greatest and most destructive explosions man has ever been able to ignite in centuries of patient effort...

In discussing this dilemma, it is easy to give the impression of being opposed to science, the friendly giant which has brought us so much knowledge and comfort and achievement that mankind should only admire and never criticize. But the problem, of course, does not lie with science itself, and never has. The difficulty is in the use we make of science, the applications men find for its truths.

It is clear too that just as science is not in itself responsible in any way for the ills which beset us, so also we must say that much of technology has greatly benefitted mankind from the day man first used tools to apply his first vague knowledge of physics, astronomy, and chemistry. But technology in some of its aspects is not only open to attack, it seems positively deadly. To find serious flaws in our application of scientific

knowledge is to lodge the problem just where it should be; in the mind and spirit of man...

The fault does not, of course, lie with science itself, nor does it lie with scientists as a group, but rather with the unusual vulnerability of science to misuse by those very humans whose superb art it is. Our expectation from science is, in part, "good," a betterment of our lives, our hopes, and all that we are; but when, instead, we find ourselves all but overwhelmed by the evils to which misapplication and misunderstanding give rise, we must seek some way to restrain the power of science, lest, in the wrong hands, it destroy us...

What we need is no abolition of science and technology; what we must have is some power that will force them to serve our purposes as whole persons. Who is to exert this control? Surely not those now reaping the heady rewards of a successfully applied technology, nor, I suspect, that scientist who, in spite of serious misgivings as to possible misuse, pushes boldly ahead to the publication and dissemination of techniques which, if perverted, can wreak enormous havoc on future generations, or place in any brains the power to erase human life on this planet. So long as we are more successful (and at an ever accelerating rate) in discovering controls over nature than we are at discovering controls over ourselves as human beings, we remain in deadly peril...

Somewhere near the heart of this problem lies the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Of the former we have more than we can handle, of the latter, very little indeed. Knowledge, to

use the common phrase, is our bag, but how to come by serviceable wisdom is another matter. We seem to be persuaded that there is no pedagogical path to it, no formal way to nurture it, not even any reliable way to define it. But I submit we could try harder in the pursuit of it than we have been, and, among other places, right here in our collegiate world...

What is needed, it seems, is a new approach to the humanity in man, the development in him of powers sufficient to restrain the death wishes of society, and deal firmly and understandingly with the ambiguities out of which we are made. If we could train him to really desire life rather than death, could cure him of thinking that there is a simple and scientifically correct solution to every problem, if we could accustom him to living cheerfully with the uncertainties which are characteristic of the mind and actions of the race, then, perhaps, we would have a man able and eager to live fully in the present century. He might even become as nearly whole as we are allowed to be in the midst of life. But it won't be easy, and the methods we are using now are clearly inadequate for the job. We must find out, somehow, an effective way to work on the self frankly, for its own sake, in school, in college, and in that longer adult life where we do, or do not do, those things which further the basic requirements of humanity...

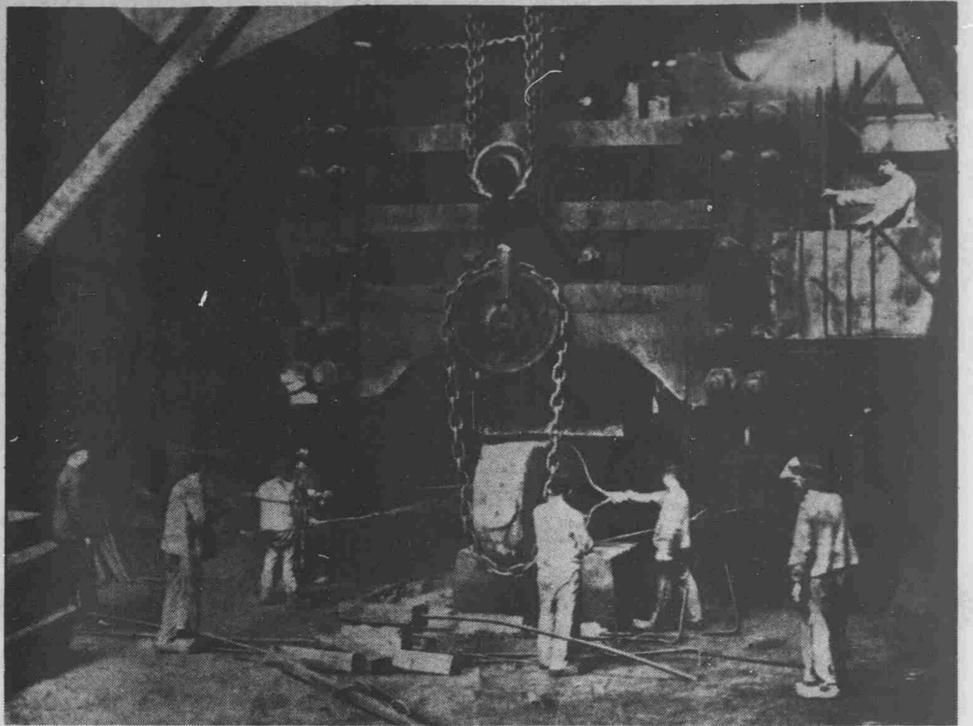
The new approach to humanity will seem strange at first to those accustomed to the traditional version of education. Unorthodoxy is always upsetting. When confronted by a colleague with the suggestion that there might be a course devoted to the study of people as such, the dean of a great university was scandalized. Did his friend forget that history, philosophy, literature, art, sociology, political science and so on were all of them about people? Yet the fact remains that there are many, including professors of these same subjects, who know almost nothing about men and women as such, as wholes, as the living beings out of which the society is constructed. The graduates who pour from our colleges every year only know a little about what their own peer group is like, but that is far too narrow a spectrum of society to do us very much good in a world crowded with persons of every conceivable description.

We are all of us ignorant here, and we shouldn't be embarrassed to admit it. But ignorance is no excuse. The new humanism will have to deal with man directly, and believe that the knowledge of the whole man is a worthy educational objective. If done properly, this study would lead individuals to an awareness of who they really are, and that is where the new wisdom must begin.

The first step toward becoming a true humanist is for each and every one of us to acquire a base, a starting point which would be unshakeably and forever our own. While physical, it would not be the house the real estate agent would sell us, but our own body, including the mind supported by it. We have not been paying the right attention to this matter.

It is easy to see how the habit of ignoring our bodies came about. From the very beginning of self-conscious speculation we have, in various ways, separated matter from spirit, the particular from the ideal, the abstraction of thought from the concrete reality of things—a tree or our own aching feet...

We are born, live, and die surrounded by bodies of which we are a part, but from which, as Schopenhauer pointed out long ago, we are miraculously separate. We see our arms, smell and taste our sweat, hear our footfall, touch our knees, feel the blood pounding in our temples, and know that strange sixth sense of kinaesthesia which tells us that our back is bent or where our hands



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are in the dark. Much of knowing consists of just this: reports brought in by the senses to keep us posted on the action and condition of our bodies. Since the purpose here is not philosophical, there is no need to discuss just how we live "in" our bodies, or precisely who the "I" is who has taken up residence there. In a general way everyone knows these things, but to his sorrow, forgets them.

This sense of living within a body is of paramount importance because, by being "inside," we have both a vantage point from which to view the world and a defense against the almost overwhelming intrusions it would force upon us. The barrier of flesh and bone which surrounds us is ours, and unless we choose to surrender it, not even slavery can strip it away. Of all the hideous things men do to each other, the "brain wash" is probably the most despicable and frightening because its purpose is to destroy the ultimate defenses of our residence in our own self—it is the ultimate invasion of privacy. But apart from this horror, in a very real sense we cannot be "homeless" if only we would know that we cannot. Men have been deprived of their careers, their wealth, their families, their whole existence, and been thrown naked into a cell, but the great ones were still at home within themselves...

The secret lies in the nature of the watch we keep, or fail to keep, over the entrances to our personal fastness. While we can be invaded by way of any of our senses, sight and hearing are the chief means of access, means we should guard far more carefully. Not only do we open our eyes and ears to a mass of useless or inimical sights, symbols, and sounds, we leave the gatekeeper's lodge unoccupied just when we should be questioning the credentials of the statements we read and the sights and sounds offered by television or the moving picture.

By what right must all this be admitted to where we really are? Are we to be cozened into receptivity by the thousand and one tricks of those who would persuade us to think, believe, and act as they, not we, desire?

We must be wary, suspicious even, of the ideas and bearers of ideas whom we admit to our inner sanctum, but of equal

importance is the attention we must pay to the manner in which we ourselves furnish it. What is it like inside this castle of ours? A look around might prove embarrassing because too many of us have furnished our personalities with clichés, the prejudices of out-worn conservatism, or the ready-made beliefs of an establishment that has been selling its ideas on the installment plan so subtly that we hadn't realized they weren't our own...

Having realized that he can be an individual if only he chooses to be one, the neophyte humanist would now turn to a most important task almost entirely overlooked in our educational system: the refining of his senses. These remain the elementary means by which we know not only what is going outside our bodies but inside as well, and as such, they are of vast importance. And yet, whether because we are suspicious of such experience, or for some other less obvious reason, it is plain that society does not think it worthwhile to spend much time training them while we are young, preferring to regard them as God-given, automatic responses conferred on us at birth. When they are imperfect, it is because they don't function properly: we have astigmatism, we are tone deaf, we are insensitive to pain at normal levels, and so on.

All problems of a sensory nature, we assume, must be either clinical or psychological, and for this reason seldom stop to wander whether we aren't suffering from a trouble we don't even know exists; an illiteracy in the world of sensory experience. We simply don't know our way about in it with any precision because, in truth, we hadn't thought such training either possible or helpful. Our educational system above the lowest grades frequently ignores the possibility that we actually don't know how to see, hear, feel, and taste with any refinement or precision. As a society we regard this incapacity as of very little consequence. If a father thinks something is wrong with his daughter's vision, he rushes her to an oculist, when possibly, he should rush her to an artist...

But whatever the components of wisdom may be; it depends in part, at least, on the ability to make shrewd comparisons leading to humanly

rewarding decisions. We are constantly urged by the man on television to compare washing powders, gas pain relievers, hair tonics and denture adhesives. Such pleas may be regarded as exemplifying the lowest level of the art of comparison, a setting of one item against another with a view to seeing which performs an elementary function most efficiently or agreeably. But the significant choices in the life of the bona fide individual transcend such small simplicities, and in attempting to train a new race of humane men, we must lift the quality of the comparisons to which they are accustomed from the inconsequential to the significant. The awareness of a wide latitude of alternatives is one of the mental traits which most clearly distinguishes men from animals.

At this point we must return to the heretical notion that we should study man directly, head on, instead of tangentially through science, history, literature or philosophy. Surely a careful study of those men, living, dead, and fictional, who have been called wise would be an enlightening experience for anyone, not so much because we hope to acquire the knack of wisdom itself but because we would spend long hours concentrating on the question of what it is, who acquired it, for what purposes, and how. Ours is too relative an age to hope for absolutes, but the sum of all case histories examined could hardly fail to constitute a valuable piece of intellectual property...

These are but the barest outlines of a new regimen which would seem to deserve a trial, if for no other reason than the obvious imperfection of what we are using now to civilize the race. Perhaps such a plan and its related requirements would prove to be applicable to only a few out of many, but if those few were democratically selected, and if the curriculum succeeded, we would be in possession of a new pool of leadership from which to draw the notable individuals we need so badly. Some would be scientists, some would be statesmen (not politicians), some would be businessmen, some teachers, and some philosophers or artists, but all of them would be whole people. The partial man may just kill us all.

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Doug Clark

A test of values

About every two weeks, it seems, I find myself examining many of the prevalent values of our day and place and, more often than not, rejecting them. Achievement-at-all-cost mentalities fail to impress me. Nor can I say that I am awed by their resulting material successes, as it seems that so much is lost in such attainment.

The values that are often sacrificed for the sake of some coveted goal are those values on which I place the most importance, that I seek to hold on to. To me, material values are secondary to human values. I don't know what can be more important than self-worth, integrity, honesty, and firm moral convictions. The achievement of a goal is worthless if the process requires one to hurt himself or another, or to seek it through deceit or injustice. The last point is especially worth considering since the first is more obvious.

I have done things in my life that I have later looked back upon with true, deep regret. Even things that are remembered by and consequential to no one periodically return to disturb me. But as badly as these past actions cause me to feel, I can nevertheless still respect myself because I have never given up my integrity for anything. The reason, perhaps, lies in the realization that whatever could be gained would soon lose its meaning, while integrity and its dependent self-worth are unchanging, so long as you let them be.

Earlier last semester I did an experiment that, being based actually on deceit, could have no outcome other than that. The experiment was a test of honesty: I would approach an individual from behind and ask if he had just dropped a dollar. Doing so, I would hold a dollar before the person, thereby hopefully adding some plausibility to the situation. I determined to carry on the experiment until I lost my bill. It took less time than I thought.

Each of my first three subjects reacted to my question in a similar manner: he would quickly fumble through his pockets, and then answer that no, he did not think that he had dropped the dollar. However, the fourth person that I asked, to my great surprise, answered that yes, she thought that she did drop it. I gave it to her, and she took it, and proceeded on her way. A few moments later she turned around and called to me. "Yes, I did drop it. Thank you very much." I responded with, "Yeah, I like to be honest." Then she was gone.

Looking back, I must now say that I sincerely regret the episode. I deceived the girl, and allowed her to commit a dishonest act. Although she did not necessarily believe herself to be ripping me off for the money, as she didn't know that it was mine to begin with, she did indeed take me for it; she made a buck. But to do this she put her integrity on the line, thinking she could easily get away with it. Of course, by keeping the dollar she got away with something, but she lost something too, something much more important than the dollar. That something is what I took from her, by giving her the chance to sacrifice her honesty. I used her, and she'll probably never know. But I do know, and it upsets me. I had no right to do it.

Unfortunately, idealism is easy to come by and hard to maintain. These are bad times that we are living in now. Many people have the best of everything that our society has to offer, while others have nothing. The former's successes have often come about through actions sadly lacking moral accompaniment. More sadly, however, the others often find themselves forced to forsake their integrity in order to survive. The other night on the news I heard an unemployed auto worker say that he will steal in order to feed his children. I can't condemn him for that.

It all boils down to a matter of priorities. Survival must always come first; it can justify almost any action, short of deliberate and unnecessary harming of others. But after that, priorities are a matter of individual direction. For my part, I like integrity, trust, friendships, love. Without these things I couldn't respect myself, or anyone.

Doug Clark is a sophomore journalism major.

Letters

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes the expression of all points of view through the letters to the editors. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors. This newspaper reserves the right to edit all letters for libelous statements and good taste.

Letters should be limited to 300 words and must include the name, address and phone number of the writer. Type letters on a 60-space line, double spaced, and address them to Editor, The Daily Tar Heel, in care of the Student Union, or drop them by the office.

To the editors:

A Dec. 6 front page DTH article about the committee studying the possibility of establishing a women's studies curriculum is seriously misleading. It gives a false impression that we have done little or no work thus far and are just getting ready to start. I wish to assure all interested readers that we have made substantial progress.

In the headline and eight column inches of text I counted 10 instances of factual error, misquotation, misleading half-truths, internal contradictions and figments of the reporter's imagination. Let me cite and correct three statements in the article as examples, to dispel the illusion that our committee will not buckle down to its task until 1975:

• The headline says we are "set to study" women's programs. According to the text, "Simpson...said the body will meet beginning the first week of classes in January." What I said when briefly

interviewed was that we would hold a series of meetings of a certain kind, probably beginning in early January. I failed to mention, because I wasn't asked about earlier meetings, that we have been studying the matter as individuals and in meetings since July.

• The article states that the committee

"has not yet begun to discuss specific programs or concepts." Had the reporter asked if we had discussed specific programs or concepts, I would have told him we have discussed them at length in several meetings, though we have reached no premature conclusions about them.

• I am quoted as saying "... what we've

done so far isn't very interesting." I did not say this. I do not remember my exact words, but their essence was that nothing I could appropriately report at this time would be very interesting to DTH readers. We have banded about a lot of ideas and collected a lot of data, and to make sense of them would require an interview lasting an hour or so for

a painstakingly written article filling several DTH pages.

If I had had my wits about me, I would not have consented to a quickie interview on a complex subject, late in the afternoon when my fondest desire was to hang up the telephone so I could go home and eat. Actually I was only dimly aware that I was being interviewed. My purpose in talking with the reporter, which I tried to make abundantly clear to him, was to explain why an article in the spring would be far more informative than one based on an interview in early December, so that I didn't want to be interviewed that day. A burnt child fears the fire, and I have learned my lesson. The only thing I'll say to a DTH reporter hereafter is "no comment." Meanwhile, the committee that is studying women's studies is alive, well and energetically at work.

Richard L. Simpson
Chairman, Women's Studies
Curriculum Committee

The Daily Tar Heel

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