

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion about the need to reassess the role of the humanities in higher education. Twenty-one years ago, C. P. Snow suggested that scientists and humanists had in fact become "two cultures". A recent report by the Commission on the Humanities, entitled The Humanities in American Life, suggests that this issue is still far from resolved. In fact, the role of the humanities in a society pervasively influenced by science and technology remains problematical.

As university presidents, and as scientists, this issue is of deep concern to us. Scientists and humanists seem to have misguided notions of each other's goals. At worst, the humanist regards the scientist as a Faustian devotee of the technologically possible, while the scientist considers the humanist to be overly concerned with the pretty conceits of the imagination. Each appears, to the other, to explore the world in fundamentally divergent ways.

How, then, can scientists and humanists be brought together to bridge the gap between their separate visions of the world?

First, we must make a concerted attack on the problem of basic literacy in both the sciences and the humanities. It is the responsibility of college educators to demand as a prerequisite that primary and secondary schools adequately introduce students to the rudiments of both science and the humanities. In turn, our graduate and professional schools must require not only proficiency in a narrowly circumscribed

field of study, but must look for students who are truly educated in the broadest and most fundamental sense.

Next, we must resist the notion that the role of the humanities in higher education, and in society at large, is to serve as the moral guardian and ethical watchdog for scientific and technological enterprises. Indeed, lately it has become increasingly common to justify the humanities on the basis of their utility--an idea that undervalues their intrinsic importance. Ethical inquiry is an important concern for many humanists, but it would be misleading to locate ethics at the heart of all humanistic study. Humanities are concerned with interpreting the broadest aspects of human experience, man's art, literature, music, philosophy, and history. Ethics is only one important aspect of the multifaceted humanistic approach to understanding our world and ourselves.

Another positive step we can take in expanding our understanding and appreciation of each other, is to create channels for on-going dialogue so that we can explore not only the differences but also the deep affinities of our endeavors. If we as a society are to develop a unified vision of man's search for knowledge, the rigidly dichotomous view of scientific versus humanistic understanding must be countered. After all, at their heart, both the sciences and the humanities seek to better man's understanding of the complex universe. It has been said that the creative humanist possesses two things: a fresh idea and the ability to express it. Is this not true of the creative scientist as well? And does anyone imagine that

we are searching for two different truths?

Recently, our institutions, New York University and The Rockefeller University, established a joint program to address these issues. Through lectures, seminars, and colloquia, we are establishing a continuing dialogue. Our program will explore the fundamental impulses and procedures which inform the scientific and humanistic imaginations. By providing opportunities for scientists to de-mystify their activities for humanists, and vice versa, we hope that the shared aspects of our work can be appreciated.

Science is a process by which we can explore the cosmos; the humanities can help to set this enterprise in historical, philosophical, and social perspective. At the same time, a clearer understanding of science will benefit the humanist. Without a knowledge of the basic propositions of modern science, the humanist is forced to settle for an incomplete and inaccurate vision of the conditions of our age. It is hoped that expanded and sustained dialogue will lead to a unified vision of human knowledge, and begin to counteract the ignorance born of isolation and mistrust.