

## EDITORIAL

One of the major criticisms levelled against the educational systems of our society is that they lack "relevance." However, there is no consensus about what this criticism means. The conservative critic would probably say, among other things, that the educational system is turning out young people who cannot perform adequately in the economic sphere or live socially useful lives. The radical critic would probably claim that the educational system, in its subservience to the political and economic power structure, is openly or subtly preventing the young from seeking solutions to the fundamental problems of society. What both the conservative and the radicals share — despite their vast disagreements about ends and means — is different degrees of disenchantment with the existing systems of education.

We do not propose to undertake here an analysis of the merits of either the conservative or the radical viewpoint — or of any other variant. But we do want to call attention to some of the implications of the charge of irrelevance or, to state it positively, the *demand for relevance* in education.

Although scholars pay lip-service to the idea that knowledge is a whole, a variety of historical exigencies have led to the excessive fragmentation of knowledge. Despite some of the advantages of this fragmentation — such as those resulting from specialized knowledge — we may have ignored some of the disadvantages resulting from distorted perceptions. The call for relevance reminds us to look for connections between the many separate academic endeavors. The renewed interest in interdisciplinary studies is perhaps a reflection of a trend towards a more holistic emphasis.

Many scholars have made a distinction between problems of society and problems of an academic field. For instance, several sociologists have maintained that the problems of a society at a particular time are not necessarily the problems which do or even should interest sociologists. In many other social sciences there are equivalents of this distinction between social and sociological problems. The call for relevance compels us to examine whether we have made too much of this distinction.

Another matter which may deserve further scrutiny in this context relates to the distinction between basic and applied orientations. The distinction is useful for some purposes, but we may have lost much by the creation of insidious communication and status barriers between theoreticians and practitioners.

This leads us to what is perhaps the most important question raised by the demand for relevance: what is the scholar's responsibility to so-

ciety: Does he serve society best by pursuing his disinterested curiosity in a protected environment such as that provided by a university or a professional association? Is his scholarly curiosity all that disinterested anyway? Should he attempt to be the conscience of his society?

The matters raised here have been discussed in long articles or books. We raise them, however, because we believe THE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT has a responsibility to deal with them and we would welcome original articles and communications addressed to this highly significant and topical issue of *relevance* in education.