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Science and Values

Last April, seeking to bridge the gap between scholarship and public affairs, the National Endowment for the Humanities inaugurated an annual lecture series—the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities—addressed to a national audience. The series was so named because Thomas Jefferson epitomized both theory and action; he was president of the American Philosophical Society as well as president of the United States. Lionel Trilling, a writer and teacher with an international reputation, was chosen as the first lecturer.

In a superb address, "Mind and the modern world," Trilling examined our society's diminished confidence in mind and in the concept (and value) of objectivity. The humanistic disciplines, he observed, have suffered. And we have lost confidence in science as well, which now "lies beyond the intellectual grasp of most men" except for the suspicion that it is dehumanizing.

Trilling was critical but not apocalyptic. He argued for objectivity and rationality, for upholding the mind's full values: intentionality, coherence, inclusiveness. He cited Wordsworth's well-known antagonism to science and the ultimate transmutation of that antagonism: "Poetry," Wordsworth said, "... is the impassioned expression which is on the countenance of all science."

Today we must turn to minds capable both of mobilizing a sense of the past and affirming our evolutionary destiny. If we hunger for values beyond those of the megamachine, we ought, with Lewis Mumford, to invoke William James's perception that the human being has always been the "starting point for new effects." If technological excess threatens to provoke an antiscience crusade, we can support Rene Dubos in urging that science help shape a truly human concept of technology—a science of humanity.

We do not lack resources. The return of confidence is within our grasp—if we reassert humanistic values, if we seek the restoration of ethical criteria in human enterprise, and if we propose the renewal of rationality. The appeal is addressed equally to scientists and humanists, in terms that virtually define certain larger objectives of the Humanities Endowment.

Endowment grants-in-progress include a number focused on ethical problems of genetic counseling, medical ethics and legislation, social effects of technology and proposed reforms, humanistic studies in engineering, and the like. The Endowment and the National Science Foundation are collaborating in programs on the ethical and human value implications of science and technology. In a word, new opportunities are being thrown open for the use of mind.

Whitehead wrote that "you cannot think without abstractions," but warned against neglect of "the remainder of things." Characteristically, he saw philosophy as the necessary critic of abstractions and believed an active school of philosophy to be essential to a healthy society. Health demands wholeness, and I see it as a drawing together of the sciences and the humanities.—RONALD S. BERMAN, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C. 20506*