

Chapter II

AN INTEGRATIVE AND NORMATIVE MODEL FOR HUMANISTIC EDUCATION AT THE ADVENT OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The classical is meaningful and relevant anywhere and anytime.

Roth

Living is the job I want to teach him.

Rousseau

Lured by my style and tendency, you follow and come after me, follow your own self faithfully – take time, and thus you follow me.

Nietzsche

If we educators are to prevent democracy from collapsing into a new form of barbarism...we will have to struggle collectively as transformative intellectuals...making democracy the medium through which they extend the potential and possibilities of what it means to be human and to live in a just society.

Giroux

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I wish to present an integrative and normative concept of humanistic education that draws on the four approaches presented in Chapter One. This concept seeks to view these approaches not as disqualifying or exclusive of the others, but rather as complementary approaches that can be integrated into a model that will successfully address the tribulations and challenges of the period. The basis of this integrative approach is the perception that “educational truth and justice” are to be found not only in one of these approaches, but that each of them encapsulates values, sensitivities, insights and skills of great and prolific potential for a contemporary theory of humanistic education. Moreover, I feel that we have learned from the historical review in the previous chapter that what is

common to the four approaches is greater than the variances between them. Beyond the intellectual and pedagogical contention, they have two basic components in common that classify them as members of the humanistic education family. First, they are committed to the “humanization” of humankind (fulfilling and broadening its humanity) by means of employing educational experiences that will enable all human beings to develop the human resources inherent in them, and live a full and dignified human life. Second, they are committed to an educational endeavor that strives to free humankind from the shackles of ignorance and prejudice, from the arbitrariness and capriciousness of the human experience, from the conformist herd instinct and individual alienation, from parochial narrow-mindedness and the false consciousness shaped by political propaganda and commercial advertising.

My presentation of the proposed model will be in a number of stages. In the *first stage* I shall present an updated, detailed and normative definition of Humanism, both as a worldview and an ethical code that places human well-being, freedom, development and dignity as the ultimate human end, beyond all political, religious, ideological and economic ideals and interests. It is my hope that this definition will be sufficiently clear and incisive in order to distinguish between humanists and pseudo-humanists, while at the same time sufficiently broad and open in order to enable a pluralistic humanism, with a multiplicity of interpretations and approaches that is neither monolithic nor dogmatic.

In the *second stage* I will present a detailed normative definition of humanistic education which will seek to do justice both to the classical components of humanistic education and to its developments in the Modern Era. The *third stage* constitutes a kind of continuation and detailing of the second stage. There, I will present three ultimate goals of the proposed model: (1) education towards cultural quality that maintains a special affinity towards classical heritage (West and East); (2) education towards autonomous and critical thinking that feeds particularly on the classical heritage of Socratic Dialectics and the radical and critical approach of modernity; and (3) education towards an authentic personality that draws its content and modes both from romantic-naturalistic and existential pedagogy.

The chapter will conclude with the *fourth stage*, in which I will present both theoretical and practical guidelines for pedagogy: I will relate to the infrastructure and physical appearance of the educational institution, the social climate and nature of interpersonal relations, relevant and meaningful teaching that strives to render the “tree of knowledge” into the “tree of life” for students as well as for the entire society.

1. HUMANISM AS A WORLDVIEW AND MORAL STANCE: A NORMATIVE DEFINITION

The proposal of the normative definition of humanism presented here relates to humanism as a worldview and moral stance that should direct both the theory and the practice of humanistic education. I hope that this definition is broad enough to encompass diverse trends and styles, but is also clear, obligating, and is not a toothless tiger, in the sense that it holds specific criteria for differentiating between humanistic stances and actions and those running counter to them. As a normative worldview, humanism means *regarding human beings as sovereign individuals who are responsible for their destiny, attributing to all people an unconditional self-value equal to that of their fellow men and women, and striving to establish a just, democratic, and humane social order, which is committed to the sanctity of human life and the furthering of human equality, freedom, solidarity, growth and happiness*. The meanings of this definition will be detailed and explained on four levels of reference.¹

First, on the *philosophical level*, humanism posits Man (*homo* in Latin) at center stage of existence and considers *the enhancement of human development, freedom, well-being and dignity as the ultimate goal, above and beyond all others – be they religious, national, ideological or economic*. At the root of this view, as H.Y. Roth says, lies the commitment to cultivate “the humanity within all humans”²; in other words, to have special concern and responsibility for the dignity of human beings by virtue of their being endowed with free will, reason, moral sensitivity, esthetical sense, and the powers of imagination and creativity. Humanism identifies these unique attributes of humankind as the source of human dignity and the ability of human beings to shape an enlightened and flourishing culture for themselves.

Despite the attempt on the part of numerous establishments, both political and educational, throughout the world, to adorn themselves in a humanistic worldview, their version should never be taken as self-evident, and in most cases the truth is quite the opposite. Let us take, for example, religious

¹ The four levels or aspects of Humanism that I present in the following discussion include the Philosophical, Socio-Political, Intellectual, and Educational-Cultural. Among the many ways of categorizing and presenting the elements of Humanism, I find most valuable the one of Paul Kurtz, in his *Living without religion*, where he speaks about four main characteristics: (1) Rational and Critical Method of Inquiry, which he often calls Critical Intelligence, (2) Naturalistic Worldview, (3) Ethics of Rational and Universal Humanism, (4) Democratic Political Order that is liberal, pluralistic, just, tolerant and humane.

² Roth, *Education and Human Values*, pp. 9-10.



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