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HUMANITIES AND HISTORY

This essay belongs to Kantorowicz's Berkeley days. It was found attached to a dittoed memorandum, "Aims of the Humanities", composed by several Berkeley professors. One of them, Manfred Bukofzer, had collaborated with Eka in publication of the *book entitled Laudes Regiae*. It is quite plausible, therefore, that Bukofzer asked Eka to produce a statement on the relationship of his discipline to the humanities.

[p.1] "Humanities" is the knowledge of man and human society. This knowledge, from the Eleatic philosophers to John Dewey, has successfully resisted efforts to boil it down to formulae, rules or laws which can be memorized or are comparable in any respect to the stabilized laws of science. To acquire the knowledge of man and human society, and of man *in* human society, there is normally only one way practicable, that of experience. Experience of man and human society is acquired, today, only to a relatively small degree through personal observation. Our *knowledge of fellow citizens* is limited, our selection perforce casual, and the number of human types from which we may gather experience is neither enough to represent our "cosmos" comprehensive, nor always be representative of the highest human qualities. *The humanities must be considered the irreplaceable medium through which the knowledge of man and human society can be extended beyond the boundaries of personal observation.*

The humanities, when reestablished at the end of the Middle Ages in the 13th and 14th centuries, took effect as an antidote against mediaeval theology, that is the knowledge not of the *variety* of man and human society but of God and a unified type of man and of a unified society. Humanities today are an antidote against "political theology", a pseudo-theology of the state which is likewise not interested in the variety of man and of [p.2] human society, but is interested, almost exclusively, in establishing a uniform type of man (Nordic Nazi) and a uniform pattern of human society (New Order – NSDAP – "Vaterland"). Modern political theology considers the knowledge of, and the respect to, other types of man and other patterns of society undesirable and "unpatriotic". The humanities are tolerated within modern political theology in a similar way as they were within mediaeval theology as a quarry from which evidence for the desired one-type-man and one-pattern society is collected.

The humanities take effect against self-centeredness and the tendencies to make mind "narrow" in the sense indicated. The humanities are the medium to extend our knowledge of man and human society to all times and all regions and thus to carry us beyond the boundaries of our casual dwelling places and of the particular epoch to which we are bound and they teach us to respect others even though those others may be not only different from us but also sometimes

even more loveable and attractive than we are. The humanities convey this knowledge in various forms, above all in what here may be call “images”, that is, in ciphers and metaphors of human and social conditions and forms of being which symbolize or stand for a sum total or elicit a compound of associations referring to man and human society (*persons* such as Alexander and Aristotle, Caesar and Brutus, Christ and Pilate).

“Images” of man, human relations, and human society in the past and in remote countries are transmitted in the most concentrated form by works of art: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, and with due alterations by philosophy. [p.3] The greater the artist, the more telling –and also the more concentrated and inexhaustible–is the “image”. Not every person has access to the knowledge of man and society through the medium of works of art, and indeed few of us have access equally to all species of art. Also, a certain amount of training is the indispensable preliminary condition for approaching art. Few human beings are in a position to gather knowledge of man, of human relations and of human society from a Greek statue or vase, a Roman sarcophagus or a Byzantine mosaic or a wall painting in the Sistine, from the music of Palestrina or Bach, from the philosophy of Descartes or Kant, unless they are prepared and trained to see and hear and read adequately. This training of eye, ear, and our reactions must not be, but usually would be connected, one way or another, with history. Without a certain amount of historical knowledge, works of art today are (for reasons not to be discussed here) likely to remain mute.

This does not imply that history is merely an auxiliary to the other branches of humanities. History transmits those “images”, which have been called “knowledge of man and human society in shorthand”, in a form which is more easily accessible and available to a greater number of people than is the case with reference to arts. The way to history is open, more or less, also to those who do not feel like an artist. History confers on us the knowledge of man and human society in a form which is broader and less esoteric or concentrated than the form represented by the arts; and the quantity as well as the variety of human and social images as transmitted by history is probably greater, more detailed and more specific than when transmitted through art. Moreover, as far as society is concerned--and man *in* society--[p.4] history is in a position to offer syntheses which the other branches of the humanities would offer only in exceptional cases. This is true with reference to constitutional or legal history as well as to cultural or biographical accounts. History, therefore, always was and still is the main gateway through which most people are led to a knowledge of man and human society.

Furthermore, history is the gateway to the understanding of evolution both of man in society and of society in itself. The work of art, except for epical poetry, does not account for the

category of time; it presents the absolute in a certain moment whereas history presents also the relative within time and within the process of development. History discloses the intellectual, political, economical, social and other branches, movements and changes, and thereby makes us conscious also of the world and the epoch in which we live. It is the instrument, the sextant, to ascertain the position of man's ship in the past and in the present. This instrument cannot be replaced by other branches of the humanities which call in history as auxiliary. History, which in turn calls in art, philosophy, philology, and so on as auxiliaries, is an independent study and a humanist branch of knowledge in its own right. A superficial knowledge of history from Adam to Adolf as distributed by those branches of the humanities which make history menial as an auxiliary, is of little help and is almost liable to do harm, unless this applied history is continuously controlled and revised and brought into line with the results of the investigation of the professional historian. History cannot be replaced by other disciplines as little as history pretends to replace other branches of humanities. But history indeed is one of the [p.5] most comprehensive humanistic disciplines and a reservoir which at least should be able to receive most of the other branches of the humanities.

The main task of history, therefore, is (1) to provide an adequate assortment of "images" of man and of human society, and (2) of making us conscious of the various ways and trends of evolution. One of the great dangers of this country, as far as education is concerned, is the poorness of the assortment of images which the students have at their disposal. The knowledge of man and society as transmitted through the symbols, metaphors and images of Scripture, of Greek mythology, of Roman mythology of the state, of historical narrations and of fairy tales is, on the whole, acquired by the student not before he enters the university, where he learns elementary things in the classroom which he should have become acquainted with in the nursery. The poorness of the normal student's stock of images and metaphors is appalling. Furthermore, the lack of thinking in terms of evolution – terms of what things really mean and where they come from – is likewise arrested. From this deficiency, the redress of which is one of the tasks of history, the other branches of humanities are bound to suffer. Students are not trained, for instance, to think etymologically, and the sense for semantics is on the whole underdeveloped. That words have history and a meaning which changes is practically unknown to students, probably because they are not taught to think in those terms. They are helpless when hearing a new word which is not borrowed from the horizon of their daily needs. They are ignorant not only of the derivation but even of the fact that a word, an institution, a style or a custom derives from anywhere at all.