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Thoughts on Jewish Professional Training*

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"This paper does not oppose the presence of 'utility' or practical courses in the preparation of rabbis, communal workers or educators. Any curriculum grounded exclusively in theoretical concerns about professional life, or in pure academic study is bound to be inadequate. Every individual needs a sense of 'craft.' . . . In addition, the specifically professional training one receives in his training institution assists him in assimilating the culture of his profession . . . however . . . whatever merit is to be gained from any practical emphasis must be tempered by a broader vision about what the Jewish professional really must be . . . (having) a sense of dignity, the stature which comes with independence, a sense of power, a treasury of Jewish knowledge and consciousness which is fundamental to him, and the ability to think originally."

The word "relevance" is heard less stridently in schools today than it was in the 1960's, but graduate professional institutions never escape concern with social utility. Thus, professional schools in the general domain still ponder the balance between general learning and training for specific tasks, and debate the definitions of theory and practice. It is a weary problem for the professions, but it is no less important today than it has ever been. Indeed the concern is reflected in two helpful articles which appeared almost simultaneously during the Spring of 1975. Irving Louis Horowitz discusses the perennial dichotomy between technical and "humanistic" orientation in his article "Head and Hand in Education;"[1] and William Bouwsma examines related dichotomies in his article, "Models of the Educated Man."[2]

Although both writers treat familiar issues, and respond to social metaphors which originate in ancient history, somehow the problem continues to stimulate the imagination. In any event, the problem is less weary for Jewish professional schools, because we have a newer tradition of scientific examination of training models; and the debate may be even more critical, precisely because Jewish institutions are less cluttered with training precedent. The *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* has devoted considerable space to the subject,[3] as have other journals of Jewish professional concern.

In our perennial pendulum swings of academic snobbery and anti-snobbery, our current tendency is to praise those programs which have an increasingly clinical focus, and which take professional training out of the "ivory tower." One hears the informal conversation supporting these trends in numerous settings, and we see them buttressed by arguments for Bachelor's Degrees in Social Work, increased emphasis on clinical training in Law Schools, and support for numerous other utilitarian models of training. In developing the more clinical models, however, inadequate attention may be paid to the ambiguity of definitions. "Practice" need not be anti-

* See article immediately following by Bernard Reisman.

[1] Irving Louis Horowitz, "Head and Hand in Education," *School Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (May 1975).

[2] William Bouwsma, "Models of the Educated Man," *The American Scholar* (Spring, 1975).

[3] See especially, its Fall, 1975 issue. See also, *Jewish Education*, Fall, 1974; and several articles in the CCAR Journal.

thetical to "theory;" "theory" need not be limited to the classroom; and "practice" need not be limited to the clinical settings of agencies, schools, or "the field." It is certain also that the variety of experience in the 1970's is too great to be comprehended through experience alone.

I propose to insert non-pragmatic concerns to balance our concern with professional skills. It is, in part, an argument for "generalist" training and for personal intellectual development which must be heard in the face of the perennial fright that we aren't "preparing people for the tasks which they perform." The dichotomy may be unnecessarily exaggerated through the debate. Pragmatists tend to temporize regarding both the theory underlying the "hand work," and the intellectual and academic concerns which are only indirectly related to any field. I suggest that the purposes of Jewish graduate professional institutions must fall primarily outside of technical spheres: to assist students in the art of problem-solving; to help them develop an ability to think acutely and articulate lucidly both problems and solutions; to stimulate a sense of professional purpose, so that students are encouraged to develop a concept of the relationship of their field to the world in its several parts and as a whole; to inspire some thinking about the purpose of humanity; and to assist students in finding a place for themselves within that humanity. For Jewish institutions professional purposes and concepts of humanity take on special dimensions, as they are complicated and enriched by specifically Jewish elements within the person's world view and the largely Jewish clientele he* will be serving. When tackling the Jewish aspects of this problem, one may be mindful of Ernest Greenwood's concern for the professional's sense of self in his article: "Attributes of a Profession," in which a significant part of his definition of a professional relates to the values, norms, and symbols of a professional culture.[4] Presumably these work-centered values and norms could include and be expanded by Jewish cultural norms.

Theory vs. Practice; and Culture vs. Utility

A number of fallacies reside in the practical training trends and in the urgency which students feel over their immediate needs. Perhaps the central fallacy, however, is the belief in a direct correspondence between practice and the skills one learns for that practice. There are so many variables in all learning situations: sequencing, nature of faculty approach, and readiness for applied material, that curriculum designers err in placing faith in the absolute requirements which shape professional programs. Curriculum planners overlook with stunning consistency the supposed faith of Western society that learning comes from many sources. When we plan programs for students, we imply an understanding about how people go about learning; which sequence makes most sense for them; which courses have highest priority; and where field work is more important than classroom study or vice versa. We have little faith in what Jerome Bruner termed "non-specific transfer of learning," by way of which a student is enabled to see the underlying structures in a variety of apparently unconnected circumstances, and to make both practical and theoretical application between them.[5]

* Third person masculine pronoun is used trans-sexually throughout to refer to person rather than to a male.

[4] Ernest Greenwood, Attributes of a Profession, *Social Work,* Vol. 12, No. 3 (July, 1967).

[5] "A second way in which earlier learning renders later performance more efficient is through

Indeed a certain kind of student may learn more about staff management from a philosophy professor than he may from many professors of administration. An insight into human nature from a novel may have at least the value of a lecture on human behavior.

The students in our schools are predictably anxious about the professional tasks which await them, and feel desperately the need for some skills with which to enter the professional world. But courses with practical orientation have presented as many problems to the planners of our curriculums as do the courses with an exclusively academic bent.

Certain practical courses often instill boredom because of the intellectual flabbiness of the material and disappointment because the expectation of utility is too high. Other courses with a theoretical orientation to practical issues (in Organizational Development, for example) seem too abstract. I believe that there is an inherent gap between the material in a practical course and what the student believes he needs for his profession. Even where a course does undertake to respond to the felt needs," students may rightfully become sive. Each week he may legitimately "need" something else. Where professors determine the needs of students, and address themselves to the "unfelt needs," students may rightfully become resentful. Few students appreciate the charge that "while you can't understand the importance of this material while you are in school, you will see the need for it once you are out in the field." Angles of perceptions shift from person to person and for any person from week to week.

Another fallacy with the overly pragmatic quest relates to the changing nature of many fields, and the changing nature of the technology available to deal with those fields. No list of precise needs can be charted anyway, but if they could, they could have importance for no more than a few years.[6] Even within the realm of "professional courses," study will have to be as theoretical as it is practical, so that the structures of technical problems may be grasped flexibly enough to anticipate technology shifts. In this regard, William J. Bouwsma cautions: "all (new specialties) have at least this in common: that all are supposed to expand indefinitely through research; and a new conception of the educated man seems to be emerging precisely from this circumstance. . . . In this context, an educated man is above all a man who is open to new knowledge and able to advance it."[7]

The dilemmas which plague a Jewish professional trainee meet him coming and going. Jewish knowledge often seems unrelated, and the amount of

what is conveniently called nonspecific transfer, or, more accurately, the transfer of principles and attitudes. In essence, it consists of learning initially not a skill, but a general idea, which can then be used as a basis for recognizing subsequent problems as special cases of the idea originally mastered. This type of transfer is at the heart of the educational process — the continual broadening and deepening of knowledge in terms of basic and general ideas . . . in order for a new person to be able to recognize the applicability or inapplicability of an idea to a new situation and to broaden learning thereby, he must have clearly in mind the general nature of the phenomenon with which he is dealing." (Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education,* New York, 1963.)

[6] Robert W. Roberts argued in 1973 that there was no validated taxonomy of social work roles, functions, or tasks. (Robert W. Roberts, "An Interim Report on the Development of an Undergraduate-Graduate Continuum of Social Work Education in a Private University," *Journal of Education for Social Work,* pages 58-64, Vol. 9, No. 3, Fall, 1973). If this is true in a field like social work which beleaguers itself with self evaluation, it is true the more so in Jewish professional life. Note, on the other hand, Maurice B. Hamovitch, "New Directors for Social Work Education's Relationship with Government," *Journal of Education for Social Work,* Fall, 1974.

[7] Bouwsma, "Models," page 297.

Jewish knowledge one needs "practically" is far less than what most serious professors would hope for. Only specific training appears to be applicable. Theoretical training about professional matters seems less practical; and broader areas of history and literature are yet more remote. One must study Jewish values, but in order to "get along" in one's work, values are needed far less than techniques. We can make a case for the intensification of Jewish learning, with high academic standards, and with intensively intellectual milieux, but not without making some enemies.

There are now hundreds of agencies within the United States devoted to Jewish activities, and staffed by professionals who have technical skills, some theoretical grounding, and considerable energy, devotion, and talent, but who lack any serious depth of Jewish information. Out of this lack of information the programs of these agencies often reflect a clichéd understanding of what is really a complex and sometimes paradoxical Jewish history and world view. A rich and complicated tradition is vulnerable any time it finds its way into popularized educational programs, but this tradition is even more likely to appear one dimensional in the hands of an uneducated Jewish programmer. Although they are eager to "raise the consciousness" of their constituencies, many of our Jewish organizations and synagogues are staffed by professionals who lack the raw materials with which to raise that consciousness.

It is safe to say that no person can ever know enough about everything and thus professional training programs must establish priorities. If we say, however, that technical skills (the means) are required to purvey Jewish values (the ends), and a sense of community, then the implication is that many Jewish organizations, and worse, many of our students, are more concerned with means than with ends. My own experience leads me to suggest that technical tasks are best learned on the job anyway, and that the training of the future professional might as well focus on ends. But even if that view is extreme, we certainly must grow beyond the view that technical skills are a sine qua non, while Jewish knowledge can be hired from an academic expert.

A distinction should be made, as well, between Jewish humanistic studies and the issue-oriented approaches which are often preferred in the pursuit of Jewish knowledge. Professionals in the field are justifiably interested in courses dealing with the holocaust, the shtetl, and modern Israel. I often hear that a certain Judaic studies course is "just what I need," a phrase which reflects a narrow understanding both of the nature of learning and the nature of needs. The above mentioned articles in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* deal at length with problems of Jewish content, but only tangentially with the question of grounding in classical Judaism.

A Question of Leadership

Training institutions must decide whether they are training for leadership, or whether they are training technicians. If we analyze the profile of leaders in American Jewish professional life, we should probably discover that there is little in their leadership for which they were or could have been trained in "how to do" courses. The cleverest budgeting style is not learned in budgeting courses, but in the grind of routine, the ability to organize materials, and the possibility of dreaming in a moderately larcenous way. The ability to negotiate delicately comes from sensitivity, courage, and basic intellectual wherewithal, and not from a course in negotiating with staff. (A course in such a subject may indeed be of use years after a person is in his field and applying technical learning on top of experience.) The stresses of executive positions cannot be anticipated in basic training courses, and if they could be taught, they would not be relevant to the learner while he is at his student stage. To handle these stresses, the technical training which one received in school has less and less meaning, and may even be a source of frustration if such training implies a readiness which is only developed with time. A vision of the human condition may, however, contribute to an individual's endurance through any of these stresses. A sense of the historical life of the modern self may add weight to one's technical being.[8]

Clearly, one critical concern should be to fortify future Jewish leaders to face the inevitable encounter with monumental professional tasks, unrealistic expectations on their time, tense relationships with community leaders and superiors, and a range of emotional vagaries which neither "how to do" courses, nor *Midrash* and *Talmud* can anticipate. But in that context, *Midrash* and *Talmud* make easily as much sense as technical courses. It certainly would not hurt if training programs had a climate in which students were treated maturely and were trusted, and in which the intellectual and academic demands made upon them were serious and uncompromising. Training laboratory groups, sensitivity training, psychoanalytic therapy, the conduct of seminars by students which faculty members attend; responsible field work, and other subtle learning settings may be far more important components of practical preparation. And, yes, *Midrash.* For if we Jewish professionals think that the tradition means a fraction of what we claim publicly that it does, then the literature of our people, and the knowledge of that literature should be a source of self worth. It may even guide professionals with regard to ways to treat the human beings they are serving.

This paper does not oppose the presence of "utility" or practical courses in the preparation of rabbis, communal workers or educators. Any curriculum grounded exclusively in theoretical concerns about professional life, or in pure academic study is bound to be inadequate. Every individual needs a sense of "craft" — a sense that there is something that he can "do," though as his career develops he may find himself "doing that" less and less. Indeed, the fact that he may be doing some of the things for which he was trained with decreasing frequency may demand even more that he develop a "craft" and hold on to it. His professional personality and his pride may be carved out on the basis of that craft. In addition, the specifically professional training one receives in his training institution assists him in assimilating the culture of his profession. The educator may never rely on the educational psychology textbooks of his college days, and the educational principles underlying curriculum plans may have long been forgotten. His third grade class from student teaching days may be a faded memory. But such technical training has the merit of beginning a series of professional building blocks which help the individual to mature in his profession. It helps, as noted above, with the serious problem of identifying the professional with a culture of like professionals. At worst such elements in a professional's training program make it possible for him to feel that he has shared the same "mill" with colleagues; and at best it provides another part of a professional's self definition.[9]

[8] Eugene Goodheart, speaking about Lionel Trilling in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov. 17, 1975, used this metaphor to capture the late Trilling's sense of learning.

[9] See Greenwood, *op. cit.*

Yet, I am not convinced that the "craft" a professional should have, as his work becomes more and more generalized, can come from his graduate school training. The kind of craft, or specific skill which one will embrace for a lifetime will probably not begin to develop until the individual is in his field for a number of years. Even in regard to a legitimate need for craft, then, the promise of specific training courses is limited.

Naturally no professional training program can emphasize one side of the training possibility to the exclusion of the other sides. I suggest, however, that whatever merit is to be gained from any practical emphasis must be tempered by a broader vision about what the Jewish professional really must be. None of the training goals of Jewish professional curriculums are worth very much if the professional emerges without a sense of dignity, the stature which comes with independence, a sense of power, a treasury of Jewish knowledge and consciousness which is fundamental to him, and the ability to think originally.

Indeed, the synthesis between theoretical elements of professional problems, and the skills therein; the visionary and philosophical elements of a field and the day to day harsh realities; the Judaic knowledge, and love of Jews; between field work and philosophy — all of these syntheses are crucial to the professional, and the role model in the field should represent a decent mixture and a sound synthesis. Training institutions might be inclined to capitulate to the most immediate anxiety of the student which proclaims: "Is there something I can do?" Where they resist, they retreat into statements about the importance of "knowledge" — never seeing the potential in other aspects of their programs. Indeed, this dichotomy does not begin to present the choices available; and I am afraid that our graduate institutions do not think much more creatively than our anxious students. When "practical" (or professional) courses are introduced, they emerge as isolated courses without reference to an organic matrix. Courses in Fund Raising, Human Behavior, Rabbinic Counselling, Education, and other isolates are then cut off from Jewish sources, and from mature problem-solving approaches. But practical, professional, and technical courses can be more dynamically addressed. Fund raising courses can assist a student in viewing priorities in the perspective of Jewish history; rabbinic counselling and human behavior courses can include the student's encounter with himself, as well as data about psychodynamics; education courses can include a requirement for the student to examine the training curriculum he is undergoing. But with any approach, a background of Jewish tradition can be present as an urgent part of whatever utilitarian foreground is apparent to the student.

Forming the background of these considerations is a far wider range of cultural considerations which probably find their modern origin in the distortions of John Dewey's thought, but which have become corrupted through the peculiar blend of American success, Jewish concern with society, and a general sense of urgency which is coming to characterize Western society. With increased consciousness of the value of "specialization," our American Jewish culture has taken the implications of our society to the extreme, and applied the concept of *tachlis* in areas which are ultimately inimical to our higher Jewish purposes. The philistine extremes of this pragmatic society seem to be what plague Mrs. Sammler in Bellow's novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, as he attempts to create universal syntheses in the face of a world which is fragmented. It is certainly what preoccupies Mr. Sammler as

he attempts to explain aspects of British social movements to a class at Columbia in the late 60's which is beset by a scatalogical rejection of the intellectual tradition. It is inherent in the articles of Bouwsma and Horowitz. It has been discussed by art and literature critics who are concerned that art never lose its independence from society.[10]

We may indeed become victims of the very society which we claim we are trying to improve. There is value in Jewish institutions developing some of their own peculiarities with relative independence from the limited contemporary concerns of the culture and free of today's questions from today's perspective. The peculiarities of being Jewish can only be preserved through Jewish leadership and that leadership must be trained in terms of the Jewish peculiarities. Leadership does not emerge from an issue-oriented curriculum nor from technical training courses.

The dilemma of the Jewish graduate professional student is not an easy one, and this paper cannot propose a clear cut exit from that dilemma. Without a skill — a craft — a professional may feel cut adrift; and thus professional institutions, no matter how little of that craft one can really learn in school, must offer courses and field work which introduces the student to a craft. But it is peculiar that many of our communal agencies haven't agonized extensively over the lack of Jewish background of our professionals, or over the fact that the more general intellectual and academic qualifications for many of them have been minimal.[11] Perhaps the explanation for this situation lies in the fact that a training institution can come closer to measuring its successes in the practical vein; whereas the ambiguity of the broader goals provokes anxiety even for the training institution which is eager to prove its worth. Old fashioned academicians are not guiltless. They often become polarized against the overly utilitarian concerns of their students. They too often look to train an intellectual or academic and ignore the social realities and immediate needs of the community. As the professional guards his pragmatic values jealously, the academic retreats even further into his tradition. Each develops his own monopoly, and the academic forfeits his right to make a contribution to the practical concerns of the student.

It is difficult for a training school to demonstrate the success with which it equips its students to solve problems, behave maturely, be compassionate, and reflect a broad intellectual vision of the Jewish and general universe.

It ill behooves these institutions, however, to suffer the same anxieties as their students; for the solutions which they will reach will then be temporary and undependable. Indeed, such institutions should be models of classicism; models of the value of broad learning, and models of a hopeful vision that man can transcend his apparent limitations. No hope is forthcoming if we imply in our professional training models that the broader vision has no place. Hope is possible if these ideals shape the work of the hand.

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[10] See Wilhelmina Van Ness, "The Tragic Dilemma of Modern Art," *The American Scholar*, Vol. 43 (Spring, 1974). While extremes of this trend are disappearing, the issue remains of interest.

[11] The efforts of such programs as that of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Jewish Communal Service and Brandeis, are commendable in this regard. And, it is encouraging to note the soul searching reflected in the articles on Jewish communal training and the minutes of Jewish communal education committees, however, limited their vision on Jewish content.