

'Ignorance, sentimentality, practicality, cruelty'

The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion . . . draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects; in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate.

—Bacon

(The article which appears below was received, unsolicited, from an instructor involved in the Camp Marston Case. The epigraph above is part of the article. *G* prints the article as the first public utterance in their defense by any of the four instructors.)

A person committed to the goals of a college—see Newman's Idea of a University for one conception not lacking gonads—a person knowing what is significant and what is trivial in the business of education would not have decided as the board decided on the drinking episode. Such a person might have considered it, at worst, a venial

matter: inappropriate as to time and place (what is conventional, even common courtesy, in your living room is immoral at a YMCA camp; it is an error in judgment not to observe the distinction), but after all, a peccadillo. And considering the value of the teachers—not even the board itself thought other than that it was canning four good teachers (although it attaches little importance to that, since it knows teachers are available, interchangeable, a cheap commodity)—but considering the education and human value of the teachers and weighing the slightness of the infraction against that value, anyone who believed in education would, after duly noting the incident, brush it aside.

But the board, is ignorant of

what college is all about. It knows building, furnishings, and fiscal solvency; what happens in a classroom, at the best times, between a teacher and some of his students it knows not. It knows not at all, and I doubt that it even has a suspicion of the sense of vital communications, of intellectual seriousness and honesty.

In place of real knowledge of education the board has a sentimental notion, that is, its idea is confused with feelings, the feelings substitute for thought, the feelings are inappropriate, the feelings are shallow. This is not a critique of feelings, as such: true emotions are the source of action: we must love ourselves in order to want to live; we must love some idea situation in order to work toward it. All this is familiar and beyond criticism. What is disgusting, however, is the feeling which is its own end, which exists to be enjoyed in itself and which leads to no action, which actually substitutes for action. Thus for example, we console ourselves that we are moved to pity by the sight of suffering; we consider ourselves warm, human, because we feel. That we do no act to assuage the suffering we do not consider. In such a case the feeling is a substitute for action and is perverse. But we enjoy the feeling, and hence we joy in perversity.

The emotion which is enjoyed but which leads to no appropriate action I call sentimental, and I say that it is this kind of emotion the board has about the education it fosters at this col-

lege. Frankly I do not know how it conceives of education, but it must be in terms like "fulfillment" and "improvement" and "maturation." But these are empty terms: one should say rather that college should teach one to live like a man. It is when we do not understand what significance the phrase "like a man" contains that we are moved to polysyllables to cloak our ignorance, but if people do not have meanings, words cannot supply them.

That the board's feelings about education are shallow, incapable of supporting action, has been demonstrated repeatedly, most notably in the controversial speaker business. We praised the board's adherence to principle in approve the policy. We did not realize then that they did not know what they were doing, did not know what the policy mean, and had no solid commitment to the principle it expressed.

In short, the board knows the husk and shadow of education, but not its soul, not its substance, not its reality. In our case weighing our merits and defects, it simply could not perceive the weight of the former. Can we see the shadows? Can shadows see us? So the board had little to put on that side of the balance.

Lacking understanding, the board necessarily lacks commitment. One cannot commit one's self to vagueness. And if to have principle means to be firmly committed to an idea one understands, the board does not have principles. The effect of this will be for the board what it is for

any individual: those who lack principle must be at the mercy of circumstance. they will move in response to whatever pressures are applied, now this way, now that way—to the mystification of those who try to find some consistency in their actions. And in their motions they will utter their substanceless sentimentalities. And they are, of course, sincere. They are all, all honorable men.

In our case the board was blown by the heated exhalations of one of the community's self-appointed guardians, a man whose commitment to nonsense is exceeded only by his capacity for self-deception (considering himself moral, he spreads rumor takes hearsay as fact, issues slanderous statements, implies statements, implies corruption and conspiracy, uses the threat of prosecution to put down our supporters, attacks our character). Pressured by this bolting hutch of vile humors, the board reacted quite practically, that is, in a manner to reduce the pressure. It was not stayed by any fixed principles, and the consequence was that its judgment was cruelly disproportionate, reflecting more the frightened response to pressure than any sense of the value of things.

Some of those who remain on the faculty and understand what has occurred manage to hold out hope for themselves that the board may be brought around to right reason. For them, and for the school and its contribution to education, I hope that my analysis is faulty. But I doubt that.

George Peranteau