

VAN DIE REDAKSIE : EDITORIAL

GENEESHEER AS INTELLEKTUALIS?

Ons lewe in 'n era van superspesialisasie, waarin die individu in so 'n mate belas word deur sy daaglikse pligte, dat daar geen geleentheid voorkom vir die waardering—om nie eers te praat van die kweking—van veelsydige belangstellings nie.

Die tempo van die lewe het gedurende die afgelope eeu ontsaglik versnel. Die druk van die daaglikse pligte rus swaar op elkeen se skouers; sodanig dat sy vermoë tot geestelike uiting daardeur verstrengel word. Dit is dus noodsaaklik om belang te stel in en die vrugte te pluk van die verskillende dissiplines van die saamgevoegde wetenskappe, asook van die kunsvorme.

Evolutionêr gesproke, word die mens se geestelike vooruitgang gekenmerk deur 'n geleidelike verbreding van sy geestelike gesigsveld en veelvuldige belangstelling. Nou wil dit eerder blyk asof daar 'n dalende neiging is, waardeur ons innerlike energie gesmoor word.

Dit dwing 'n mens tot die konsep van die totale mens, naamlik 'n beskaafde, intelligente, sensitiewe individu. Waarom word 'n gekultiveerde persoon as 'n geneesheer verkies bo 'n harde, koue masjienagtige wetenskaplike? Juis omdat die medikus te doen het met lewende, gevoelige, onvoorspelbare mense, met 'n samevloeiing van die wetenskap aan die een kant en 'n mate van kultuur aan die ander kant.

Om dus perspektief te kry, moet die goeie geneesheer 'n balans probeer handhaaf tussen homself, wat basies wetenskaplik opgelei is, en die labiele lewensbestaan.

Die beskaafde medikus moet dus oor die volgende eienskappe beskik: Hy moet die vermoë besit om sy gedagtes, emosies en ideale aan ander te kan oordra—dit wil sê, te kan kommunikeer. Hy moet ook voldoende kennis van sy belangstellingsgebied besit, asook van andere, en dit is relatief maklik verkrygbaar. Hy moet logiese argumente kan deurvoer en 'n boek so kan lees dat hy die boodskap kan vertolk en inkorporeer. Verder moet hy insig hê; met ander woorde hy moet sensitieweit besit wat grotendeels bepaal word deur versoening met die kunsvorme—dit is, grotendeels 'n emosionele inhoud—en laastens moet hy 'n waardering besit vir wat uitmuntend is, en hy moet in staat wees om uit batige ondervinding homself te kan verryk.

Wat die geneesheer betref is kommunikasievermoë van groot belang. Ons het nie te doen met onintelligente materie nie. Ons het te doen met persone wat ly; met persone wat dink en met persone wat 'n kaleidoskoop van emosies openbaar, waarvoor geen bepaalde formulering aanvaarbaar is nie. In hierdie materialistiese era moet die sentrale rol van die delikate balans van intermenslike verhoudings bewaar en tot rypwording gebring word. Dit gebeur dikwels dat pasiënte, na 'n lang verblyf in 'n hospitaal, niks van hul

toestand weet of begryp nie—weens die non-kommunikatiewe medici! Op die hoogste vlak van verfynde kommunikasie is die kontak met kollegas wat op dieselfde wetenskaplike wyse leef en dink.

'n Basiese raamwerk van feite, al is dit slegs skeletvormig, word benodig om enigsins met gesag 'n wetenskaplike terrein te betree. Die vermoë om feite—geïsoleerde bestanddele van die wetenskap—te versamel, is as sodanig nie 'n enorme taak nie. Die korrelasie en integrasie van feite; die samevoeging van weerkaatsings, wat uit skynbare onafhanklike bewussynbestanddele na vore kom, is verder noodsaaklik. Nogtans moet die mens sy beperkte intellektuele vermoëns aanvaar en besef dat die onpeilbare feite-kennis, waarvan hy 'n fraksie aandurf, met 'n groot mate van nederigheid aangepak moet word.

Maar dit is nie net feite nie, maar ook konsepte—daardie wasige entiteite van die menslike bewussyn—wat evalueer moet word. Teenstrydige menings moet teen mekaar opgeveeg word om 'n delikate balans te behou. Die goeie skrywer het 'n sinvolle boodskap om oor te dra. Hy skep op papier met simbole beelde van sy innerlike gedagtes en van sy begeertes in sy lewe. Die medikus, so hewiglik verstrengel in die wetenskap, is geneig om te lees en slegs feite te absorbeer. Die letterkunde het ook die hoogtes van abstraksie ingeskiet en 'n panoramiese uitsig van die multi-gefasetteerde mens geopenbaar. Die ervaring van hierdie visies dra by tot 'n meer akkurate benadering tot ons pasiënte.

Insig is grotendeels 'n emosionele entiteit. Dit kon amper daarop neer dat die goeie dokter net twee eienskappe benodig, nl. die waarheid (kennis en logika) en meegevoel. Meegevoel is in 'n groot mate bydraend tot insig. Dit is 'n gawe, maar dit kan ook gedeeltelik aangekweek word en dan wel onder die invloed van die kunsvorme.

Die besit van kennis en insig bring mee dat die beeld van die wêreld nie net berus op waarnemings nie, maar elke keer 'n vergelyking in gradering uitlok en met 'n mate van intelligensie, en noodwendig met die verloop van tyd, ontwikkel daar die hoogsverfynde kapasiteit om te kan onderskei tussen wat uitmuntend is en wat nie. Hierdie vermoë word dikwels *ervaring* genoem, maar dit behels sekerlik veel meer.

Wat die geneesheer betref bied hierdie vermoë hom die geleentheid om die beste vorm van terapie uit 'n hele reeks te kan kies, of om die werklike sieke van die minder siek pasiënt te kan onderskei.

'We are reminded that the phenomenon of living cannot be measured or explained by material standards and that above all, in medicine, in the midst of scientific progress, we must not lose the art of living or an appreciation of things we cannot understand.'

CORRUPT WHOM?

When a jury brought back a verdict of guilty against a purveyor of pornography, and the foreman requested a heavy sentence in view of the danger that the books the accused had sold could be corrupting, the learned judge leaned forward and asked: 'Corrupt whom?'

The psychologists and the psychiatrists will probably never be able to give us the final answer to that question, but it is one that must be asked, and asked repeatedly. Many people have firm convictions and very definite ideas of what their norms are and what they will never tolerate, and it is good that they should have such beliefs, for without them human beings become drifters and are unable to find any values by which to live and to work. But unfortunately, from time immemorial there has been a certain genre of human being who not only believes strongly in whatever set of values he regards as best, but who is adamant that everybody should hold the same views.

When might literature be corrupting? The answer seems obvious: when it threatens to affect the accepted norms of the reader. But that presupposes that the reader must have the same norms as the censor who fears the possible corrupting influence. Let us first examine this concept.

Modesty, like love, is a many-splendoured thing; and like love it is heir to all the fickleness of mankind. Let no one say that he or she can give a final answer as to what constitutes immodesty. The décolletage of the Victorian era would startle even the most permissive guests at a dinner party today; yet the Victorians considered a woman who dared show the tip of her nude shoulder as being well on her way to moral degeneration. A series of coloured postcards of typical South African scenes are freely on sale, and many of these photographs show nude breasts by the dozen, but of course they are not White bosoms. By inference one would assume that White, but well tanned, bosoms would be acceptable. To a Tanzanian the idea that he should cover his body for the sake of modesty would be strange to say the least, but to expect him to attend a dinner and be seen eating would horrify him and he would be convinced that the White man had no sense of shame.

The list of examples one could cite is endless, from the changing world of fashion to ethnic differences. We shall leave it to the imagination of our readers to produce more instances of the curious inconsistency of man's concepts of modesty.

Let us look at another aspect of the corrupting, or alleged corrupting, effects of pornography. Corrupt whom? Can we honestly say that a normal, balanced person, man or woman, will become depraved and morally unacceptable through the perusal of pornographic literature? A psychopath, or somebody suffering from voyeurism or one of the other perversions, might conceivably be adversely affected by it, but would his or her perversion have disappeared or never have reared its ugly head but for the fact that suggestive literature had come his or her way? For the sake of the hypothetical corrupting influence on a handful of our less balanced fellow citizens the entire reading

populace must be deprived of what in many instances happens to be excellent literature.

What exactly constitutes pornography is a subject that has been exercising the best legal brains of the world for generations, and we cannot hope to find an easy answer; but the blind acceptance, so correctly queried by the English judge, that pornography can and will corrupt is an assumption which has not been substantiated by experience. Countries where censorship has been abolished as far as 'undesirable' literature is concerned, have had the satisfaction of seeing the purveyors of such books left stranded with shelves full of them, unable to offload them onto a totally disinterested reading public.

There is no legal compulsion for anybody to read a book, good, bad or indifferent. Apart from those who have the duty of deciding whether a particular book is permissible or not, we have often wondered how the self-styled puritans could know that a book was pornographic and therefore corrupting. Who made them read it?

Should not the psychiatrists undertake a large-scale investigation now to find out whether there is in fact any foundation for the generally held belief that books with a permissively sexual flavour are corrupting? For unless we do find out we will never know whether the elaborate mechanism we now have to ensure that no such literature reaches our bookstalls is really needed. And if the finding of the psychiatrists is that a danger does exist, then we must make sure that our regulations are consistent, for that they are not consistent at present is indisputable.

It is a sobering thought that our grandchildren might well look back on our regulations with the same amusement with which we now regard the swimming costumes of the Georgians, and they might well be shocked at our blatant immodesty in allowing our ears to be seen unclothed. That such a notion is not even far-fetched is proved by the fact that many Middle-Eastern women will lift their dresses in order to cover their faces when confronted by a stranger.

The problem is almost insuperably involved. If it is said that a particular book is immoral, one may pose the question: By what standards? If it is said that it is corrupting, one must be sure whom it corrupts, and if the answer to the judge's question is 'It will corrupt me', the final question may be posed: 'Then why do you want to read it?'

We do not wish to join the permissive movement, nor do we wish to support the conservative point of view. But so many of society's firmly held beliefs have of late been proved to be either wrong or unnecessary that one cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the present trend towards relaxation of strict censorship. Until a few decades ago the circulation of books was such that it did not constitute a big industry and not so many were produced. Today we need an expensive mechanism for screening of literature and without psychiatric proof of the time-honoured acceptance of the need to guard against corruption one cannot know whether the expense is justified. We must appeal to our psychiatric colleagues to supply the answer.