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W. Edgerton

brought these in,
thought they would be of help

(Speech to Phi Beta Kappa Assocs. - New York, October 28, 1966, 7 PM)

Phi Beta Kappa is one of the three parents of an unlikely offspring--the National Endowment for the Humanities. I should, therefore, be an ungrateful child if I were not happy to be here.

I shall try to put the Endowment, of which I am chairman, into its perspective, to talk a little bit about its programs, and to suggest some of the things on which we expect to work and some of the problems that we hope to be able to solve. I shall welcome questions and comments, for from these come ideas, and ideas are the lifeblood of foundations, even though money may appear to be.

When our history is written again, fifty years or so from now, the late fifties and particularly the sixties may well be called the "decade of education." This is the period in which our legislators and our people came finally to realize that education is a pressing national concern, that it is in the national interest that our citizenry be well prepared for the complex tasks and necessary thoughts of modern life, and that education cannot be left completely to the sole support of local governments or state governments or private establishments or the churches; but that it is so much a part of modern life that it must be a concern of the whole society. It was not easy for us to come to this conclusion, and we still question some of the results and some of the implications.

The evolution of this attitude goes back to our first colonists in New England and Virginia; to the post-revolutionary citizens of North Carolina, who established the first state university; to Senator Morrill of Vermont, who brought about the land grant colleges; and to Horace Mann, the father, for better or worse, of our public schools. All of these individuals and groups realized that education is at once a cause and instrument of change, that if education is good the change is likely to be good, and that if it is bad, the change is likely to be disadvantageous. They realized, too, that education in its retrospective aspects is a great source of stability, and that the country which knows its liberties and their history best will preserve them best. All of these things are known to our Congress and our President, and yet it took great courage and great commitment on their part to make the decisions that have been made in the last four years. Prior to that, it was fully understood by many, though not by all, that sound education is in the national interest; and by even more it was partly understood that the scientific and technological competence which comes from education is essential to survival. The step which took the courage was the one from the peripheral approach to the direct approach; and the one from the restricted scientific approach to the general approach which regards all education as essential.

For some years our national government has supported scientific investigation through grants and contracts. The modern phase of this development began at the end of the second World War. For less years, but for a substantial period, the federal government has supported students through loans to undergraduates and fellowships to graduate students. These activities have had great value, for they have provided scientists with the means to work and have helped individual undergraduate and graduate students to carry out their activities. The country has profited greatly from them, and the universities and schools have profited to the extent that they have been able to enlarge their activities and to have available a better pool of highly educated manpower; but, in another sense, they have suffered, because these two programs, together with the program for the construction of physical facilities, have forced them to choose the opportunities presented thereby, which they would have been insane to reject, and accept in turn the distortion in their overall programs resulting from them because of unequal support and indeed because of the drain of money that might have been spent for other purposes.

The great decisions of the 88th and 89th Congresses and of the Executive Branch were to approach the problem directly, to aid the schools directly through the school bill, to aid the colleges and universities directly through the higher education bill, to empower the National Science Foundation to make grants to institutions for teaching as well as to individuals or departments for research, and, finally, and perhaps for the moment a little out of proportion, to establish the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, and to sprinkle it lightly with money.

The genesis of this organization is as interesting as its structure, which is one of the most fascinating, impossible, and effective environments in which I have ever worked. It is, in fact, as insanely organized as a university. President Kennedy began the process when he appointed an advisor on the arts. Then Senator Pell and Congressman Thompson secured legislation establishing an Arts Foundation, without funds, but with a very important Arts Council headed by an extraordinary man, Roger Stevens, which put together a plan and a policy. At this point the humanities were not involved; but in the late fifties and early sixties, several thoughtful congressmen and of course many scholars and humanists, began to advocate federal support for this hitherto neglected but essential area of study. Congressman Thompson, Fogarty, Widnall, Boland, and Dent introduced legislation to establish some sort of support for the humanities but these bills did not flourish. Then in 1963 the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, the Council on Graduate Schools in the United States, and the American Council of Learned Societies joined together and pooled their resources to establish the Commission on the Humanities, of which I was chairman.

This remarkable group of humanists, scientists, college and university presidents, and tycoons produced at exactly the right time a report which has been described by a master lobbyist as an excellent political document. It advocated, of course, the establishment of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by definition it included the arts in the humanities as being indeed their very substance--a useful overstatement under the circumstances.

Had this report been produced in the fifties, it would have been another interesting document. Had it been produced today, it would have been wistfully filed away as something to come back to when the Vietnamese situation settled down. It was produced in the spring of 1964, and it was sent to each member of Congress, of whom by the way a very high percentage are members of Phi Beta Kappa. It was read by many Congressmen; and one of them, William Moorhead of Pittsburgh, introduced a bill based upon it into the 88th Congress too late to have a chance of passage or even hearings but at the right time to excite attention and interest. In the campaign of 1964 President Johnson strongly endorsed the proposals of the Commission, and it became part of his legislative program. In the 89th Congress one of the first bills was a revised version of Congressman Moorhead's bill. Identical bills were introduced by a large segment of the House. Similar bills were introduced by Senator Gruening and Senator Pell, and co-sponsored by nearly a majority of the Senate. Then the Executive Branch entered the scene, and the bill that ultimately passed was constructed, putting the Arts Council as the Arts Endowment, and the Humanities Foundation as the Humanities Endowment, into the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, a loose confederation bound together by cooperation, but, more important, by an understanding of joint interests and common problems that have made for a very good working relationship. Hearings were held on this bill under the very effective chairmanships of Senator Pell and Representative Thompson of New Jersey. The bill quickly passed the Senate, and was gotten out of House committee through the efforts of many interested people, including Mrs. Johnson. The bill passed the House on a voice vote and was signed into law by the President. Roger Stevens became chairman of the Arts Endowment. Henry Moe, whom I succeeded on the first of July, was interim chairman of the Humanities Endowment.

There have been, of course, some early problems--notably those related to funding, staffing, organization, and developing a program. I am comforted in dealing with some of these problems by a passage from the Anglican service for the dead which I remember as "the miseries of today are not worthy to be compared with the glories which lie within us for tomorrow."

The leadership of Henry Moe, the effectiveness of the National Council on the Humanities, and the increasing ability of the staff, have brought about the development and preliminary implementation of a viable program of support in the humanities. This program falls into three parts: The first is directed at the development of individual humanists, through fellowships at the post-doctoral or equivalent level. The second is directed at

enabling humanists to carry on their scholarly investigations through grants. The third is the development of education in the humanities in the schools, the colleges, and the universities. This is a pretty obvious division, but in our early period, when we have less than \$5,000,000 with which to operate, it seems best to be as simple as possible. Some of the programs, however, though obvious, are to me, at least, exciting. It is, for example, interesting to speculate on what changes may be brought about in learning and education by the award of fellowships for six to eight months of uninterrupted work to young humanists, starting with a hundred a year and hopefully growing to much larger numbers. This is the age at which young scholars are either made or broken as scholars, and ultimately, as teachers. It is gratifying to think that, through another of our fellowship programs, 50 mature humanists will be able to bring together the work of years and start new investigations on fellowships awarded to them. It is important to all of us that we have the works of our great American authors in good texts, to be accomplished through the work of dozens of scholars operating under a grant to the Modern Language Association. To those who are interested in the development of British and American constitutionalism, it is essential that the diaries of members of Parliament in the early 17th century, a formative period both for Britain and the United States, be edited and published. For those who understand the relevance of the ancient past to the present, it is gratifying that the aging generation of great papyrologists have been able, this past summer, to transmit something of their skill to the younger and inexperienced successor generation. In education, it is hopeful that ways may be found to enable school systems and universities to work together to generate ideas and means of teaching, and to work together to improve the teachers of the humanities in whole school systems. It is perhaps visionary, but just as necessary, to hope that compact regional groups of colleges and universities may be encouraged to share their resources, both intellectual and administrative. There are many other things of which I could speak, and will, if you ask. These are the obvious things.

Some of the less obvious are also less likely, but more exciting. We have all been over-sold on the potentialities and present capabilities of computers, and yet, we must not lose hope that this marvelous tool may help us solve some of our most pressing problems. There have been, in human history, several great syntheses of knowledge and thought. One of these was the separate but related syntheses composed by Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century before Christ. Their work has been a beacon to human thought ever since. Then in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, one working from Plato and the other from Aristotle, synthesized medieval knowledge and thought. Finally, in the 18th century, the French encyclopedists performed a like task. There has not been a meaningful synthesis since, and there never will be until knowledge can be arranged systematically and quickly enough so that its enormously rapid development does not make the arrangement immediately obsolete. No human mind, nor even any group of human minds, can possibly do this unaided today. The only hope is to arrange the material by data processing machines, to add new and discard obsolete information and interpretation, and on the basis of this

to construct a living encyclopedia from which a synthesis can be made. These activities are still beyond the reach of our present equipment, but it is not too early to start constructing the logical structure in which the data will be placed. One of the most fascinating aspects of the earlier syntheses is that each of them, in effect, destroyed the very system of knowledge that it brought together, for by making the parts clear and relevant to each other, it also made them contradictory to each other. More important, these syntheses stimulated new and even more exciting thoughts from which man moved on. I can view the destruction of our present intellectual system with stoical calm.

In another area, there are equal but different possibilities. It is now possible to interfere with the plans of a gene and to change thereby the development of the organism which it controls. It is believed that it will soon be possible to create a living cell from unliving matter. The main obstacle to organ transplants, not only from humans but from some animals, is immunological, for the surgical problems are close to solution, thereby not only saving the life of a human, but changing him in ways not yet understood. When all of these things have happened, it will be possible for scientists and medical men to create new beings and to change those which exist even more rapidly than they can through present genetic means. That is to say, it will be possible to influence the development of an already born being, as well as to shape one yet to be born by breeding. These possibilities raise all sorts of fascinating and terrifying ethical, moral, and social problems which should be the concern of every thoughtful individual, and particularly of every philosopher.

Still again, the very nature of humanism is of interest and importance. Humanists, by their very task, tend to be retrospective, for their work often deals with the past. In many humanists, this has produced a recessive characteristic which they pass on to their students and which, in its ultimate form, leads to a withdrawal of the humanist from the daily problems of society, and in its more common and vulgar form, leads to an attitude on the part of people who have studied the humanities but who are not themselves humanists, that the substance of the humanities is irrelevant to the major questions of life. Yet these thoughts and this knowledge is thoroughly relevant to every aspect of human life, for it involves every decision, every judgment, almost every activity, of men. If a way can be found to bring together in their formative years humanists with those who make decisions, whether they be politicians or executives, whether they be businessmen or governmental officials, a habit of mind may be formed which will further the solution of many of our social and governmental problems. The Endowment hopes to further the establishment of a center for advanced study in the humanities and arts in an environment where scholars and artists will be aware of the use of their work by decision makers, and decision makers be made more fully aware of the utility of the abstract and the aesthetic. We may thereby be able to make the beginnings of a social, ethical, and aesthetic advance as great as the material advance that has characterized our society. We may ultimately be able thereby better to control ourselves.

The ultimate goal of the Humanities Endowment is to help humanists provide knowledge and understanding of what is past, what is abstract, aesthetic, not material, so that thinking men may realize their full potential through achieving greater perspective, and be inspired to a vision of achievement; have the material with which to develop their wisdom, and the time in which to do it; and ultimately to master themselves and their environment, including that part of the environment that we have made ourselves through our technology. These things taken together are the ingredients of the nation's spirit, its ethics, and its morality. They are the basis of the judgments of value involved in all important decisions, whether they be public or private. They are bound together by the relevance of man's knowledge and thoughts through his actions. As the President put it, the need is not only to enrich scholarship, but life for all men. This is a large ambition. To carry it out we need your help.