

Elliot F-11  
 Harvard University  
 Cambridge 38, Mass.  
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Dear Fred,

Thanks for your contribution to the World Federation of Scientific Workers. I was glad to see the outline of your seminar paper; it gives me the impression that you have succeeded in integrating your natural and social science work pretty thoroughly. I can't say that I've done the same; my courses in the Social Relations Department at Harvard have been a rather abrupt transition for me - but none the less an interesting one. The closest connection I find at present is one of mathematics, as it appears in statistics. If one gets to larger philosophical issues rather than techniques, there are of course the fundamental similarities of all the empirical sciences (in which I include the social sciences - at least the parts that have a future). And finally I feel that all the sciences are alike in that they are oblivious of ethics. Propaganda devised by our highly developed social science may be as dangerous a weapon of warfare as the atomic bomb, and the perceptive applications of the same art promise well to have a similar effect on our minds (through the radio and other media of communication) as the smoke that pours over our cities has on the air we breathe. Therefore I look not to social science in itself as the salvation of our culture, but rather to its participation in a more clearly defined ethics, whereby we may strive for agreement without resorting to the ideas of undefined 'absolute' good which successfully put an end to any ethical argument.

I've been teaching half time in Harvard's General Education program - assisting Prof. Kemble in one of the introductory science courses. Next year I hope that we will start teaching the students a little philosophy of science and something like semantics. It is in this part of what science teaches that I feel it can be really useful in 'general education'; the construction of concepts, made concrete by demonstrations, can be an effective way of showing the student how to put ~~the~~ empirical observation in correspondence with a system of concepts.

A friend of mine at California - a graduate student in physics named Bob Gelinas - has told me of some interesting study he has been doing in the philosophy department there, under a man named Rynin. Apparently Rynin is something of a semanticist, having published an edition of the works of a philosopher of the last century named Johnson (this spring).

The influence of specific scientific techniques on social development is something I hope to learn about eventually, for the same reasons you do (I think) - because I know something about science. The view that science is the determining factor in social change is not a popular one here, and seems to have a label of Marxism. I can't appraise this yet.

Sincerely,

Lawrence MacRae