Science with Practice

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Abstract

THE slogan at Iowa State is “Science with Practice.” Or is it sacrilege to call a crested motto a ”slogan?” Perhaps I should write with saccharine hypocrisy about high scholastic standards, the emphasis upon ”basic fundamentals,” or the complexity of subjects offered...
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The slogan at Iowa State is "Science with Practice." Or is it sacrilege to call a crested motto a "slogan?" Perhaps I should write with saccharine hypocrisy about high scholastic standards, the emphasis upon "basic fundamentals," or the complexity of subjects offered. Iowa State has famous scientists on the faculty. Iowa State's enrollment mounts hysterically. Iowa State is one of the top schools in the country. But the proud motto, "Science with Practice" is not our guiding maxim. Every year we graduate more "little scientists" and turn loose more well-practiced automatons on the state, the nation, and the world. There is an everywhere present and gleefully infantile emphasis on Practice. There is little evidence of that imaginative and creative integrity which makes the idea of Science worth while. "Science with Practice" is, in actual and pecuniary fact, a slogan. It advertises Iowa State, its wares and its products.

And this year I am one of those graduating "products." I know vaguely that the world is facing a revolution, a suicide, or a stagnation. Yet what have I learned here at Iowa State that will help me cope with such a future?

We at Iowa State have been feeling the epidermis of science. We have been robots, accepting without doubt or wonder the vastly over-simplified laws and associations of a stereotyped study. The faculty is derelict in its duty; the student body is delinquent in its privilege. Chasing, on the one hand, adolescent pleasure; being exposed, on the other, to the monotony of faculty interests.
And I am one of these. Seeing what is obvious and stating it baldly is no great virtue.

What is the meaning of Science? How does it relate to Practice? And why have we been so fumbling in our efforts to understand? Perhaps my answers are truisms; perhaps they are mere delusions. But they are better answers than I had before I began to puzzle over them.

Science is a state of mind; it is only incidentally the massing and systematizing of data. Einstein says that “Science is the attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense-experience correspond to a logically uniform system of thought. Single experiences must be correlated with the theoretical structure in such a way that the resulting coordination is complete and convincing.” Obviously, then, there must be an intimate and apparent connection between technical details and the agenda of daily life.

The machinery of science is not dynamic and creative. The paraphernalia of science is useful only to a scientist, to a man with a curious and wondering mind, interested in relating his daily living to the universal nature of things through the approximations of tentative and theoretical hypotheses. Science is man’s best way of thinking. It serves him, and helps him solve his present dilemmas.

What does Practice accomplish, then? Perhaps it is a necessary part of learning to use the tools of Science. But the mere manipulation of dogmatic laws to determine the mundane answer to a planned problem stripped of its natural caprice is not enough. Unless we learn that science—the state of mind that devises theoretical and tentative answers to correspond with a given flux of circumstances—is applicable to our daily dilemma as a citizen and a social being, we learn nothing really useful.

We merely make ourselves well-practiced automatons who are bought and sold as productive increments. We are purchased in the marketplace by men with the imagination and ingenuity necessary to profit from the moving world of actuality. Lacking the implements of science and the balanced yet creative state of mind which science offers, the tragedy is that too often the profit is for the few, while the many suffer hardship and frustration.

The fault is ours. We are the peddlers of petty accuracies, instead of the “priests and prophets of abundant living.” We count knowledge more precious than wisdom. We, who have worked to gain dexterity with the tools of science, can make a
narrow application of its method. But we have failed to see its
purpose: to provide the way of thinking for solving the pressing,
irking problems of our public lives, our private lives, our futures
and our destiny.

Disavowal
Dick Ellis

Love
Is a sleek cat in the night,
A peacock’s shadow,
A naiad on the hill:
A gossamer thread not meant for spinning.