

## Part I

# THE HUMANITIES

PART I is an exploration of the nature of the humanities. In the first essay Walter Kaufmann describes a kind of knowledge available *only* through humanistic studies. The humanities include literature and history, philosophy and religion, art and music, and unlike the natural sciences and much of the social sciences they provide what Kaufmann calls *historical knowledge*.

Noting the distinction, sometimes drawn by philosophers, between *knowledge that* and *knowledge of*, Kaufmann claims that *historical knowledge* is both. It is *knowledge that* various events have occurred and *that* various results have ensued. It is also *knowledge of* the dead. "Humanistic studies can tell us what some of the most fascinating human beings of all time felt, thought, and did." But *historical knowledge* is also *knowledge how* to do things. It is *knowledge how* to write poetry, to compose a quartet, or to do philosophy, "in the sense in which past masters engaged in such pursuits." Anyone, of course, can rhyme words or espouse views about truth and beauty, but to write poetry or do philosophy in the sense in which poets and philosophers do these things means drawing on the history of poetry and the history of philosophy. What Kaufmann identifies here is the important relationship between *knowing how* and *knowledge of*, a relationship that distinguishes, for example, doing philosophy from stating opinions.

*Historical knowledge*, however, is more than *knowledge that, of, and how*. Humanistic studies also provide the element of perspective which is required for judgments of quality or value. Kaufmann notes that "many people are led to think that what is close by is great." But the present may seem great only because we have nothing to compare it with. Even in the present, our own literature, for example, may seem great because we are not familiar with contemporary French or Russian literature and,

therefore, have no basis for comparison. *Historical knowledge* provides that basis for comparison and reduces the subjectivity of evaluation. We can *know* that Rilke is better than Heyse, that Dostoyovsky is better than Erica Jong, that Van Gogh is better than Andy Warhol, but only through humanistic studies. And how good is Sylvia Plath or Ted Hughes, Saul Bellow or Kurt Vonnegut, John Rawls or Saul Kripke? The answers remain to be found in humanistic studies.

But *historical knowledge* is yet more. The humanities offer us *knowledge of man*. "Some of the most distinctive manifestations of humanity," Kaufmann notes, "are to be found in music, art, and literature, in philosophy and religion, and any study of man that neglects these realms comes nowhere near telling us what man is." Thus, while biology and chemistry can give us some knowledge of man's body and while sociology and political science can give us some knowledge of the power structure of a particular community, they do not give us knowledge of what is distinctively human, of what man is.

And, *historical knowledge* includes *self-knowledge*. "Through the study of art and music, literature and history, philosophy and religion we discover our own humanity, our own potentialities." Encountering works of art, music, and literature, and philosophy and religion changes our conception of ourselves, changes our self-understanding. The humanities "increase our self-awareness and lead us to distinguish between feelings and thoughts that we had never sorted out before."

Toward the end of his essay, Kaufmann describes four reasons for teaching the humanities in addition to the special kind of knowledge which is available only through humanistic studies. The first reason is to preserve our humanistic heritage. The second is that the humanities are often concerned with the ends of life, with human goals and ultimate aims. By exploring the humanities one can more readily determine which goals are acceptable and which are unrewarding. Third, teaching the humanities is teaching vision. The humanities expand horizons and provide perspective, without which the limits of one's life are narrow and confining. Finally, teaching the humanities fosters a critical spirit. The critical spirit is one which seeks the truth. It is not one which possesses the truth and points out the error of

every other view. The critical spirit is positive rather than negative and it too is an expression of our humanity.

In the second essay, Bruce J. Malina proposes a model for understanding the humanities. Americans, Malina believes, have a relatively clear idea, whether correct or not, of what the sciences are, derived from high-school or college science classes and from television accounts of science and technology. Given the popular model of science, Malina describes the character of the humanities by contrasting the humanities with the popular conception of science.

A broad view of science includes science as process ( $S_1$ ), science as achieved result ( $S_2$ ), and science as applied ( $S_3$ ). Drawing upon a distinction similar to the one noted by Kaufmann, Malina describes these views of science in terms of *that-knowledge*, *how-to-knowledge*, and *why-knowledge* or principle knowledge.  $S_1$  is concerned primarily with *why-knowledge*.  $S_2$  "looks to a rather sophisticated *how-to-knowledge* with some *why/how-to-knowledge*." And,  $S_3$  "requires a simple *that-knowledge* along with a simplified *how-to-knowledge*." For most Americans, "science" means  $S_2$  and  $S_3$ .

The humanities can also be viewed as process ( $H_1$ ), as achieved result ( $H_2$ ), and as applied ( $H_3$ ), but Malina claims that  $H_3$  is probably not an adequate account of the humanities. "The reason for this is that since the humanities are appreciative and non-manipulative, they really cannot be applied or used." The position seems to oppose Kaufmann's claim that the humanities do provide *how-to-knowledge*, but the sense of *how-to* is much more narrow for Malina and both Malina and Kaufmann probably would argue that the humanities do not provide *how-to* knowledge in the narrow sense and that they do in the larger sense in which Kaufmann describes such knowledge.

In establishing the model of binary opposition, Malina describes science as "those models of knowledge that attempt to understand empirical phenomena in terms of clear, distinct, and universal concepts in a manipulative, repeatable, predictable, cumulative, eliminative, ahistorical, and segmented way." In contrast to science, then, the humanities are "those models of knowledge that attempt to understand non-empirical phenomena in terms of fused and dense, elusive and indistinct, culturally particular concepts in an appreciative, unrepeatable, unpredictable,

complexifying, historical, and holistic way." The fundamental difference between the sciences and the humanities derives in large measure from the object of each, since both seek the same goal: understanding. The sciences focus upon the physical environment whereas the humanities focus upon fundamental human experiences, and human experience cannot be reduced to empirical, mathematical analysis. When the model for all knowledge is the model of science, the scientific American finds the humanities confusing and unintelligible. But, to understand human experience requires something other than the model of science. When the humanities are understood in their own terms, the understanding which they provide is at least as rewarding as, and probably a great deal more rewarding than that of the sciences. Malina concludes: "If the scientific American can get beyond the true/false stage of cognitive development, if he will allow curiosity about man and all that man stands for to run rampant, the humanities would be as obvious as the sciences are, and the sciences would be as uncertain and relative as the humanities are."

Malina's conclusion finds further support in the third essay, by Eugene E. Selk. The purpose of Selk's essay is "to show that most of the traditional grounds employed for drawing a theoretical distinction between the sciences and the humanities are based on a picture of science which is now generally discredited, or at least under serious stress." The picture of science which is now discredited, however, is relatively close to the view of science described by Malina as accepted by the scientific American.

Science is often seen as objective, presuppositionless, and value-neutral, while the humanities are viewed as subjective, full of presuppositions, and value-laden. Selk argues, however, that science does not provide certain truth, that both observation and facts are theory-laden, and that the value judgments are an intrinsic part of the scientific enterprise. (Note, with regard to objectivity, Walter Kaufmann's discussion of taste.) Science is also seen as dealing with the general, while the humanities focus upon the particular and idiosyncratic. (Note Malina's discussion of the particular *vs.* the universal.) On this point Selk argues that the difference between the sciences and the humanities is a difference in degree not in kind. The sciences do consider particular

events and the humanities often provide general information about the nature of man.

Another ground for distinguishing the sciences from the humanities is that the sciences progress, that is, continue to move toward truth, while the humanities “produce a sequence of original creations, each of which stands relatively alone and steadfast.” (Note Malina’s discussion of cumulative *vs.* complexifying.) Selk argues that science does not, in fact, progress in linear fashion and that the notion of what constitutes progress is culturally determined. He also argues that the humanities do progress, that they are cumulative, in the sense that they build upon an historical tradition.

A fourth way of distinguishing the humanities from the sciences is to claim that the humanities are historical and that the sciences are ahistorical. (Malina discusses this same issue and, of course, Kaufmann’s notion of *historical knowledge* is relevant to the issue.) Selk explores this issue and concludes that the difference between the humanities and sciences with regard to the importance of history is only a matter of degree. (Kaufmann’s discussion of *how-to-knowledge* is relevant to Selk’s argument.)

The final ground for distinguishing the sciences from the humanities considered by Selk is that science is based on reason or logic whereas the humanities are based upon intuition or creativity. Selk contends, however, that the humanities do not deny reason—the analysis of a poem, for example, clearly requires reasoned argument—and that science is often a matter of creativity and intuition.

While Kaufmann and Malina argue for a difference between the humanities and sciences, Selk argues for their sameness. Their positions, however, are not contradictory, for Selk tries to show that the popular conception of science is mistaken and he would agree that some aspects of the sciences are clearly distinguishable from the humanistic enterprise. It is the popular conception of science that makes the humanities appear difficult, confused, unattractive, and less valuable. The popular conception of science is that it gives simple answers, and life is easier, if less rewarding, the more simple it is. The search for simple answers to complex questions, unfortunately, is all too true of many humanists. But Selk shows that the popular conception of

science is mistaken. The humanities, as described by Kaufmann and Malina, then, can be seen as less problematic and more attractive, and even more capable of giving an accurate account of the nature of man and of fundamental human experience than is possible through the sciences.