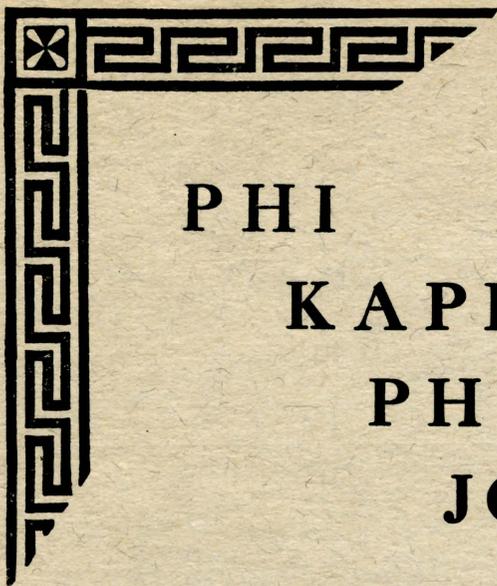


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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HONOR SOCIETIES\*

BY A. E. DOUGLASS

My remaining duty is to call your attention to the philosophic bearing of Phi Kappa Phi and all other honor societies.

Election into this honor society is a "contemporary reward", a very clumsy expression which I am using to bring out a certain thought. It is a reward given at this moment for doing something whose real benefit will come a long time in the future. It is payment to a man for digging a hole and putting in a tree which is going to benefit the next generation. It makes the laborer feel that digging the hole is worth his while, even though he gets no benefit from the tree. If we come to think of it, life is full of these contemporary rewards that keep the race moving so that benefits in the future will come about. When we praise children they are pleased and bend to more effort and our recognition of their effort is a contemporary reward. It has no relationship to the great and real reward which they themselves will get from that effort later in their own lives. It is only a part of the machinery by which they overcome momentary difficulties, in order to reach future results, of which they themselves can in no way see the importance.

The real reward of a teacher's labor is in the advance of the pupils, which only reaches its measure years after the chief work of the teacher is over. The teacher is paid a salary as a contemporary reward. The fame of a statesman is the contemporary reward for some of the many pieces of work whose benefit will come to the nation perhaps a hundred years hence. The honor to an inventor or discoverer is precisely the same. So in scholarship the real benefit of scholarship is not in any reward which we can give, but in the improvement of the citizenship of the nation. When this effort towards scholarship by the student comes to its

\*The concluding portion of an address delivered before the chapter of the University of Southern California. The beginning was published in the JOURNAL for December, 1925 (Vol. V, No. 4).

fruition, it is in improved laws, greater conveniences, more efficient activities of the people of succeeding generations; when we give a reward for scholarship we can give only a contemporary reward, a bit of encouragement, a promise that in the world of ideas we recognize the future value of that effort.

The world, then, is full of contemporary rewards. It is as if we carried a ledger which must be balanced every day; and every day the debit and credit balance is liquidated in part between the different units of the community, yet the whole is working on to some future purpose towards which these daily balances effect continual progress. In all our daily contemporary rewards we promise, we mortgage, we contract, we buy, we sell or somehow we influence the future. It is a transaction in which time is the fundamental element. We do all these acts because the human mind has not yet developed a good time-consciousness. Its space-consciousness has been pretty well developed,—from the time when man thought the earth was flat and bounded by neighboring mountain ranges, to the first measurements of the distance of the sun, and now to the realization of actual distances as great as 1,000,000 light years. But his time-consciousness is very feeble as yet. We visualize things in the future and in the past only hazily. Right today we are awakening to this need of time-consciousness. Evidences of such awakening are seen in the popular agitation of Einstein's relativity; in the violent opposition to the idea of evolution by those who, while very conscientious, still have time-consciousness under-developed; by the noble work that is being done at the present time to conserve the national resources for the future. One of our greatest national failings is our difficulty in visualizing the needs of this country one hundred years from now, and in having any consideration for it. It is rather evident, I think, that such time-consciousness is more likely to be developed in individuals in mature age than in youth. So it becomes evident that where youthful psychology dominates, as in a military atmosphere, time-consciousness and thought for the distant future grow less. In times of peace and stability the counsels of older people dominate and their activities extend further and further into the future because they can visualize it.

Now time, in long periods, is the essence of certain scientific studies. For example, biology is dealing with various groups of animals or plants whose group life is far longer than the lives of the individuals within them. Botanists in plant succession discuss successive dominance of such groups as grass, shrub and forest in the same area. In a similar way our human life is divided into groups that are larger and longer-lived than the individual. For instance, we belong to a family; it transcends in numbers the

individual and lives longer than the life-time of an individual; family traditions last over generations. We belong to a church which far transcends the individual in time. It is an organism which is going to influence the future, to which, as we pass, we contribute in a small measure. We associate ourselves with charity organizations, which will always be with us, with health organizations, with efforts to train young people, with business enterprises, and with numberless clubs. In all these we have developed why, and technically the way numbers should dominate, but we have little thought of the time extension in these groups and we should visualize especially the part they are going to play in the future.

Perhaps the most important human organism is the nation or race. Such groups comprise millions of individuals and last over periods of time far transcending the life of man. The interests of this larger organism are not identical with the interests of every individual, for it must look to futures which the individual cannot see or recognize. In order to make the larger organism efficient, then the individual must and does feel within himself instincts which deal with the larger and longer-lived group, and which represent the larger interests. These are the religious instincts, and this is the scientific basis of religion.

Now there is one phase of this matter which is very hard for us to realize. These larger organisms—race, nation, church or business—are not inanimate things; they are persons with a distinct personality. For example, your University is a living thing; if you work for it, it will work for you; if you fight it, it will fight you; and to this super-human organism I am here giving the name of super-person. It is not at all the idea of the super-man, which appears to me a vicious idea. It is a super-person, including and residing within, all human beings who are interested in it. It has strength beyond the individual, and for our present purpose it has a life-time not limited by the individual. Once we recognize the characteristics of the super-person we begin to get an idea of the new units whose interaction, competition, struggle, sacrifice and service are now contributing to the advance of humanity. When we combine these super-organisms both in time and numbers, into larger and more inclusive groups, we find they possess a still larger life and touch the most important and far-reaching human interests. The grand combination of all becomes the supreme person, and thus the supreme and most powerful and far-reaching interest of humanity is God Himself.

In this interpretation of life, which leads at once to the greatest thoughts regarding humanity, education may receive what amounts to a new definition. It is the cement or connecting ma-

terial which ties human individuals together so that they can form these larger groups called super-persons, and includes eventually all humanity in one group. In this we take education in its broadest aspect beginning with language itself, both in its ancient origin when the human race was young and in its present use with growing children of today. It binds all together because it gives to the individual a knowledge of what others have done in the past, are doing at present, and may do in the future. Hence it is essential in any grouping of people for larger purposes. It is the basis of coördination of human action. A spoken language may reach many people but cannot carry over long periods of time, and under such conditions our super-persons would have short life, if life at all. But a written language means coördination through long time as well as in added numbers, and makes possible larger and longer-lived groups.

So education in its long reach over periods of time presents one of the greatest and oldest problems of human thought, a problem that will always renew itself with the increasing complexity of life. Always must it recur when races become mixed and racial forces clash against each other and a new unified people is trying to emerge from a melting pot. Hence it is before us Americans at this time, more than any other nation. Thoughtful people have been dimly realizing this view of the problem and have discussed extensively "heredity *versus* environment" without, I think, feeling much enlightenment. But when we put exactly the same problem into new words and call it "race *versus* education" we see the major American problem of today. Shall we have race rivalries and riots or shall we work together and educate ourselves to become one people, dropping our notions of race boundaries and admit that there are good things in other races? This is the modern phase of the most ancient of all contests. Among animals the racial solution was the only one, namely, the extinction of one race and the dominance of the other. But the education of the human mind came as salvation. Is it not our privilege to save and educate our enemies instead of killing them? Cannot it be so managed that we educate them so they never become our enemies? The mission of Jesus Christ came in the early extension of the Roman Empire when races were mixing as they are today. He taught people not to kill their enemies but to love them: and he meant exactly what we do when we tell ourselves to "educate" them. The early carrying of Christianity to the Gentiles was, in modern language, the carrying of education outside racial boundaries, and that is what we need today. Education then wears down racial divisions and cements the people of the world both now and for past and future time.

Courtesy of Phi Kappa Phi address  
with notes on yellow paper