

## Humanism and Social Science

As part of the consideration of the relative applicability of the respective approaches of humanism and social science to the study of culture today, is an implication that if the aims of the two areas are similar, or the same, the method of research of the social scientist suggests that his is the more reliable approach and should in all cases be adopted. Since it is generally agreed that the eventual goal of either approach is to accurately describe man in his culture, the question centers on the comparative rigor of the two methods. The usual assumption is that the approach of the social scientist is the more reliable. This arises from a general misunderstanding of the capacity for dispassionate observation and experimentation when the "scientific method" is applied to the social situation.

The elements of human behavior are so multitudinous as to present the social scientist with a situation in which the control of variables in his experiment is not in any way comparable to that of the "hard" scientist in his laboratory. Herein lies the danger. The fact is that to exercise any sort of control the social scientist must so narrowly restrict his observations that his data may be misleading when he comes to interpret it. This is not to say that no such attempts at control should be made. However, the limitations should be recognized.

The scientific method as applied to the situation of the social scientist is essentially a measuring device. That which is measured is that which is manifest in the culture. However, it is not possible to measure everything. The criteria for selection of elements for measurement, the elements selected, and the method of measurement all effect both the data and the possible interpretations of it.

The humanistic approach to cultural analysis attempts to describe and interpret not only the manifest in culture, but that which is latent in it as well. Such latent elements would be those of a philosophical, spiritual, or aesthetical aspect. What the social scientist can tell us about these areas is only that which the informant directly imparts to him. He can tell us that a particular story was told a specific number of times with certain variations, that the audience seemingly reacted in a particular manner, and that the informants made specific comments about it. To go beyond this, he must enter the area of the humanist. The humanistic approach does not ignore data. It interprets those aspects latent in the culture and beyond mere statistical measurement. The humanist would consider the world-view of the story, the interlocking relationships between the individual and his family, society, gods, and demons, and the way in which the individual or society might identify himself or itself with the story. The emphasis here would not be on the relationships as institutions--as would be the case with the social scientist. The conceptualization in the story of the individual--what is expected of him, what he may expect--would be stressed by the humanist.

To the extent that they give consideration to these latent aspects of culture and to the extent that they practice "art" in the selection of those variables they will attempt to control, the social scientists approach the method of the humanists. I feel that a false polarity has been posed. The only realistic polarity is the one between science and humanism; social science is something of a resolution of that conflict.

[The discussion on the preceding page was prepared by James Durham, c/o Folklore Institute, Indiana University.]

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#### NOTES for QUERIES

DR. MAUNG HTIN AUNG, presently a visiting professor at the Folklore Institute, is a former ambassador to the United Nations and Ceylon from Burma. As an authority on Burmese folklore, he is teaching a course on the folklore of Southeast Asia.

Has anyone considered THE HARD-LUCK STORY told by beggars and panhandlers as a genre of folk narrative that would be distinct from tale or legend?

KENNETH GOLDSTEIN, from the University of Pennsylvania, will be teaching two courses at Indiana this summer: Folksongs of the English Speaking World and The Folklore of Regions and Communities.

The annual meeting of the AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY will take place in Bloomington, Indiana, next November. We encourage as many graduate students as possible to attend. Accomodations can surely be arranged for those who have sleeping bags and don't mind sleeping on the floor. Perhaps even more refined accomodations may be found for students who are somewhat less enthusiastic. All those students who will definitely attend should send in their names to the editors so arrangements can be made.

DR. RICHARD M. DORSON, chairman of the Folklore Institute, Indiana University, after completing some field work in northwest Indiana, recently began a new tour of duty as a visiting professor. He will be with the University of California, Berkeley, until next September when he will again resume his work at the Institute.

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