Majority Of Panel Agree That Some Specialization Is Desirable

“Specialization in Twentieth Century Education” was the subject of one of the Friday morning panels of the Mid-Century Convocation. Moderating at the panel was Thomas K. Sheerwood, Dean of Engineering at Technology. In general the panel attempted to answer the question of whether present-day individuals and institutions are over-specialized.

Sidney Hook, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at New York University, replied that “first we must know with respect to what. If it is with respect to the discovery of new and significant truths about nature and man, I make bold to answer the question set for us with an unqualified negative. We owe the revolutionary developments in almost every field of knowledge during the twentieth century primarily to work done in institutions of higher learning.” Mr. Hook defined several other ways that the question might be answered, depending upon the way the question was interpreted, and felt that “it therefore seems to me that it is possible that persons who specialize most thoroughly are those who can most safely be trusted to do so without falling short on wisdom and conscience.”

Deftine Stand

One member of the panel definitely in favor of specialization was Sir Richard Livingston, President of Corpus Christi College of Oxford University. He began by listing three major ideals in favor of specialization.

“I. It is inevitable in an age which depends on growing knowledge.”

“II. Some of the major ends of education can be achieved through specialization—the general training of the intellect, the art of arguing logically, and of arranging and expressing thought. These can be acquired in the intensive study of any subject.”

“I. It gives an insight into the meaning of knowledge and the way to attain it, not to be achieved in any other way, and is a medicine against superficiality, which is at least as dangerous as narrowness.”

Specialization Inevitable

Dr. Philip J. Palus, Professor of Education at Harvard, felt that specialization is necessary, and in any case inevitable. He concluded his address with the thought that “It is possible that persons who specialize most thoroughly are those who can most safely be trusted to do so without falling short on wisdom and conscience.”

Master of Definition

According to Audrey A. Pedder, Dean of Engineering at Purdue, general education, liberal education, and specialization are all a matter of definition. “Engineering education is a distinctive type of education, useful in a wide range of occupations. It is not inconsistent with any other form of general, liberal, or scientific education.”

Dean Potter made a good point in that “much of the students’ education comes from activities outside of the classroom. Voluntary participation in student publications, musical organizations, dramatics, debates, literary contests, athletics, medical organizations, dramatics, debates, literary contests, athletics, and other student activities are not limited to those in student publications, musical organizations, dramatics, debates, literary contests, athletics, the same. They can be compensated for. “Technical or professional specialization is necessary, and in any case inevitable.”

Definite Stand

Mr. Charles Allen Thomas, Executive Vice President of the Monsanto Chemical Company, dismissed the various “attitudes found in students of various types of education.”

The last speaker of the six-man panel was Frederic Lilge, Asst. Professor of Education at the University of California, who used the term “education” in a broader sense of the word—education is the process of humanizing in the process of humanization. He came to the conclusion that specialization does have some bad effects, and should in some way be compensated for. “Technical or professional specialization when compartmentalized and unbalanced, is sad to leave the members of society with little of importance to say to one another.”

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