

PREFACE

In Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, Roquentin feels bound to listen to the sentimental ramblings about humanism and humanity by the Self-Taught Man. "Is it my fault," muses Roquentin, "in all he tells me, I recognize the lack of the genuine article? Is it my fault if, as he speaks, I see all the humanists I have known rise up? I have known so many of them!" And then he lists the radical humanist, the so-called "left" humanist, and Communist Humanist, the Catholic humanist, all claiming a passion for their fellow men. "But there are others, a swarm of others: the humanist philosopher who bends over his brothers like a wise older brother with a sense of his responsibility; the humanist who loves men as they are, the humanist who loves men as they ought to be, the one who wants to save them with their consent, and the one who will save them in spite of themselves...." Quite naturally, the skeptical Roquentin ends by saying how "they all hate each other: as individuals, not as men."

Fully aware of the misuse and false comfort in the use of the term, Professor Aloni proceeds to restore meaning to the word as well as appropriate its educational significance. There is a freshness in this book, a restoration of a lost clarity, a regaining of authentic commitment. No longer oriented to an "essence" of what it means to be human, "humanism" in the context of this book cannot be used to paper over what has become a kind of wasteland where values are concerned. Nor can it be used to suggest that contemporary education (public or private or religious) is governed by identifiable principle or communally defined and accepted ideal.

Perhaps most important in the pages that follow is the light cast on the problem of human existence in these days of blank indifference on the one hand, a search for sensation on the other. Professor Aloni is as interested in individual uniqueness as he is in community, and in what it means to become human in a postmodern moment of receding universals and an emptying out of meaningful purposes and goals. He knows as well as anyone the importance of empowering students to be not only wide-awake but also critical in their adoption of world-views.

Beginning as he does in classical times, concluding with open questions regarding education – and the prospects of humanism – in the face of postmodernism, Professor Aloni weaves the past of humanism into the present. For him, the past does not press down upon the present or determine what we think and dream and try to teach today; but the possibilities in a revised humanism remain – for the individual as well as for the community.

We can only hope that under the deceiving brightness of an oversimplified and conventional “humanism,” there are fewer instances of professed love for “humanity” coupled with hatred of particular persons. Professor Aloni hopes to pull aside the screens of obfuscation that have allowed so much of a so-called humanist education hide an erosion of ethical concern as well as concern for the individual self. At once he hopes to point the way towards the thus far undiscovered: a new philosophical consciousness in education, a humanism that works to liberate and at once to bring together, to make visible and palpable heretofore undefined possibility.

Maxine Greene
Professor of Philosophy and Education (Emr.)
Teachers College, Columbia University