

Human Sciences?

In the last few years, we have all been encouraged to read the dedication of University teaching of the History of Medicine in a scientific interest group named “Human Sciences”. For many of us it seems right to accept this definition that overlooks a variegated horizon that includes many different disciplines, but without leaving the traditional tracks of the disciplinary scientific sector of the History of Medicine. Our field of study over the years has included Paleopathology, Bioethics, Medical Pedagogy, Medical Museology, the recent history of our society and our Journal is demonstrative of this. The discipline is enriched with our strengths and skills that are engaged in these different research branches. However, it seems necessary to suggest caution to who today desires to enlarge the boundaries of the so-called “Human Sciences”, proposing to also include disciplines distant from ours such as the Philosophy of Medicine, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology and so on. If we are to draw on the great chapter of “Human Sciences”, we should remember that this is a territory with soft boundaries, a field that, in the definition given to us by Gerard Radnitzky, includes different interests such as those of the Sociology of Science, Psychology of Research, Science, Study of the Economic Aspects of Science etc. They are fields of study and research evidently aimed at various aspects of the scientific enterprise and sometimes grouped under the global label of “Science of Science” which must contribute to the synergistic action of the disciplines aimed at raising the humanistic level of knowledge. A concert of voices, all in perfect harmony of content between them, places History of Medicine among the disciplines belonging to the chapter of human sciences and it seems there is indeed a large consensus on the opinions expressed.

However, it is necessary to remember the precise role that the legislator wanted and wants to assign to the articulation of this discipline in the updated didactic of the degree courses, to be carried out by the students of the medical faculties to understand further these fundamental concepts of the Historical Evolution of the medical values.

During the National Congress of the History of Medicine (Messina, 27-29 October 1989), Professor Leonardo Verga explained how in the debate that was opening: “many researchers of other disciplines, in addition to philosophers, doctors, biologists, theologians, jurists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, psychologists, anthropologists, etc. intervened”. This view emphasized the importance of “Human Sciences” to examine the anthropological foundations of the various positions and to define a common operational field. Beyond the specific professionalizing contents of disciplines such as bioethics and history, today, with a general consonance of views, it tends to grasp the common meaning of subjects aimed at creating and nurturing in the student a “humanistic” sensibility, together with a greater awareness of the conceptual and intellectual tools used in clinical reasoning. In my opinion, it is not essential to forge relationships and to combine the specific characteristics of different teachings.

Differences in skills and research fields do not hinder didactic interaction and the many scientific and cultural links can be developed while preserving the distinctions, while still guaranteeing in the didactic programming a non-marginal presence in the traditionally understood History of Medicine, the bearer of knowledge that can expand students' vision beyond the strong biotechnological paradigms of medicine.

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