TWO CULTURES

The term two cultures refers to a failure of scientists and humanists to comprehend the content, nature, and implications of each other's intellectual activities. An issue that goes back at least to the rise of modern science as a distinct practice and the romantic criticism of some of the results of the scientific worldview, it received international attention when Charles Percy Snow (1905–1980) considered the breakdown in a 1959 lecture, "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution."

Snow, who had experience as a novelist and a scientist, coined the phrase to deplore a widening gulf of mutual incomprehension between literary intellectuals and natural scientists. The division between cultures represented a dilemma over the role of science and technology in human affairs and led to the failure to address the three menaces of nuclear weapons, overpopulation, and the gap between rich and poor. Although he recommended broadening education for both groups, Snow ultimately implied that solving these problems simply required more science and technology. Accordingly, Snow accused literary intellectuals of being anti-scientific. While scientists held the future in their bones, the literary (whose ideas, Snow believed, unduly influenced western policy makers) were seen as Luddites.

Critics, notably Frank R. Lewis, criticized Snow for being anti-cultural. In reducing humanistic knowledge to the equivalent of factual information, Snow undermined the capacity for reflexive ethical inquiry. In "A Second Look" (1964), Snow acknowledged that his phrase ignored the emergence of a third culture of social scientists that studied the human effects of the scientific revolution. Snow's phrase, imprecise in excluding that third group and in reducing culture to a set of conditioned responses, nevertheless calls attention to the problem of specialization and the disagreements about the proper function of science and technology that have persisted to this day.

Exchanges such as the science wars demonstrate that in many respects intellectual clowns have only continued to widen. Moreover, public policy debates often take place in the context of the discussion of the relations among science and technology, development, and the common good. They are often indicative of broader processes in society, such as the tension between the need to develop new technologies and the desire to protect the environment. The scientific method, which is based on empirical evidence and critical thinking, is essential for progress in science and technology.

SEE ALSO Human Rights; Race; Sociological Ethics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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standing, and collaboration across the various intellectual divides.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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