

Apathy blamed on good/bad dichotomy

By John H. Fischer Jr.

I would like to comment on P.M. Keller's letter concerning the anti-intellectual atmosphere at UNL. (Daily Nebraskan, April 10). Keller comments, "Sometimes I wonder if UNL kids read, discuss and think." If this is true, and I think it is, then UNL has a serious problem on its hands.

The question of apathy in attitudes and education is a fact that I, too, have observed with some alarm. Perhaps the best way to view this problem is from the standpoint of an analogy. Draw whatever conclusions you may.

The science of physics as we know it today is a very precise science of universal laws, such as motion, and method of investigation. This preciseness, however, has not always been the case in the past. Physics began as a science based on the dichotomy relationship—opposites. This method of looking at things from only two standpoints, good and bad, positive and negative, black and white, is commonly referred to as the Aristotelian approach.

In addition to the dichotomy relationship, there is the concept of classification or categorization. This concept requires that all objects be arranged in classes or groups depending upon certain characteristics or traits of an object. Classification and the dichotomy relationship then make it very easy for a scientist to judge certain things about an object under his or her scrutiny.

Most Americans today use the Aristotelian approach in their daily encounters with life's problems. As examples to this fact are the black/white racial strifes, criminals/law abiders, professionals/amateurs, freaks/straights, and teacher/students. Most of us use the dichotomy relationship when we judge another person, thereby placing that person in a class.

The science of physics would have become quite static though had it continued using the dichotomy relationship for its observations. After a while all the observable phenomena in nature would have been grouped or classed and that would be the end of it.

For physics to continue as a science, a change in attitude or perspective was needed and this is exactly what happened. This period of attitude change in physics is known as the post-Galilean period. The change which occurred was from the dichotomy relationship to the rating of phenomena on a graduated scale when compared to an ideal model of the phenomena being observed. The science of human behavior should hope to do so well.

But what of the apathy in attitudes and education at UNL? Unfortunately, the principles of education at UNL operate on the dichotomy relationship. You are good if you go to classes, bad if you don't. You are good if your sexual expression is repressed, bad if it isn't. You are good if you pass your tests, bad if you don't. You are good if you don't drink beer in your residence hall room, bad if you do. You are good if you accept the regent's policies without question, bad if you reject them. And so on and so on. UNL then adds up all your goods and labels you a success by giving you a piece of paper. If your bads outweigh your goods you don't get that piece of paper. Whether you have learned anything while at UNL is beside the point.

UNL tries to turn out successes and not failures (note the dichotomy relationship.)

Individuals who do not agree with these things are not forced to comply.

Here at UNL we have the same problem of the matrist/patrist dichotomy. The students coming to UNL are basically progressive, eager, vibrant individuals which are characteristic of a matrist viewpoint. Then they run smack dab head on into the patrist views of the University. How many students can come out of such an encounter without feeling stifled escapes my comprehension.

Patrist viewpoints are hard to change, as well. People who adhere to patrist ideas are incredibly afraid of losing their power over others. The patrist sense of power is silly, stupid, ignorant and just plain bad when dealing with progress. The patrist uses coercive power force to get things done. When people with ideas and progressive attitudes run into force, they are stopped because, as a general rule, they cannot use consensual power against coercive power.

Consensual power implies cooperation, compromise, and openmindedness; all things absent in the UNL education atmosphere of coercion. You can't fight coercive power with consensual power. If you do try, you soon become apathetic and despondent. Therein lies the source of apathy at UNL. We have students raised in a society which is becoming consensual but the University is still coercive. Another dichotomy relationship.

Therefore, the administration at UNL needs a change of attitudes and ideas which are more in line with those of the students (if we are agreed that progress is desirable). Nothing terrible is going to happen if the regents give in to reasonable demands of both faculty and students.

In fact, the terrible things which the regents are afraid of just will not occur as a rule. For example, let's use sex and drinking in residence halls for another analogy. All through history, whenever sex or drinking has been repressed in a society, they surface in a perverted form. Look at the speakeasies during prohibition. Look at the rape and murder and carnage of the so-called Christian Crusades.

But when repression has been nonexistent, everything surfaces in a healthy normal form. Those periods of history when repressions has been the least are the same periods when crime and perversion have been the least. So, the policy of cracking down on drugs, sex, drinking or whatever is not only erroneous, it points out the sheer ignorance of those leaders and administrators who practice it.

guest opinion

The problem of apathy arises from the one outstanding principle of psychology that every individual is unique. UNL does not cater to uniqueness but rather to the patriarchal models of success. The attitudes and needs of students at UNL have changed but the rules and regulations of the University have not changed to match.

Perhaps it would be well here to examine the phenomenon of the social pendulum. A strict society is known as a patrist society. Some of the characteristics of a patrist society are fear of homosexuality, fear of scientific research, lack of spontaneity, pleasure is undesirable, clothing differences between the sexes are maximized, and those individuals who don't agree with these things are forced into compliance.

A permissive society is known as a matrist society. Some of the traits of a matrist society are fear of incest, encouragement of scientific research, spontaneity, pleasure is desirable, clothing differences are minimized by the unisex look and those

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