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SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SOCIAL ACTION

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WE HAVE a considerable literature on the subject of "social control," but it deals with control in a special sense. In that literature, "control" means the devices whereby a social group induces or compels its members to behave in approved ways. Little or nothing is said as to the possibilities of a society controlling its own future, though it is generally believed that the development of the social sciences will enable man to build the type of society he wants. It is frequently asserted that a chief reason why our public affairs are in such a tangle is that our social thinking is still done in terms of the ox-cart age and that if everybody would only think in the same terms as our "advanced" thinkers, our social problems could be readily solved. In the recent past, a good deal was written on social telesis, and if I am not mistaken there are a great many sociologists and other social scientists who still have somewhat exaggerated notions as to the extent to which conscious social direction is possible. In view of the world-wide tendency for central governments to extend their control to all aspects of individual and collective existence, it is pertinent to ask whether even the highly self-conscious national state can really determine its future development, or whether it merely wobbles along a course determined by the more or less haphazard adjustment of internal and external social forces.<sup>1</sup>

For naive popular thought, the problem here posed scarcely exists. Legislatures enact laws after due deliberation under the reassuring assumption that these laws will have the effects intended. Governments launch far-reaching policies under the assumption that social evils can be corrected thereby. They thus assume a power to forecast the future effects of present policies and actions. Spencer long ago set forth a multitude of instances

<sup>1</sup> By "social forces" is meant merely the actions and reactions of individuals, singly and collectively, giving expression to their culturally developed capacities and culturally directed drives in adjustment to other individuals, collectivities, and physical nature.

to show that the unexpected results of social action frequently, if not ordinarily, exceed the expected results; and occasionally an entire nation may be impressed by just such an outcome, as in the case of our recent constitutional prohibition amendment. Designed to make the country dry, it made it wetter; it spread the consumption of alcohol to new social areas, stimulated the creation of new folkways and mores of consumption, reduced the respect for law, and brought on a considerable increase of gangsterism and political corruption. Similarly, we were recently told on good authority that the antitrust laws were largely responsible for making big business still bigger; we have seen the sincere pacifists of one country promulgating the doctrine of peace at any price and thus promoting the military aggressions of other countries; while the whole world has been bewildered and amazed at the results of the war to end wars, to make the world safe for democracy and to establish a firm basis for a world order. Nevertheless, schemes for making society over flourish with ever-renewed vigor; and nothing is more striking in the world today than the vast efforts of some of the great nations to rebuild the foundations of their social structures. This is done under the dogmatic assurance that new ideals of national power and unity, justice, equality, material welfare (and) or cultural "progressiveness" can be attained thereby.

This assurance appears to be all the more remarkable when one notes that it does not rest on any kind of scientific proof but only on dogmatic-emotional beliefs. So little has the scientific temper permeated the field of popular social action that nearly the whole discussion of social issues resolves itself into a verbalization of one's emotional set,—a projection of one's subjective scheme of values onto the stage of world events. The reasoning powers are marshalled to do yeoman service in rationalizing facts and ideas in support of predetermined conclusions. There is thus manifested a belief that almost any social objective can be attained, if only it can be made to *appear* attractive; or the equal illusion that profound changes can be prevented, if only they are denounced with sufficient vigor. Nowadays, we are all gallantly reaffirming our faith in democracy and most of us hasten to classify ourselves with the "right-thinking people" and "friends of humanity" who condemn either Fascism or Communism, or both. In the thought of the average citizen there is little realization that such great social transformations are the apparently inevitable effects of causes,—and of causes far more deep-seated than the assiduous reader of the daily newspaper will readily discover. The weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth that mark much discussion of such changes probably have no more effect on their prevention than did the lamentations of the aristocracies in preventing the wreck of their civilization by the French Revolution.

Popular discussion seldom asks *why* events turn out the way they do;

and, if it does, usually finds the answer in the willful political and financial schemings of prominent personages, to the complete neglect of the complex body of interacting personalities also involved. Even the social scientist, though he knows that the stream of events is a manifestation of causal processes, and though he study his data objectively and statistically, has, as yet, very little power of prediction. He can measure some of the factors involved, within certain limits of probable error, and make a forecast for a short future, but only under the assumption that the factors involved do not undergo any major shifts. Only one conclusion seems certain, namely, that in the long run we reach a wholly unexpected social condition. We know in advance that Russia will not attain the ideal Communist society and that the Nazis will not rule for a thousand years.

One result of this situation is that proposed solutions for conscious social ills necessarily have large ingredients of wishful thinking. Instead of knowledge, ignorance often becomes the basis of hope. We continually say: "If we will only make this change in our institutional set-up, then such and such evils will be eliminated and such and such advantages attained." There is little else that we can do in view of our present inability to analyze and forecast with confidence the reactions of a complex variety of human beings, moved by passions and prejudices that undergo kaleidoscopic changes of configuration with changes in the stimuli. We are not in position to estimate the effects of stupidity and cunning, to say nothing of the impact of the spectacular personality on the sentimentalities of the popular mind. Nor can we very well foresee the distant effects of recent discoveries and inventions,—least of all, of those that will be made in the future. We know that the popular mind is necessarily guided less by knowledge than by emotions based on interests and a scheme of values. Moreover, factual knowledge does not, of itself, reveal the goal of action. That is determined by human needs and interests operating within limits set by the scheme of values and the associated emotional set. In view of such considerations, it is little wonder that men of good intentions may lead destructive causes or that the villains of one age may become the heroes of the next; that radicals, in the name of liberty and under the guise of a procrustean liberalism, promote intolerance and the advent of totalitarianism; that wise men may weep and cynics may laugh, while ignoramuses pull down the very house that shelters them.

The foregoing reflections lead to a reexamination of the old question of the possibility of social direction of cultural evolution. It is particularly pertinent to inquire whether the knowledge accumulated by the social sciences materially increases such possibility. Such queries are bound to occur to every reflective person in such times as these, when vast upheavals in social ideologies are being accompanied by a fever of social manipulation. No doubt these very queries are culturally determined, at least in the sense

that they have been raised only during brief periods of human history. During most of that history, social groups have lived under relatively static conditions, so sanctified by use and tradition as to make any suggestion of fundamental change anathema. We have lived for a hundred and fifty years, however, in a culture imbued with the concept of progress, and this concept is still in widespread use as the final justification of proposals for social action.

The conception of a more or less steadily progressive society began to be widely accepted before the third quarter of the eighteenth century and by the middle of the nineteenth century had become an almost universally accepted axiom of social thought. It is pertinent to inquire, therefore, what were some of the major social conditions giving rise to this optimistic view. There were at least three such conditions. There was, first, the new scientific outlook and the extension of the concepts of universal causation and natural law to social phenomena. There was, secondly, the new technology, revealing the possibilities of continued increase in material wealth, through the conscious application of new scientific discoveries and inventions. These two conditions resulted in a growth of rationalism, culminating in the late eighteenth century in a sublime faith in the saving power of the human reason. Meanwhile, a third set of factors, the existence of vast new and rich frontiers of settlement and exploitation, had been influencing the material welfare and the social theorizing for over two centuries. Taken together, these conditions constitute a setting for social optimism that scarcely could be surpassed.

We need only recall in passing the rise of the middle class and the concurrent transformations in social philosophy. As one looks back on that period, it seems quite natural that the views of Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham should have prevailed. The works of these men and many others of their time were not scientific treatises but dissertations on new ethical principles suitable to new social conditions. They formulated a new conception of human nature and new political and economic principles in harmony with the new setting for social interaction, and justified them by ethical principles that fitted the developing folkways and mores of the times. To the doctrines of the inherent rights of man and popular sovereignty, were added the conceptions of the inherent rationality and goodness of human nature and the Helvetian doctrine that all men are by nature substantially equal in inherent potentialities. Thus much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century literature is marked by an almost hypnotic infatuation with the idea of indefinite progress in material welfare. Utopian theorizing flourished and utopian experiments by the score were launched by eager idealists. The postulates and principles of democracy, individualism, utilitarianism, and laissez faire were incorporated into the mores and institutions and sanctioned by the feeling of

rightness that is, to popular thought, verification of the eternal validity of whatever is firmly believed.

The theory of progress associated with these principles is too well known to require extended restatement. The essentially progressive factor was the power of the human reason to discover natural laws and apply them. While progress was not clearly defined, attention was centered on an increase in the quantity of wealth. With self-interest as the driving force, a reasonably close and comprehensive harmony of individual interests as a basic feature of natural law, and an "Invisible Hand" to provide a reasonable equity in distribution, the system of natural liberty was looked upon as ordained by Providence and hence eternal. That all these doctrines, when viewed in historical perspective, would prove to be purely relative to the social context that produced them, was certainly not an element in the thought of their sponsors.

The extension of the concept of natural law to social phenomena carried with it the concept of universal causation. The strict determinism of historical processes was, however, reconciled with the prevailing theological views by the soothing and culturally necessary view that natural law represents the will of a beneficent Providence, or that the universe, being made for man, will in the long run prove friendly to him. The concept of a social physics led to an industrious application of the statistics of probabilities to a wide range of social phenomena, demonstrating the existence of regularities and sequences in the free will activities of a collectivity of individuals. Man and society thus became purely natural phenomena, and their development a part of cosmic evolution. It was presumed that increasing knowledge of social causation would lead to indefinite improvement in human affairs, because, through his growing knowledge, man could either control the conditions of his social life or adjust to them with intelligent foresight.

These views developed into the progressive evolutionism of the second half of the last century. Evolution now took the place of a beneficent Providence. Though mankind might be called upon to traverse many vales of tears, the long-time trend of social evolution was "onward and upward," whatever these terms might mean. Spencer, for example, who argued that mankind usually tries all possible ways of going wrong before hitting upon the right way, nevertheless pictured man as evolving, both in his hereditary make-up and in his social institutions toward a state of perfect adjustment to the globe. Maladjustments would be remedied by modifications of internal and external relations. Even in the absence of knowledge to guide action, maladjustments would be remedied, because faulty solutions would be eliminated by both rational and natural selective processes.

Evolutionism led to an eager search for the magistral law of societal development as the essential foundation for a social dynamics. The litera-

ture blossomed with theories of the stages and trends of development, past, present and future. Biology, psychology, economics, political science, ethics and sociology traced the great steps of evolution in their respective fields. Not a few thought they had discovered the law or laws of social development or of the historical movement, but these laws usually turned out to be aspects of a philosophy of history rather than a science of society. They were too abstract and devoid of concrete content to convey verifiable meanings to realistic scientific students.

Moreover, the way was opened for every wishful philosopher to assure himself that there was an inevitable trend in human affairs toward whatever ethical ends he prized most. These ends were profusely diverse and even contradictory. There was evolution toward world peace, world order and unity; toward an amalgamation and solidarity of all races; toward greater command over nature and an ever rising standard of living; toward universal equality and a classless society; toward a more altruistic type of human being and a cooperative commonwealth; toward more, as well as toward less, religiosity; toward greater individual liberty or greater social regulation; toward a firmer monogamy or toward a regime of free love; and so on. Thus the theologian and the scientist-philosopher seemed to vie with each other; for, while one pretended to expound God's purposes toward man, the other, with almost equal presumptuousness, pretended to deduce, from what was likewise only a bold assumption, the future state of society. In either case, it is obvious that the optimism as to the future rested on a transcendental faith in the indulgent nature of the universe.

Lester F. Ward, deeply impressed by the inherent difficulty of reconciling the determinism of his cosmic evolutionism with a clear possibility of realizing human hopes, emphasized the efficacy of human effort. This effort, however, should, in his view, be individual, because government, "incapable from its very nature of making society any better, loses no opportunity to make it worse." His theory of social action was simple yet typical of individualistic theory in general. The difference between rational behavior and irrational behavior is the difference between behavior guided by knowledge and behavior not so guided. All that is necessary is, first, to advance knowledge as fast as possible, and then disseminate it as widely as possible. This will produce an ameliorative action on the conditions of social life and at the same time realize ideals of individual liberty, justice and equality. He noted the increase in social self-consciousness and the consequent growth of collectivism, but he attributed them to the growth of intelligence rather than to the integration of the national life. Collectivism, he saw, would involve an increase of collective action, but his concept of social teleosis was limited to what he called "attractive legislation," or the establishment of such social conditions "as will induce men

to act in the manner most advantageous to society."<sup>2</sup> His view was thus always subordinated to the scheme of social values represented by nineteenth century individualism, and the emergence of compulsory regulative philosophies of welfare was quite contrary to his conception of the evolutionary trend. Moreover, he confessed that he did not himself see how any important social problem could be solved.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, much of the prewar social thought now sounds strange and unreal, as though out of another world. Optimism tends to give way to pessimism; the outlook has darkened perceptibly. This changed perspective is attributable to two sets of factors. There are, first, the changes in the social scene itself; and there are, secondly, the changes in character of social theorizing.

Perhaps the most obvious change in the social scene is the increase in social integration. A truly phenomenal increase in the division of labor, a vast diversification of goods and services, and an unprecedented increase in transportation and communication have knit all geographical divisions and all individuals of the nation into an organic complex of mutually dependent relations. It is a society in which that atomistic individualism of our frontier ancestors is impossible. Social integration has been preceded and necessitated by the urbanization of the majority of the population; and urbanization has, in turn, increased the dependence of the population on the regular functioning of the industrial processes. At the same time, the vast technological advances have rendered mere brawn less and less necessary,—and brawn is the chief marketable product of a large part of the population. To a great extent, industrial invention has lost much of that early expansive effect on the supply of food, clothing, and comfort, such as was clearly attributable to the power loom, the steam engine, and the reaper. Marvels multiply, to be sure, but one must note also an endless multiplication of mere gadgets that add little to comfort but considerably to the speed and complexity of life and to the problem of "keeping up with the Joneses."

Ours thus tends to become a saturated civilization. The era of expansion closes. We have about all the people we can manage; we are even under the necessity of restricting the margin of land cultivation. There may still be plenty of room at the top of the social scale, but one observes that college graduates are now carrying on activities largely filled by high school graduates a generation ago and the latter are now doing what grade school graduates then did. Though we seem to have mastered the secrets of technological improvements and are in sight of potential abundance, economic utopia eludes us, even as an enticing mirage recedes before the eager gaze of the

<sup>2</sup> *Pure Sociology*, 559.

<sup>3</sup> *Applied Sociology*, 315.

desert traveler. We are in the midst of a persistent blocking of the industrial mechanism which we do not know how to put back into gear. Moreover, we see more clearly than did the early utilitarians that poverty is largely relative, and final escape from it impossible so long as wealth is viewed as the great desideratum. The utilitarians saw in the indefinite expansibility of human wants a sure guarantee of an equally unlimited expansion of industrial effort and productivity. We note, however, that the more we have the more we want, so that the area of unsatisfied wants expands with every increase in the wants satisfied. Relative contentment is superseded by increasing discontent. With the closing of frontiers of new expansion, and the massing of the "have nots" in urban centers, jealousy of the "haves" increases and problems of redistribution of existing wealth tend to take precedence over problems of greater productivity. It is all too obvious that the life hopes and ambitions of a large percentage of the population have not been realized and basic changes in sentiment and law are under way.

Along with these changes go other subtle changes in human psychology that may prove vastly important. It seems probable that the remarkable advances in material welfare are altering the attitudes of the human agents toward the labor and privations whereby those advances were obtained. As John Wesley said long ago regarding Methodist ideals of thrift, industry, and sober living, they ordinarily eventuate in the accumulation of property and a life of relative ease and luxury. They thus in the end destroy the religiosity that sustained the original labor and privation. This is a simple observation, often made, and yet it contains a point crucial to the problem of social teleosis, namely, that the effect of an ideology, together with its accompanying type of social action, may alter the social structure and the psychosocial forces so as to destroy the ideology and necessitate profound alterations in the type of social action.

Such an observation may be extended to capitalist society as a whole. The vast labors of the past under the stimulus of the bourgeois ideology has, as already noted, led to such profound alterations in the structure of social relations that equally profound alterations have occurred in the generally accepted ideology. Instead of placing in our copy-books, "A penny saved is a penny earned," and many other aphorisms that went with an economy of scarcity and privation, we are urged to spend and to cultivate the arts of leisure and the mores of an economy of potential abundance and pleasure. The government both discourages thrift and encourages spending by collecting taxes in amounts and from sources unthinkable two generations ago. Even the ideal of personal independence, won through the development of personal abilities and the accumulation of property, weakens in a society where everybody works for someone else in cooperative collectivities in a structure of superordinated relationships. The rugged

virtues of a simple folk give place to the sophisticated smoothness of the urbanite. To some extent, the mores of bourgeois individualism become vices, or at least bad manners, in a new age.

The point of all this is that the processes of social evolution are ever creative. The social forces released under a given set of social conditions so transform these conditions themselves that new forces are released and a new direction is given to the general social trends. These changes may be slow and gradual or revolutionary, but in either case they bring new mores, a new philosophy of welfare, and hence a new hierarchy of social values. Marx was clearly correct in observing that every society contains within itself the germ of the new and different society that will succeed it; but few would attempt to state with any assurance what our own society will look like a century hence.

It would seem that, outside the dictatorships, there is a feeling of widespread uncertainty. There seems to be some weakening of faith in democratic methods and institutions. It is obvious that the weight of mass feelings and attitudes in political affairs has increased. No longer sure of our direction, we are in some danger of becoming victims of herd fear. Siren voices of demagogic leaders, sometimes moved by hate and lust for power, call the masses to follow them into new and strange utopias. Detached from its ancestral soil and dependent on a creaking industrial mechanism, the urban populace inevitably prefers loaves, fishes, and the circus to a painful and precarious personal independence, often quite unattainable. Curiously enough, we have, with almost startling suddenness, become aware also of a rural proletariat, rich in children but poor in nearly all else, whose future has in some respects been rendered even more hopeless by the very efforts of a benevolent government to relieve them. To add to our bewilderment, we not only find ourselves preparing for wars we do not wish to fight, but nearly helpless to take even modest constructive measures to guarantee future peace.

These profound changes in the social scene have been accompanied by important changes in certain theoretical postulates. The progressive evolutionism of the Victorian era has well-nigh disappeared from sociological thought. Recent theorizing has been more concerned, as was Aristotle, to point to the evidence of cyclical advances and recessions. While both the long-time and the short-time perspectives show unmistakable advances in control over the means of satisfying the physical needs for food, clothing, and shelter, it seems to be impossible to demonstrate any clear movement toward any of the great ideological goals which seemed so clearly inevitable a short while ago. In fact, "progress" in the realization of ideal ends cannot be demonstrated in the absence of ethical absolutes to serve as points of reference and yardsticks of measurement. In a world of relativities, we are under the necessity of reducing one value to another, all interrelated in a

scheme of subjective reference. Some of those ends toward which the social world was moving, according to progressive evolutionism, are now seen to be abstractions of deductive reasoning, often meaningless until given concrete content. Here are included such ideals as more perfect adaptation, increased dignity of the person, self-domination, rational morality, impartial justice, universal equality, and universal happiness. Others of those ends are merely remote objects of human hopes, such as world peace, a parliament of nations, growth of altruism, spread of toleration, dominance of reason over instinct, passion, and prejudice. Still others appear to be purely relative values derived from the immediate cultural setting, such as the spread of democracy, economic individualism, Christianity, and freedom of thought and expression, and the decline of corruption in politics.

The celestially guaranteed progress of the whole society toward idealistic goals has given place to the concept of mere change. In the absence of theological postulates, man stands alone in the world, struggling with the limitations of his own nature and having only a limited guidance from a somewhat feeble intelligence whereby to perfect the internal and external adjustments of individuals and groups in an everchanging cultural milieu. Certainly we read much less in sociological writings of the ends or goals of the social processes. It is, in fact, a question whether, even by deductive philosophizing, the ultimate ends can be stated in anything but abstract terms, corrupted by subjectivism,—mere bones of contention when given realistic meanings. One may still say that there is social evolution, in the sense of endless change in the scheme of social relations in consequence of constant alteration in the combinations of social forces; but the direction of that evolution, except for increasing collectivism, is not very clear.

Another profound alteration in thought is seen in our conception of human nature. Man has been shorn of that superlative rationality formerly attributed to him. He is now variously pictured as a creature of strong passions, prone to violence; a herd animal easily aroused to panic, contagious fear, and bloody hate; a cave-man, slinking stealthily and threateningly behind a veneer of good manners and sweet reasonableness. Not a few who contemplate the human scene today agree with the observation of Kant that human behavior, viewed in the perspective of universal history, represents "a web of folly, childish vanity and often of the idlest wickedness and destruction." To accept such a view unqualifiedly is to plunge into the hopeless pessimism of complete anti-intellectualism. Man is neither the child of the god of reason and the goddess of charity, nor a brutal, sentimental simpleton, though he may be closer to the latter than to the former. He stagnated in savagery for thousands of generations, and yet he has had enough intelligence to increase his material comfort and security in spite of huge increases in numbers, and to double the average length of life. He has thus definitely increased his adaptation to the physical condi-

tions of existence. It seems reasonable to suppose that he can similarly gain control of the purely societal interactions and thus perfect the adaptations of human beings to each other, both as individuals and collectivities.

Nevertheless, the extension of the concept of universal causation to human affairs makes of individuals mere points in an endless stream of social forces, which are parts of cosmic energy. It thus seems to reduce the individual to something resembling an automaton. It is for this reason that there has lurked in the background of more than one philosopher's thinking the dark suspicion that, in final analysis, human history, in spite of its magnificent episodes, is a grand futility, more colorful and more versatile, but no more a conscious and purposeful achievement than that of the bee, living the same round of existence as its ancestors of aeons ago. It has even been suggested that across the human stage passes an endless procession of puppets and automatons, wholly unconscious of the purely instrumental character and the illusory quality of their hopes and dreams.

Most of us will probably concede that the individual is the temporary embodiment of certain genetic potentialities which are more or less developed by the cultural medium in which he grows up. The stream of humanity and the culture it bears flows on through the generations, each generation supplying the genetic factors and the cultural medium which shapes its successor. Moreover, so versatile and flexible is man's moral nature that the dominant values whereby the internal relations and the life aims of members of the social group are shaped, have had very wide variation. If one take a sufficiently elevated point of view, such as that supplied by the perspective of universal history, this stream of culture, though its essential dynamic forces are always embodied in individuals, becomes impersonal, one of the minor, though humanly most important, aspects of the evolving cosmos.

The changes in this culture stream are to a large extent mediated by the conflicts, rivalries, cooperative efforts, and creative powers of interacting individuals. The culture patterns seem to come and go, often without apparent rhyme or reason. This is clearly the case with numerous fads and crazes that sweep across the country; and it is but a step from these to the short-lived folkways that represent temporary adjustments to temporary conditions. From these, one ascends by steps through the more enduring folkways and the mores to the philosophies of welfare, which, though they always pretend to eternal validity, are also discarded and replaced in the unceasing flux of cultural evolution. Even the major values that men deeply cherish for longer or shorter epochs thus seem to be merely pragmatic devices, deriving their validity from their utility in a given conjunction of social conditions. The divine right of kings gives way to the divine right of popular sovereignty and this to the charismatic rule of the dictators. It seems quite clear to us here that freedom of thought in all its

aspects is an essential condition for discovering whatever knowledge and wisdom are available, and most of us would place tolerance of opinion near the top of our personal value schemes; but we do not know how to guarantee the continuance of such values as dominant features of our national life. Even our warm attachment to the idea of progress may pass and our descendants find surcease from the strivings and strains of civilization by reversion to a simple life.

In spite of all this, there is so much talk of social planning that a few reflections on its limitations in such a society as we now have in this country are pertinent to our theme. In order to plan successfully, that is, to give self-conscious direction to social development, several conditions must be fulfilled. First, the goal of effort must be formulated; secondly, society must have sufficient scientific knowledge of the causal processes involved to enable it to foresee how the goal may be surely attained; and thirdly, it must have sufficient command over these causal processes to bend them to the common purpose in hand. These conditions are frequently fulfilled, even in voluntaristic, democratic groups, where the goal is immediate and tangible and where there is wide agreement as to the desirability of the objective. Long-time and large-scale planning, however, are immensely more difficult, if not impossible, under democratic conditions. It should be obvious that social planning on a broad scale requires that all individuals involved conduct themselves strictly according to the program laid down. Free initiative is thus ruled out and resort must be had to force, fear, or persuasion to secure single-minded cooperation. Here the dictator has an advantage, so long as popular enthusiasm gives him undivided support; but even dictators cannot control the future.

In the first place and as already noted, we have little power to predict the broad social consequences of social action. Especially are we unable to predict the effects of the most dynamic factors, such as scientific discovery, invention, the number and character of historic personages, and the continuous rivalries of nations. Obviously, if we cannot foresee such effects, we are unable to utilize them in attaining objectives set in advance. Growth of knowledge is the only basis for an extension of telic action, but it is only one of several factors in social dynamics. The multiplicity and ever changing confluence of causal factors operating in social processes fills every forecast with large improbabilities. Even assuming growing knowledge to be the most beneficent element in culture change, its application is first made by individuals and interest groups, and only at length comes under general social regulation. In fact, one notes numerous recent attacks on science because it exerts a dissolving effect on certain ideologies and because it so increases the means of destruction as to threaten the annihilation of civilization.

Then, as has often been noted, the prevalent mores and their associated

sentiments set limits to and define the direction of action. The birth control movement has succeeded only as sentiments slowly have changed, and still fails to reach many of those who, from many standpoints, need it most. Similarly, eugenics, though widely discussed for two generations, has thus far received only very slight acceptance. This is sometimes said to be due to lack of knowledge of human heredity, but this would seem to be mainly a rationalization of opposing sentiments. If we leave out all reference to heredity and put the matter on the basis of bringing about a close correlation of family size with income, education or occupation, the situation remains the same. That is, we cannot as yet substantially alter the distribution of births even though both hereditarians and environmentalists join in the effort.

The state of popular sentiments limits and directs public action in other ways. The arena of social politics is occupied by men of action rather than by men of thought. The politician focuses popular sentiments and emotions and brings about changes in the mores and legal structure designed to relieve the strains of maladjustment in social relations. He is popularly given credit for solving problems, though ordinarily he merely resets the scene for new aspects of the same problems. The major social problems (international relations, the farm problem, the labor problem, wealth production and distribution, class differences, sex relations) are never really solved though their forms and settings undergo change.

The contrast between the application of social thought and the findings of the natural sciences is striking. The latter sciences have, for the most part, escaped from the taboos of popular sentiments and have acquired an esoteric quality that gives them an unimpeachable authority. The man on the street is not entitled to an opinion in questions of physics or chemistry, medicine, or psychiatry. Applications of these sciences, therefore, remain largely in the hands of experts. In the social sciences, there is an entirely different situation. However ignorant he may be of the theoretical aspects of a social problem, the average man feels fully entitled to an opinion. This derives less from democratic theory than from the facts. The problems usually involve the interests of the average man, and even when they do not, their attempted solutions touch his conceptions of what is right and proper. To a very large extent, social problems arise out of the scheme of values held by the community. Poverty is not a "problem" in China, nor illegitimacy in Jamaica; nor was war a "problem" for the Sioux Confederacy.

The solutions, as just noted, must be found within the range of existing sentiments, of which the average man is the guardian. The applications of the findings of the social sciences are, in consequence, ordinarily made through political agencies. Now social scientists are seldom chosen to positions of political responsibility. They are, in fact, widely distrusted.

The political leader may use them, from time to time, as a "brain trust" only to cast them aside when their views or their factual knowledge no longer serve his political objectives. Perhaps the most conspicuous illustration of this in all history is the manner in which the great galaxy of experts who thronged the halls of Versailles were largely ignored. Moreover, though Lloyd George and Poincaré had declared that large reparations could not be paid without enormously stimulating German exports to the detriment of industries in the Allied nations, they did not, in view of political exigencies, dare to apply the knowledge that was clearly understood by them. A trained physician, because his expertness gives him unquestioned command, can stop a plague singlehanded, but a cohort of world famous politicians could only make a peace that let loose a plague of antagonisms.

Then there is some question as to whether the social science we have is capable of precise application even if experts were given control. It is notorious that social scientists do not ordinarily agree on the best policy to adopt in a given situation. This is illustrated in the long arguments over high or low tariff or free trade. In other words, when we approach questions of practical policy, we immediately confront the question of values, which must be answered before the direction of action can be determined.

Then there are limitations in the very nature of the social sciences. Assuming the same degree of causal determinancy in social as in natural science fields, we, nevertheless, do not seem to arrive at the same type of applicable knowledge. This knowledge is marked by a much higher degree of contingency. In addition, its application must be made, not by the manipulation of inert materials, but by the manipulation of volatile human beings. The contingency of our findings is partly a consequence of the multiplicity of minor factors involved and partly a consequence of continual shifts in the folkways and mores themselves. Causal sequences, even when established, are valid only so long as no major shifts occur. The everlasting flux of human affairs makes it impossible to get far beyond a description of what has occurred or is occurring; and this, in terms of association and correlation rather than precise causal relations. In other words, for the present at least, the social science field is not even a relatively closed field of investigation and it cannot escape the relativity of its practical conclusions. For example, earlier in this paper I outlined briefly some of the social conditions usually said to have given rise to the ideology of democratic individualism. Such an "explanation" of the origins of our democratic institutions furnishes no clue as to how to preserve them, because the basic conditions that produced them no longer exist.

Now at this point, we confront what is the final paradox of collective social action. Fully rational action is impossible for a group as a whole, not only because one cannot clearly foresee the outcome of a plan or policy, but also because action by the collectivity is dependent on stirring up the

sentiments and emotions of the group members. The rank and file of any considerable social group are necessarily ignorant of the technical knowledge that can be accumulated by experts; what information they get is partial and freighted with propaganda. In a highly complex and rapidly changing culture, the mass of the population has little to guide it except the pressure of its immediate circumstances. The mores continuously get out of adjustment to the changing cultural medium and the mass inevitably follows the men of action with the most alluring programs. What such men want from those possessing knowledge of the social processes are facts and arguments to support a policy; and the policy is one designed to allay unrest or satisfy vocal interest groups. The art of government is to satisfy popular desires, even though these desires are in part aroused by the politicians and utilized by them. Government is not an engineering job of getting a clearly visualized task done with the minimum of effort and expense and in harmony with established scientific principles. It is rather the art of adjusting the strains continuously occurring in the internal and the external relations of the body politic. And the successful politician is one who, by shrewd insight and skillful propaganda, anticipates the inevitable.

There are thus many difficulties in the way of precise application of the social sciences to fields of social action, but one need not draw the conclusion that these sciences are futile. We have to admit that progress and planning on an extensive scale cannot now be undertaken with assurance; but there is abundant evidence that social research exerts on the processes of social adjustment the ameliorative action postulated by Ward. This is particularly true of societies where freedom of research and discussion are preserved. The advancement of the social sciences is, in fact, the main hope for the preservation of the essentials of the democratic mode of life. They not only give a picture of social conditions and trends but they facilitate adjustments by clarifying expedient lines of action. They are the unrelenting enemies of superstitions, sentimentalities, and dogmatisms in every field of social life. They are the chief promoters of the realistic and objective thinking that is the basis of all rational action. Where their full impact is felt, there is an increase of tolerance and a decrease of partisanship. Their viewpoints and findings slowly permeate the medium of accepted discourse and thus exert a positive influence on the ideas, values and sentiments of the average man. They furnish no architectural plans for utopia, but they promise a vast utility in limiting human error and in expediting the adjustment of social life to its ever changing conditions. Their supreme task today would seem to be to discover how their own development may be more surely guaranteed and more actively promoted.

## A COMTEAN CENTENARY: INVENTION OF THE TERM "SOCIOLOGY"

**Remarks by President Frank H. Hankins:** We meet this evening in observance of the 100th anniversary of the coining of the term "sociology" by the great French philosopher, A. Comte.

Now, I suppose, the sociologist, of all persons, is inclined to look with some skepticism on this question of anniversaries of any kind of social invention. He knows that if A. Comte was thinking certain thoughts and coining new terms, other persons of the same day were also thinking similar thoughts and calling for the new terms. This proves to be particularly true in the present case.

After our program was published, I had a note from one of our members, calling my attention to the observance of a Comtean centenary in 1922. (See *Amer. J. Sociol.*, Jan. 1922, 24: 510-513). It seems that, in 1822, at the age of 24, Comte published a small work under the title, "Plan of Scientific Work Necessary to the Reorganization of Society." In this, he proposed the development of a new science to be called "Social Physics." This work was an appeal to the savants of Europe to elevate politics to the rank of a positive observational science. Social physics was envisaged as a great science of society, a natural science, which would elucidate the laws of the collective behavior and historical development of mankind. Sixteen years later Comte substituted the word "Sociology" for the term "Social Physics."

Meanwhile, the Belgian astronomer and statistician, Adolphe Quetelet, had been devoting considerable attention to the demonstration of the statistical regularities in collective social behavior, and in 1835 had published his *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés, ou essai de physique sociale*. There is good evidence that Comte was not a little peeved that Quetelet should have usurped the term "social physics" and felt compelled by this usurpation to coin the new term "Sociology." Nevertheless, one is not surprised to learn that Quetelet, at the time of his death, was hailed by the Berlin Academy of Sciences and others as "the founder of a new science of social physics, or sociology as it is called today."

In other words, in celebrating this Comtean anniversary, we are celebrating one of a series of men and ideas of an epoch, or phase, in the development of sociology. At the same time, it is well that Comte, who made sociology the crown of the scientific pyramid, should receive our chief attention. He clearly and unquestionably holds title to the claim of founder-in-chief of sociology as we know it today.

This evening we are to have three views of Comtean ideas and their place in modern thought.