syllabus
"The Problem of Value."

Wherever men have been associated in society, they have sought answers to the question of the nature and purpose of social organization. What constitutes the "good life?" What is the end or goal or value to which men should aspire? It is such questions as these that constitute the problem of value. The answers that men have given are important because our ideas about what ought to be constitute the criterion of judgment which we use when confronted with the necessity or possibility of making choices in the attempted solution of a problem.

While we are now in a position to see that there is some scientific evidence which can aid us in solving our social problems, does this mean that it is no longer necessary to concern ourselves with the question of what is desirable? The answer is that there does not seem to be any way of escaping the necessity for considering what ought to be. But it is in their context as criteria of judgment that we must concern ourselves with concepts of value. This is so because it is in this connection that they are involved in the attempted solution of social problems. The solution of social problems involves the necessity for making choices. Man cannot escape the necessity for social action, and such activity necessarily involves some prior choice-making wherever it is not determined by habitual behavior patterns. To refuse to make a choice in a situation where action of some sort is inescapable is, in effect, to make one. The decision to maintain the status quo unchanged is itself a choice.

The making of choices involves the application of some criterion of judgment--some concept of the desirable which serves as the reference point in the selection from among available alternatives. This is true of the choices that men make in their attempts to solve social problems. For example, if we are considering the problem of unemployment, and it is found that full employment can be maintained only by increasing public control over some parts of the economy, on what basis do we decide that it is desirable to do so? Are there not moral values in "free enterprise" which are more important than maintaining full employment? If it be true that security can be achieved only at the expense of freedom (as many people contend) which of these is the more valuable goal?

In the analysis of social problems, solutions always take the form of choices from among available alternatives which exist as institutional structures. When confronted with the problem of housing, do we decide to leave home-building exclusively in the hands of private enterprise, provide government subsidies to homebuilders and purchasers, have the government build housing projects, facilitate the setting up of cooperatives, set up the institutional means for killing off that part of the population which cannot find homes, or adopt some other alternative or combination of alternatives? The character of the answer chosen--the institutional pattern selected--will be determined by the criterion of judgment employed. It is clear that the problem of value, in the sense of criterion of judgment, cannot be escaped.

The problem now becomes that of whether criteria of judgment are themselves subject to rational analysis or whether, after all, there is no rational way to judge between them and, therefore, no rational way to solve social problems. In this regard, it needs to be emphasized that these criteria do not exist independently of the social interaction which is taking place in the group in which they are applied. In each case they rest at bottom on some conception of human nature, some idea of what sort of being the human animal is. As

such, we are entitled to inquire whether their validity is subject to examination in the light of the hypotheses which emerge from the actual study of human relations.

There is no reason to believe that any criterion of judgment is somehow mysteriously divorced from and logically independent of the "observed regularities" of human behavior discussed earlier. Since such criteria become meaningful only as they are used as the reference point in the organization of human behavior and the attempt to solve social problems, they may be required legitimately to meet the test of such evidence as we have about the behavior of human beings. The criterion of judgment used to solve economic problems within the framework of business enterprise, for example, is based on the concept of the "economic man." This is a theory which no longer can be held to be valid in the light of the mores principle. We are now able to see that the classical economists were confusing some aspects of the human behavior which they saw around them in their society with an immutable, inherent human nature. Yet judgments continue to be made on this basis. Witness current discussions with regard to the problems of housing, inflation, medical care, educational facilities, etc. Much the same difficulty is inherent in the communist criterion of judgment. The class struggle, upon examination, is found to be the same sort of thing as the "invisible hand." This is not to be wondered at, since both theories are the result of the same sort of thinking about social affairs. They both represent "absolute truths" which must be accepted through an act of faith and do not stand the test of inquiry. All such non-scientifically based criteria of judgment--including at the present time fascism, communism, and laissez-faire--have several things in common. A closer examination of these similarities may be of help at this point.

Characteristics of Non-scientifically-based Criteria of Judgment.

In the first place, all such theories find validity in a certain fixed pattern of institutions. Whether it be the noninterference by government in the economic life of the community and the determination of economic policy exclusively by the owners of property (laissez faire), the complete absence of private property and policy determination by the dictatorship of the proletariat (communism), or the superiority of some racial or cultural group and determination of policy by the "naturally superior" through the institution of the party (fascism)--no matter which of these theories is involved, its aims are to be achieved through some particular set of institutions. But we know that institutions change, and we know that the only way to solve real social problems is by changing institutions. We know that any theory based on values which are to be realized through some particular institutional pattern, though it may seem to present easy answers to problems, is in fact incapable of solving those problems. The character of the social process and the dynamic nature of invention make such easy answers impossible. If it is necessary to change institutions in order to solve social problems, then we know that, whatever criterion of judgment is to be used, it cannot be such as to require any particular pattern of institutions.

Similarly, and for the same reasons, any valid criterion of judgment must be independent of the institutional structure in which the judgment is to be made. Otherwise, nothing more than a justification of the very institutions which need to be modified can occur. In other words, while cultural prescriptions dictate habitual behavior patterns, where problems arise these habitual patterns must be modified. The prevailing dictates of the culture which regulate this particular phase of social activity must, then, be critically appraised and modified, and this requires a criterion of judgment which is exterior to the institutions being examined.

The second characteristic of such theories results from the previously noted fact that any criterion of social judgment rests on some conception of human nature. In this case, this theory of human nature is not based upon scientific analysis of the biological and social characteristics of men living in groups, but is based upon some preconceptions about human nature. These preconceptions seek to establish invidious distinctions between people. By invidious, we mean alleged distinctions of relative worth or ability which are not drawn from and cannot be verified by rational analysis of the evidence. They represent judgments about the relative worth of individuals, and they generally come to focus in the matter of policy determination, for the power to determine social policy is the power to prescribe the conditions of social life for all of the member of a community. Thus, it may be held that one race is inherently superior to all others, that the proletariat is somehow the highest class in society, that the owners of property are peculiarly endowed with the capacity to make decisions. In each case, the assumed inequality between men is used as the criterion of what is desirable in social affairs. In each case, this assumed inequality is held to be a valid reason for allowing some group of people to decide policies which affect the lives of others. This is accomplished by identifying the interests and welfare of the "superior" group with the interests of the community at large, and it is held that the well-being of the elite is an accurate index to the well-being of the society. In each case, this assumed inequality is invidious (unscientific) because it rests on assumptions which cannot be proved, or it is an unwarranted imputation of moral worth from real individual differences.

It is this sort of judgment, which is at the bottom of all prejudice. Certain common sense appreciations of surface differences between people--skin pigmentation, hair texture, facial characteristics, etc.--are held to be evidence of relative worth or instrumental capacities of the individuals concerned, and are held to be sufficient evidence for denying to this group opportunities for full participation in the social system--always, of course, in their own best interest since they are "inferior."

Characteristics of a Scientific Criterion of Judgment.

These characteristics of nonscientific criteria of judgment represent clues as to the way the scientific method can be applied positively to the problem of making choices. We can distinguish at least three positive identifications of a valid criterion of judgment in social affairs.

In the first place, the basis for judging must take account of the reality and inevitability of change. This means that our criterion of judgment must be constructed in terms of process rather than structure. It must be outside of and independent of any specific sorts of institutions, since we are judging from among institutional structures. This implies a criterion which does not specify any stable, continuous pattern of institutions, but one which recognizes that a continuously expanding technology makes institutional change inevitable. The process of change, motivated by the enlarging area of human activity in which scientific explanation occurs, must itself be the reference point for a valid criterion of judgment.

This does not at all imply that institutions are unimportant, nor does it mean that stability and continuity in institutional life are not social imperatives. It is necessary to repeat that social activity takes place through institutions, and that social change is accomplished through the modification of institutions. The point is that the criterion of judgment employed must be independent of the prevailing mores if real, rational choice is to be possible . Nor

does it mean that all of the mores of a community must be modified to solve its problems. The habits of thought in a democratic society, for example, which may properly be called mores and which constitute the habit of referring to non-coercive, nonviolent solutions to problems may be validated by a scientific criterion of judgment since they constitute a basic condition for rational choice.

In the second place, a valid criterion must provide the opportunity for real, rational choices to be made. That is to say, it must take into account the determinants of the problems to which it is to be applied. It must be rooted in reality--in the "observed regularities" among the items involved in the problem. It must recognize and be based on the realities of the culture concept and the principles of social change. It must start from where we are in the realities of the problems encountered, and at the same time, it must provide a conception of where we ought to be. It must bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be. This means that
there must be an explicit connection between the two, and that what is viewed as desirable must not be divorced from what is possible. This condition can only be met by a recognition of the relationship between personality and culture--an understanding of the habitual behavior of people (what is), and a recognition of the nature of social change--an understanding of the way that people can change their behavior patterns in order to solve the problems created by an expanding technology (what ought to be).

Thirdly, judgments about social affairs which can be held to be valid must be instrumental rather than invidious in character. When judgments are made on invidious grounds, they can only intensify the problem which exists. The racial problem, for example, is the problem of the denial of the opportunity for effective participation to minority groups on the basis of assumptions of invidious differences between races. Any attempt to solve it on invidious grounds cannot possibly resolve the problem.

We are here considering the belief systems held by people in any society. These belief systems are important data in social analysis. But they are important in the same way that men's ideas about disease before the discovery of bacteria were important. They do not provide us with the basis for making judgments about current problems any more than the explanation of disease as punishment for sin provides the modern medical researcher with a tool for curing cancer. Social science can provide people with a way of thinking about social affairs which will enable them to solve their social problems only insofar as we are able to apply to the relationships between human beings a way of thinking which meets the same logical conditions as that which has characterized advances in physical knowledge.

The advances in the reliability of our knowledge about the physical world have been achieved through the sort of thinking that we have been calling instrumental. We have been able to solve physical problems as our approach to them has come to be based, not on preconceptions about their nature, but on "observed regularities" in the phenomena disclosed by observation of the facts in the case. In the case of man's relationship to man (institutional life), man's thinking has commonly been invidious in character. The task now ahead for civilized man is the construction of judgment drawn from an investigation of the way that human beings do, and have, in fact behaved.

Summary.

By way of summing up, it is clear that science does not provide us with a way of escaping the necessity for making value judgments in social affairs. But it is also clear that the method of science does provide us with a way of bringing our value judgments into

closer correlation with the facts of social life. It does provide us with a way of making such judgments as will enable us to solve problems. In fact, the validity of the instrumental approach to social affairs, as distinguished from the invidious, is to be found in the fact that it is the method by which problems may be solved. Moreover, this way of thinking about social affairs enables us to escape the conclusion that there is no way to decide between the relative validity of different institutions and social theories.

The significance of what has been said for the central problem of the competing theories of government in the world today should also be considered. For of all these theories, democracy--the determination of social policy by those who will be affected by the policy--would seem to most nearly approximate the conditions discussed above. It is within the framework of the democratic process that a free, un-coerced choice from among alternatives can be made. Democracy alone among the available theories of social organization does not specify any particular pattern of institutions. Democracy alone makes no invidious distinctions between people and specifies that it is only within such a framework that the real, instrumental differences between people may be realized. Democracy provides, in the long run, the alternative which is capable of constantly adjusting itself to changed conditions--of continuously solving the problems which it confronts.

It may be true that such assertions are valid only on the basic assumption that it is desirable to solve problems. If so, it does no material harm to the position here stated, since no one can deny the validity of problem-solving without denying the very nature of life. In fact, all social theories have laid claim to potency in the matter of solving problems. The point we have been emphasizing is that these problems are objectively determined and that they can be viewed as cause-effect sequences. As we approach the matter of human relations with this clearly in view, there is reason for hope that we can develop the techniques for solving those problems.

What is a Social Problem?

We are now in a position to consider what we mean by a social problem. It should already be clear that social problems are related somehow to the fact of continuous social change. In fact, social conflicts or problems may be viewed as symptoms of social change. Conflicts arise in society when two or more aspects of the social process are inefficiently correlated--more specifically, when the invidious bases of institutions interfere with their ability to maintain the social process at the level which the available tools and techniques make possible. Social problems are not dependent, then, on the subjective awareness of their existence by members of the community. Unemployment is a social problem when the economic institutional arrangements make it impossible to maintain a level of full employment in a technological situation which is capable of supporting full employment. To put it another way, a social problem exists where members of a community are denied access to the full measure of participation in society which their own energies and capacities and the available technology make possible.

Because this is the case, social problems can only be solved by the modification or replacement of the institutions which have failed to correlate human behavior efficiently. We have, of course, been assuming that it is the behavior of individuals which is being correlated inefficiently. It follows that, while social problems may be said to exist independently of the awareness of the individuals concerned, it is also true that the effort to solve a problem will not be made until the members of the society are conscious of the

existence of the problem. And the effort cannot be successful until they are aware of the factors which have caused the problem and are thereby equipped to deal with it.

Social Problems and the Individual.

While any particular pattern of institutions is a cross-section of the social process, these institutions are reflected in the behavior patterns of the individuals in that society. Institutions may also, therefore, be said to exist in the minds of individuals. The judgments of any society as to right and wrong, permissible and forbidden sorts of human activity which are expressed in institutions, become cultured, ingrained habits of thought and action in the members of that society. In the language of the social psychologists, people tend to "interiorize" the social norms which are current in their institutions.

The activities which the norms of any society prescribe become habitual and their execution almost unconscious. At the same time, the norms themselves--the values and basic assumptions on which these behavior patterns are based--are accepted, for the most part, uncritically. Indeed, many individuals are not even aware of their existence. The result is that they tend to become "evidence-proof formulae." They remain tacit assumptions that people are not prepared to question or have questioned or to refer to the test of evidence for proof. When they are attacked, the reaction is personal and emotional.

Some of these established ways of doing things are more commonly and deeply ingrained in the minds of individuals than others, of course. In American society, for example, most people would consider it immoral--and suffer real discomfort--if forced to use someone else's toothbrush, and feel it a personal affront when the sanctity of the traditional institution of the family is called into question. These are matters about which the American community's institutional prescriptions are widely and deeply held. On the other hand, the appearance of women in public in the "old look" is probably not yet accounted serious enough to bring deep social disapproval. The attempt by advertising methods to make the "new look" a serious social prescription has not come up to the hopes or expectations of the ladies' apparel industry. In the matter of dress, the varying degrees in which social prescriptions become involved with emotions is clearly evident.

While much of human activity is habitual and dictated in the manner described above by the existing institutional pattern, it is also true that the pressure to solve real social problems results in a conscious decision on the part of individuals to modify these habitual behavior patterns and institute new patterns of relationships among the individuals in the community. This decision amounts to a conscious choice from among the various alternative solutions to the problem which are available. It is a different sort of activity than the unconscious obedience to custom which we have been considering. And it is the only sort of activity which is capable of solving problems. This sort of real, rational choice by the individuals concerned can only be made when they have become sufficiently aware of the restraints which established institutional behavior put on their ability to live more meaningfully and abundantly.

Personal Problems and Social Problems.

Because all individuals live in society and, therefore, within the institutions of their society (with the rare exception of the hermit), it becomes necessary for them to adjust themselves to the requirements of their society. But the adjustment of individuals to society--to things as they are--does not mean that people must be taught to regard the institutions in which they live as permanent or perfect arrangements. If this could

be accomplished, the result would be mass stagnation or suicide since a society composed of such individuals would not be able to modify itself as change becomes necessary. A healthy society, then, is one composed of individuals who recognize the inevitability of change and are prepared to solve their problems by the rational modification of their institutions.

It is not enough, therefore, to have citizens who are well-adjusted to what is. In the long run, healthy individuals cannot exist in a sick society. Consider, for example, what the consequences of adjusting individuals to the social structure of Fascism meant to the world. A well-adjusted little Nazi can hardly be said to be a healthier and sounder individual than a poorly adjusted one who finds it exceedingly difficult to live in the Fascist society. In the case of the migratory workers in the United States, the social problem is obviously not one of convincing the migrant that he should be happy in spite of the fact that his family is hungry, ill-housed, diseased and deprived of any educational facilities. Nor is it a matter of enrolling him in night school so that he can study to be a salesman or a mechanic. If all migrants were transferred to stores and factories, the agricultural crops would lie unharvested.

The social problem here lies in the fact that a substantial portion of the American community is denied access to the full participation in the economic process that our technology makes possible. And the level of participation of the rest of the community is lowered to the same degree, since they are denied the socially useful results of the contribution that the migrants might make. In short, the concern of social science is with the character of the society to which individuals are to adjust.

Every individual in society has many personal problems which may range all the way from inferiority complexes to inability to find housing facilities. Many of these problems are in reality the incidence of a social problem on the individual. For example, it s not inconceivable that a veteran today might find himself in the position of not being able to find a job, having to house his family in a chicken-coop, not being able to provide an adequate diet for his family, and of having frequent and violent quarrels with his wife. Now it is also conceivable that, by conferring with experts trained in rehabilitation work, he might be able to work out these difficulties--to solve his problems. The individual may in effect, lift himself by his bootstraps. Certainly it is desirable that effort be exerted to this end. But solving personal problems does not solve social problems. The claim that it does rests on a confusion between these two sorts of problems.

By getting a job, a house, and working out his difficulties with his wife, this veteran will not thereby have solved the social problems of unemployment, housing, inflation, and the organization of the family of which his personal problems were symptoms. These are problems which are occasioned not by weakness or deficiencies in any particular individuals, but by the fact that the institutions of that society do not effectively correlate the activities of individuals so that all are provided with the opportunity for the fullest expression of their potentialities. And they can be solved in only one way: by the modification of the institutions involved so that full use may be made of the available scientific knowledge of the community. The solution by individuals of their personal problems is, of course, a desirable end. But the conditions under which this is possible for all individuals can only be accomplished when individuals realize that many of their personal problems are only symptomatic of social maladjustment.

This confusion of personal and social problems is also responsible for the emotional approach to the solution of problems which, however commendable in intent, serves to

prolong the existence of the problem itself. Very often, for example, a genuinely admirable concern for the poor or the "unfortunate," when accompanied by a failure to see the reality of the social problem involved, leads to the conclusion that the answer lies in public or private charity. But charity is not a solution to the problem of poverty. The problem itself can only be solved by the rational attempt to get at its causes. As a social phenomenon, the problem of poverty--like other economic problems--is located in those social arrangements which determine the rules of the game in the matter of how men "make a living" in society.

Nor does the solution of social problems consist in the effort to assess moral praise or blame to any individual or group or class of individuals. Social science is not concerned with this sort of moral judgment, since it is not capable of solving problems. The determinants of problems lie elsewhere, and it is only by the rational attempt to discover what these determinants are and what alternatives are available that problems may be solved.

Why Solve Social Problems?

The serious attempt to solve social problems is an exciting adventure in the interplay of forces which are within human control and those which are not. The rational decision to modify institutions is within the area of choice of man, even though its exercise requires intelligent reexamination of long-established habits. At the same time, there are considerations in problem-solving which are outside human control. The limitations of the physical environment are an obvious example. Not so obvious is the proposition that any attempt to solve social problems must take as given data the level of scientific knowledge which is available, and that to effect a solution is to provide new institutional arrangements which will make fuller use of this knowledge.

It is this latter fact which makes problem-solving necessary. Social change is made necessary and inevitable by the fact that established institutions cannot make full use of new discoveries and inventions--of new ideas, tools, and techniques. The social process has ceased in some way to proceed efficiently. Since the social process affects individuals through institutions--prescribed patterns of human behavior--its efficiency depends on the efficiency of the structural institutions and arrangements which compose it in any given cultural order. It is inevitable, therefore, that in seeking to make their lives meaningful, men will continue to modify their institutions.

But why worry and work at the matter? Why not let the social process run its course and let social problems take care of themselves? Perhaps the best answer to these questions lies in the fact that the quality of the lives of every individual in a society depends in large part on the quality of the social arrangements which are in effect. To the degree that any members of a society are precluded from effective participation, the society itself is a sick society, and every member of it is affected thereby.

Moreover, failure to solve social problems rationally invites non-rational attempts to do the same thing. These non-rational attempts take the form of the substitution of violence for discussion and reasoned analysis, and adopt the method of war and revolution. Especially in an atomic age--but, of course, in any age--widespread use of force and violence may make social survival itself impossible. Increasingly, modern man becomes aware of the truth of the charge that the alternative to the rational modification of his institutions is death or, at best, a badly crippled community.

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