

#1.SYLLABUS “The Social Process.”

Introduction.

Human knowledge and experience may be classified for convenience into four branches, each of which clusters about a great central theme. Thus, the physical sciences cluster about the study of inorganic (nonliving) matter; the biological sciences deal with organic (living) things; the humanities find their unity in the common interest in human feelings, expression, creation and aspiration; and the social sciences compose a separately classifiable broad field because of their concern with man's Associative (group) life.

These broad fields are not actually separate and distinct, one from another. They are so identified and described purely for purposes of convenience, ease of study, accuracy in methodology, and also because they can be used as preparations for distinctive occupations such as physicist, journalist, physician, minister, astronomer, teacher, artist, engineer, businessman, and many others.

The present course deals with that growing body of scientific knowledge about man's social life in groups, usually referred to as the social sciences. As one of the four great branches of human knowledge, the social sciences have certain distinctive characteristics which identify them as such. It is the purpose of this essay to describe some of these characteristics, especially as they focus upon the social process which acts as a nucleus for the broad field of the social sciences.

The Object of Social Inquiry.

In dealing with mankind's social life, the social scientist can never get far away from the fact that he is dealing with society in transition--in process of continual change. There is no way to escape the reality of change in social affairs.

This is true because human society never ceases to respond to changes of all sorts; natural changes, cultural changes, technological changes. The process of change never stops, freezes, petrifies or comes to rest. A moment's reflection will confirm the validity of this notion that reality is always changing. For, as a wise Greek philosopher once said, "no man can step in the same river twice." In the instant between the first step and the second step, both the man and the river have changed; and neither can be "recaptured" in its identical form of the instant before. Time and change have intervened.

So it is with the flow of the social process. Social change is the gross continuing effect of millions of smaller and mere individual changes taking place in all things and in all people all the time. Change is inherent even in the electromagnetic structure of atomic matter itself. It reveals itself to the social scientist in myriad ways, making the study of the social process a complex and difficult task. But since social change and the continuing flow of the social process is a verifiable fact, we have no alternative except to make our inquiry as accurate and as significant as possible.

Social inquiry, then, can be significant only in so far as it deals with the social process in all its complexity or in so far as it contributes to that effect. All social scientists share the social process with one another. It is the object of their cooperative inquiry. Some of these social scientists call themselves after the several aspects of the social process which evoke their special interests, such as: Anthropologist, Economist, Geographer, Journalist, Historian, Political Scientist, Sociologist, Social Psychologist or specialist in International Affairs. Still

others like Educators, Social Philosophers, Lawyers and Social Service Workers are concerned with special aspects of the social process.

But all of these categories and many others are unified in to the same broad field by their shared interest in man's associative life in groups as it is carried on within the stream of the social process. The social process therefore forms the unifying nucleus of the social sciences, and it is, therefore, the proper object of social inquiry.

The Social Process and the Social Order.

The social process, like a broad river, flows through time unceasingly. It can never be studied comprehensively in its wholeness without reference to movement, mutation, modification and change. But even so, it is sometimes both possible and desirable to stop this flow of change at a given instant in time, in order to study a given institution or group of institutions within the social process. This artificial device is something like taking a flash picture of a waterfall with a very fast lens. The effect is to "freeze" the actual action-flow. It is sometimes desirable to do this in order to help the social scientist make sense out of an otherwise bewilderingly complex social interaction. The picture thus produced is never "real" in the sense of complete accuracy, but it is real enough to support a useful level of generalization about specific social problems.

In this manner we can put together a series of these flash pictures in such a way as to be able to trace through time the evolution of almost any given social institution, such as the family, the economy, the church, the nation-state or the political order. When these pictures of various institutions are in turn sequentially put together we can get some idea of the "social order" at any given era. For the social order may be thought of as the totality of the interacting institutions during any given span of years or decades. And it is within this meaning that we give such names to cultural epochs as "Victorian," or "Periclean," or "Elizabethan;" or more broadly yet, "Restoration," Colonial Era," and "Postwar." These are undoubtedly high-level generalizations. Yet at the same time they are distinctly useful to the social scientist as he attempts to study the social process in its constant evolution from one social order into the next. If we assume, however, that we have succeeded in recreating an exact and substantial picture of a social order which is not also in a constant state of change and flux, then this device of stopping the flow of the social process can lead to inaccuracy and self-negation.

The Social Order and Social Institutions.

The social order is comprised of social institutions. One reason why stopping the flow of the social process by "artificial means" is especially useful is to allow the social investigator to analyze the social institutions which make up a given social order. These is extremely important to the social scientist because it is through social institutions--and only through social institutions--that the social process impinges upon individual persons in society. None can escape living within social institutions and, indeed, most of us would not care to escape. From the moment of birth into the world, human individuals are involved with other humans in institutional circumstances. A moment's recasting of one's own life substantiates this statement of fact. The individual is born into the institution of the family; plays as a child in neighborhood gangs; is educated in institutions called schools; worships in the institution of the church; joins fraternal clubs; serves, perhaps, in institutions of national defense; earns a living in economic institutions; joins a political party, a professional or trade society, and so on. At all

times he is a citizen of a locality (municipality), a state, a region, a nation, and--in our day--of the world.

There is no escaping institutional life. It is the only means by which the social process can bestow the blessings, as well as deposit the problems and conflicts, of associative life upon the

individual person. It is through the hundreds of social institutions of the social order that the social process provides life and its qualitative promises for each individual person.

The importance of life as it is lived within institutional patterns can hardly be overestimated. Institutions are decisive in molding us into the persons we are. In a sense we are the prisoners of our institutional environment, the victims of our past experiences. For social institutions (groups) prescribe our every action. They influence our manner of speech and prescribe the language we use in communication; they dictate our dress, mould our habits of thought, specify our habits of eating, our manners, our relations with our own and the opposite sex, oversee what we learn, what we hope for, reward us for conformity and punish us for transgression. In a word, institutions control, guide, educate, and influence our every interaction with the human environment of ideas, habits, and human relations both past and present.

It is obvious that if the social process occurs through social institutions, and if the social process is the proper object of inquiry among the social sciences, then social institutions are of key importance. Their origin, framework, operation, maintenance, growth, continuity and (sometimes) demise are the stuff and substance with which the social sciences must deal. When all the social institutions of a given time are taken together, they may be said to comprise the social order of that particular moment in history. It follows, therefore, that if the social sciences are to have real significance, they must focus their attention upon social institutions, and address themselves to the social problems within these institutions. For it is only when social institutions efficiently perform the duties for which they were created that a smooth-flowing social process is possible.

The Purpose of the Social Process.

Society is the great invention of men who are born into a world not made for them. Although in legend mankind commenced life in a Garden of Eden, he has long since left that happy state. Men have wants the world does not supply without working, and men have needs whose satisfaction comprises the terms of the life struggle.

Social institutions are man-made devices for making life secure, easier, richer, less risky and more abundant and attractive. Mankind found out long ago that the frictions and conflicts of group life were outweighed many times over by the dividends of working together in cooperative association. The fact that man as a species was capable of learning this great lesson made him capable of dominating the earth despite his relative physical weakness, the burden of an enormously long period of child nurture, his lack of protective body hair, and his inferiority of scent and other requisites of survival in a hostile world.

As a life-loving, death-fearing animal, man's only recourse has been to seek perpetuation of life through pooled intelligence and cooperative enterprise. He has sought--and still seeks--to make his world as secure, as full, and as satisfying as the terms of life struggle will allow. Moreover, as man has accumulated a vast heritage of useful experience (and has become able to communicate it on a global scale), he has developed his ability to control his less-than-garden-of-Eden environment.

By developing the resources of scientific curiosity; by improving his industrial arts; by peering into the nature of the human mind, emotions, and personality; and by creating leisure in which to speculate about human purposes, he has raised himself in a bare 100 centuries to a substantial level of material abundance and security within which to contemplate beauty, to pursue creative happiness beyond mere animal existence, and to engage in the activities and arts of the good life.

The vehicle by which this astounding progress has been made has been society. That is to say, men in association with one another in various social institutions have lived, worked, and achieved together that correlation of life activities we call progress. The social process--the flow of change through the institutions of the social order--has increasingly become the only means by which men can seek to anticipate, to welcome, and to direct intelligently the changing reality which is the central fact of human existence.

When viewed in these terms, the social process loses much of its inevitability and fearsomeness. If society--that is, the institutions of the social order--is man-made, then it can be altered by man. Indeed, this is precisely what Thomas Jefferson meant when he made recourse to the "right of revolution" in justifying the birth of the American nation in 1776. For he was able to perceive that the social order is the tool, not the master, of mankind, and that it can be refashioned and redirected into new channels and newer forms more efficient and more beneficial than formerly.

Jefferson's implication is scientifically true. It is that the social process should be fashioned by man to serve two great ends: 1) the protection of men from preventable death (the inalienable right to life and liberty), and 2) the provision of life's qualitative promises (the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness). In his memorable Declaration of Independence, Jefferson proclaimed the deathless integrity of man, and of man's right to redirect the social process and refashion his social institutions to serve not only the few but all men.

Now it is obvious that the social process does not provide all men today with either an assured existence or the fullest possible measure of life's potential promises. It is this failure--this inefficiency--of successive orders through history to arrange the flow of the social process so as to make the maximum provision of life and its promises that gives meaning and significance to the study of the social sciences.

For when Jefferson spoke of the inalienable rights of life and liberty, his thought was that society serves men most efficiently when it protects men against the derangements of wars. To this thought, other philosophers and statesmen have since added the concept that the social process must be arranged so as to provide other things, such as protection against accident, illness, old-age and unemployment.

And when Jefferson spoke of the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, his thought was that no social order could long exist which did not also provide its citizen-members with a measure of human dignity, achievement, status and belonging, love and companionship--in short, with the amenities and some of the luxuries, the leisures, the relaxations and the promises of life.

Jefferson's notion of judging the social order by setting it up against the inalienable rights of man is a profound--indeed even today almost a revolutionary--social instrument. For it is no less than a statement of social value.

Using it as the criterion of value, above and beyond the social institutions which themselves are under reexamination, we have a scientific means of measuring the achievements and shortcomings of the social institutions which are the immediate focus of attention in the social sciences. And if these social institutions occasionally fail, as they do, to

provide men with life and the maximal consummatory experiences of which these institutions are capable, then we have at least a clue to the discovery of the source of this inefficiency and of eradicating the defect on a scientific (evidential) basis.

This is the whole object of inquiring into the social process and into the institutions of the social order through which the process takes place. This is the fundamental nature and purpose of the social sciences. It is in the constant scientific reexamination of man-made institutions against the criterion of “instrumental efficiency” that the social scientist can make his most significant contribution to a smoothly flowing, that is to say, a peacefully changing and ever-modifying, social process.

The Social Process and the Theory of Value.

The notion that the social order exists to provide all men with life and its consummatory promises is a fundamental concept in the study of the social sciences. It is fundamental because from it can be derived some idea of the proper scope of the broad field of social science, as well as the practical usefulness of social inquiry.

Consciously or subconsciously, all generations of men have at all times been compelled to fall back upon this final criterion of instrumental efficiency in order to modify outworn or inefficient social institutions. The historical record is filled with examples. The modification of the Divine-Right Monarchy in France and England and Russia is one case in point. The inability of nation-states to prevent war and the growth of the United Nations is another. The inability of unregulated capitalism to prevent the now-famous “boom and bust” cycle is still another. There are but three examples of the types of social problems which confront social scientists in their search for a peaceful, ever-changing, and smoothly operating social order. A longer list of real social problems plaguing various social institutions would include the disorganization of the family, inequities in the flow of income, disparities between mutually-exclusive religious beliefs, race prejudices, the control of atomic and disease-based weapons of mass destruction.

How is he to attack these problems with any real hope of actually resolving the conflicts which create them?

The social scientist can hardly hope to resolve all social conflicts by the application of some mystic formula. But he does know some things in fact--that is to say, things that are subject to experiential proof in the entire historical record of human experience. He knows, for instance:

- 1) That change is constantly taking place, and that no human activity can arrest its flow;
- 2) That in order to survive, man-made social institutions must respond and adapt to these natural changes;
- 3) That failure to modify outworn structural institutions is an invitation to forceful overthrow--war and revolution;
- 4) That institutional modification to endure cannot be made blindly, but must be made in conformity with some notion of social value;
- 5) That social value, as confirmed by the entire historical record, is no less than the maximum provision of life and its consummatory promises for all men;
- 6) That social value can be used as the criterion of instrumental efficiency only in a truly free society.

These are the tools of the modern social scientist. They involve some of the most profound learning and scholarship of the ages. They represent no less than the attempt to

apply the theory of value scientifically (evidentially) to social affairs. And the object of making social inquiry with these tools is to help resolve real problems of real people in a realistic and peaceful fashion.

The Social Process and the Free Society.

Some human societies have attained to a high degree the benefits of a smoothly flowing social process: security, abundance, liberty, and experimental development. Others have attained only an imperfect and awkwardly organized social process: animal existence, poverty for large numbers, human exploitation, institutions wedded to traditional practices.

It is obvious that only in the free society can the pursuit of social value best take place. It is obvious from everything we know about past human institutions that the level of production of the necessities and abundance of life is coexistent with the degree of experimental freedom of thought.

These two things--high-level production and freedom to change and experiment--are the signal lights of free societies. Where they are extinguished, freedom exists usually only for the few in an economic and political as well as a social sense. It was this thought that motivated Thomas Jefferson to lay down the five propositions by which social institutions (in this case, the state) must be modified when freedom of inquiry and experiment do not exist. He said:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: 1) that all men are created equal; 2) that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; 3) that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; 4) that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; 5) that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Explicit in the Jeffersonian doctrine is the declaration of the inalienability of right to experiment--to be wrong as well as right. In other words, Jefferson believed that the human being is so constituted that, short of death, his curiosity can never be taken away, that experimental inquiry is a function of living itself. Any society which believes differently, which attempts to abolish or perpetually to extinguish curiosity without extinguishing life itself, is merely banking the fires for its own eventual consummation by the flames of revolution. As Jefferson continued, "... and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed" Eventually, the unquenchable and inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will correlate into some form, expressing itself in modifying the offending institution or institutions and recreating "its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

But Jefferson was speaking of forceful revolution as a last resort. The modern social scientist, with the data of the historical laboratory at his elbow, seeks to make free social inquiry into a tool of peaceful modification and adaptation. Using it properly, he seeks to conduct his investigations into the various institutional structures of his society in such a way as to produce a "plurality of alternatives" by which to resolve the social conflicts and problems that continually arise in response to continuous social change. His motive at all times is to

propose alternative solutions to social problems which society at large can use to be tested in experience and in practical operation, and then to modify and to examine once again “in such forms as to [it] shall seem most likely to effect [its] safety and happiness.”

The truly free society does not penalize one alternative solution in advance. As in a fair race, the competitors do not injure one another or seek to trip an opponent while racing toward the goal. So with alternative ideas for resolving social problems; no liability is imposed before the race of experiential testing is completed, and no recrimination or revenge is visited upon the loser. In the free society, individuals are left free to choose between competing ideas which serve them and their purposes better than others. And even when once accepted by the majority, a given idea or belief is always held subject to reexamination, modification, and revision--even as conditions, ideas, things and people themselves change with time.

At the root of the free society is the realization that the social process, like a broad river flowing, is always becoming.

The social sciences are but one of the four great branches of knowledge through which mankind can hope for a social process which makes it the beneficiary, not the victim, of change. Through the social sciences, the modern student has access--not only to the vast body of data collected by the various fields within the social sciences, but also to a scientific method of dealing with social data which can contribute in large measure to the dissolution of the forces of hate, greed, misery and ignorance which lie like festering sores deep with the social process of modern times.

But the free society and social order most likely to survive its capacity for its own self-destruction is the one--and only that one--which is willing to submit its basic foundations to constant and candid scientific criticism. This necessitates the vigorously protected right by all men everywhere to apply the standards of scientific criticism even to the most sacred and obviously unquestionable justifications of a given social order.

In our day, this privilege is the price not only of the smooth continuity of world culture, but of the survival of that culture itself.
