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***Freedom and Reform***

*Essays in Economics and  
Social Philosophy*

FRANK H. KNIGHT

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The cuneiform inscription that serves as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest known written appearance of the word "freedom" (*ama-gi*), or liberty. It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

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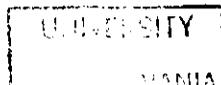
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9. J. Buchanan

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## *Freedom as Fact and Criterion*

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**S**tudents of ethics or social science hardly need to be reminded that one of the leading modern schools of ethical thought has been dominated by economists. The English-speaking world in particular has been utilitarian in its theory and its folk-mind from the age of the Enlightenment. Hence some reflections by an economist on utilitarianism and ethics generally may be worth consideration.

For present purposes, it is the political rather than the properly ethical aspect of utilitarianism, and especially the separation of the two, which is of interest. It is one thing to ask what is Good, and another to inquire as to what social policy is to be carried out, and by what agencies, in order to realize the Good as far as possible. There might, indeed, be such a connection between the two questions that the answer to one would largely involve an answer to the other; but it is

terms of physical causality (behaviorism) all human acts alike and equally have their physical antecedents from which they inevitably follow, and beyond the description of these antecedent conditions no intelligent statement can be made. Nor do we in any way escape from the difficulty by recognizing mental states, attitudes, or motives as causes. In that case all acts alike and equally have their adequate motives. No factual attribute or descriptive difference in either physical antecedent or motive will make one act (of a private individual or government official) right and another wrong. At most the ethical question is merely carried back a step. If we adopt the view that acts are to be fully accounted for by motives, then in order to validate any difference between right and wrong acts we must find some basis for discrimination between right and wrong motives. If we say that acts are to be fully accounted for by antecedent physical conditions it seems to be nonsensical to talk about ethical differences at all, for we can hardly call one physical configuration right and another wrong.

It will be seen that the issue regarding freedom is entirely unconnected with the old metaphysical problem of free will. If one believes in freedom, in that sense, all choices are alike and equally free, within the limits of the possible alternatives open. If one does not believe in freedom, then all acts are alike and equally *determined* (by physical or psychological conditions, or both, according to taste). Practical requirements, however, call for a working distinction between two sorts of acts, some free and some unfree, and for a valid means of assigning some acts to one class and some to the other. The thinker whose mechanistic bias is strong enough will simply deny that the distinction has any meaning; but he will hardly convince any jurist or legislator who is "up against" the practical problem that he does not have to make the classification. Our suggestion is that the fallacy comes in seeking an

objective standard, or one which does not finally rest on a judgment of ethical approval and disapproval. We say that the victim of a highwayman is coerced, not because the character of his choice between the alternatives presented is different from any other choice, but because we think the robber does "wrong" in making the alternatives what they are.

In no other sense is it possible to speak of coercion. No human being can ever literally "force" another to do anything (though one may of course forcibly prevent another from acting). It is most unfortunate that the word "force" has come to have such a confusing ambiguity of meaning; for the *threat of violence* (or threat of inflicting some other injury or loss) as a means of controlling the conduct of a human being has only a figurative kinship with the action of a physical force in changing the state of rest or motion of a mass of matter. It is interesting to note that when conduct is influenced by an offer to improve one's condition, instead of a threat of worsening it, we do not call it force or duress. The intensity of "moral pressure" exerted by a bribe is felt to be less than that due to a threat, no doubt because of the tendency to assume that the person affected must have been in a tolerable situation to begin with. Perhaps it is generally true that men feel a negative change in condition more keenly than a positive change, or perhaps we should have to seek for some historical or accidental explanation of the fact that the law takes a different attitude toward bribes than toward threats. The point of this discussion is presumably clear, and need not be labored further. It is simply and briefly that freedom is itself an ethical category and cannot possibly furnish an objective criterion for moral judgments of legislative policy.

However, if the argument for this negative result is sound, it can be followed out to some broader and more positive conclusions, of significance for the character of social "sci-

ence," and that of ethics. This general argument may be summarized in two main stages, both of which are perhaps "self-evident" in the only sense that expression ever rightly carries. The first of these conclusions or propositions is that the notion of economy, or efficiency, or degree or extent of desire satisfaction is not "objective" in the sense in which physical occurrences and magnitudes are objective. Yet the very notion of policy, or of a practical problem, involves at a minimum the former notion of a possible greater or lesser degree of achievement of a desired end. There can be no such subject matter as economics nor any intelligent discussion of conduct in a practical sense which does not run in terms of teleology. One might treat of the movements of the human body or its members in terms of physiology,<sup>10</sup> or perhaps admit the possibility of conscious accompaniments of such changes on a merely factual level.<sup>11</sup> But such a discussion would not hold any place for recognition that such movements present a problem to the behaving organism itself; the movements so treated would not be conduct, in the meaning which the term actually has to educated human beings. If, at a minimum, the concepts of desire and satisfaction, end (in a personal sense), and achievement of end, are not "real" or "objective" in the sense of being valid units in disclosure,

<sup>10</sup> The same logic will in fact just as conclusively eliminate the physiological point of view also, reducing physiology to physics and chemistry. Nor will it end there. The premises of modern physics eliminate all *content* in that field also; matter is resolved into energy, a pure intangible, a physical non-existent, and one is left with a sort of higher geometry of an indeterminate number of dimensions, a system of abstract relations of a purely ideal character.

<sup>11</sup> It is more than doubtful whether this is in fact logically allowable. No human being could have any way of knowing the existence of such purely phenomenal conscious states unless we admit the validity of processes of inference totally different from those involved in our knowledge of physical reality and hence just as subjective, metaphysical, and inadmissible as the notion of value which the scientific intellect finds so repugnant, and the effort to get rid of which raised all these questions in the first place.

then the whole content of economics, technology, and all practical discussion whatever is illusion, and the discussion itself is without meaning, mere raving. That this is not true is as certain as any assertion whatever—at least as certain as any assertion regarding those external physical objects which are the subject matter of the natural sciences. The conclusion in regard to the status of the notions of desire and satisfaction does not need to be put into words.

The second general conclusion is fully as repugnant as the first to the intellectual cravings of twentieth-century man, but is also unescapable. No *discussion of policy* is possible apart from a moral judgment. The argument of the body of this paper has shown that an appeal to maximum freedom as a "standard" involves a fallacy. The result is dogmatic acceptance of an existing distribution of power, which is an ethical proposition, a value judgment in disguise, and an ethically indefensible one. Moreover, it involves logical contradictions. Freedom means freedom to use power, and the only possible limitation on the use of power is intrinsically ethical. To say that one is restrained from the use of power by other than ethical considerations amounts to saying that he does not really have the power, that it is cancelled by some opposing force. Freedom and coercion are ethical categories, and the only question in regard to which *discussion* can possibly be carried on is the question of what power *ought* to be exercised, or how and under what circumstances. Why should one not be as *free* to use political power as economic power? As far as the mere notion of freedom is concerned, there is no reason why the majority in a democratic state, or the sovereign group in any state, should not dispossess and exploit the rest of society at their pleasure. And the consistent theoretical utilitarian would have to pronounce the result, whatever it might be, in perfect conformity with his ethical principles. Those principles can never carry him beyond a

begging of the question in justification of the *status quo*. The only real objection that could be raised is some form of the statement that political power ought not to be used in that way.

Indeed, it appears to be self-evident, as stated above, that the only reason one person should yield to another, in pleasure or well-being or self-realization or whatever it be called (for they are all merely different words for value or the good) is either (a) that he must (in which case he has no choice, no problem exists), (b) that he wishes to do so (and hence there is a purely personal problem), or (c) that he feels a duty or obligation to do so, which gives rise to a new sort of problem, a moral or ethical problem. The notion of duty or obligation is an ultimate fact of experience—as much so as desire and satisfaction, or space, time, matter, motion, and force.

Or (we might add) life, or consequences, or beauty; and a more detailed examination would greatly extend the list of kinds of “reality” which the exigencies of talking sense compel us to recognize in this “pluralistic universe.” But there appears to be justification for giving special recognition as above, to three levels of experience and of subject matter for intelligent discussion. There is first, the field of external fact (science in the narrow sense) in which the relations of events in space and time present no problem in any sense to the material undergoing change. Questions arise in this field only to man as an outsider, as problems of knowledge, in relation to pure curiosity (if there is such a thing) or to the *means* of action. Human behavior may be conceived and studied in either of these two ways: either as scientific data in which the only problem can be to discover “uniformities of coexistence and sequence,”—in more modern terms, stable configurations in space-time—or as a problem of “economy,” the adaptation of means to ends. The ends are *data*, but not physically existent data, nor yet values; they are purely personal

desires. Discussion on this second level, however, involves something over and above the description of actual events. It involves a judging of conduct, but only from the standpoint of the *intelligence* displayed. The norm is that of efficiency.

On the third level, ends and not merely means are problematic, and are to be discussed and judged. That men do pass such judgments, rating some aims or objectives of action to be higher or more worthy than others and recognizing that it is possible to be in *error* in regard to such ratings as well as in regard to choice of means for securing given ends, is perhaps more of an observed fact than a conclusion established by reasoning. It is hardly necessary to remark to people who have reflected at all about the foundations of knowledge that the common distinction between what is observed and what is inferred is naïve and untenable.

So finally, the argument as to the interpretation of freedom as an ethical standard leads even to a suggestion to the philosopher in his supreme function of ontologist. Viewing the matter in terms of the ineluctable practical exigencies, it is hard to deny “reality” to any notion which has to be recognized as a condition of a tolerable ordering of conduct or of intelligible discourse, or “truth” to any proposition the opposite of which is indisputably more wrong than the proposition itself. Accuracy is a matter of degree, even in the most exact measurements of space. From such a point of view, both private motives in behavior and ethical evaluations have to be recognized as real, and ultimately just as real as behavior itself, considered merely as a change in physical configuration or movement of matter in space.

From the point of view of “radical empiricism,” indeed, the problem presented is that of explaining why the modern mind has developed the tendency to explain everything by correlating it with some change in physical configuration, to refuse to accept any other explanation or to regard anything

else as truly real. The tendency itself is unquestionably "real" (and this proposition might go far in deciding the ultimate nature of reality and truth, for matter and motion are after all ideas, culture facts with a culture history and explanation). The writer of the present argument feels the bias toward physical-mechanistic thought as strongly as anyone does or can. Primitive atomism, which explains all change as a rearrangement of hard inert particles in space, is unquestionably more solid and satisfying to the mind, gives one more the feeling of really knowing what one is talking about, than any other view of phenomena. But a little study of physics, more effectively than any amount of psychology and philosophy, shows conclusively that such a description of the world leaves out most of the facts, and those rather the most interesting and important. The first thing that physical theory does to the physical world of common knowledge is to annihilate it; all its properties of visibility, tangibility, etc., by which it can be known, are shown to be purely subjective and the reality back of them to be unknowable. Neither the hard particle nor even the space in which it moves stands up under critical examination, or can be at all what it seems. The equations will not balance without putting in various intangibles, force, energy, and potential energy, which are fully as bad as creative will, if indeed they can be kept from running into the latter.

We have to face the fact that our craving for a simple, monistic, mechanical explanation of experience is intrinsically doomed to frustration. However, an explanation of why men have such a craving will go far to take the place of satisfaction for the craving itself. Our final suggestion is that there is a fairly obvious explanation for the phenomenon along pragmatic lines. Thought is to begin with, mainly, and throughout its history in considerable part, a biological function, a phase of organic adaptation, which in its developed stage is more and

more adaptation of the environment rather than the organism. Now the only way in which the organism which has developed to the stage of purposiveness can change his environment in the least is by *moving* some part of it in space.

The sole point of effective contact between mind and matter is through the voluntary muscles and the sole activity of which they are capable is precisely this change of physical configuration or rearrangement in space, first of the members of the organism itself and secondarily of external objects. Is not this the source and meaning of the bias for reducing all existence to physical existence and all change to change in spatial configuration?

“right” individuals, which in itself means a right cultural situation, one in which freedom, order, and efficiency are simultaneously possible to the highest degree. More concretely, the objective is such a society, made up of such men, that the individual can be trusted with freedom, meaning that he can be trusted with the *power* which is necessary to give freedom substantial content. Meanwhile, the issue lies between trusting men with freedom, and with the power over others which in organized society is inseparable from freedom, and trusting some small group of men with supreme power to govern, and to change, all others.

The greatest tragedy of the situation is that freedom has led men to conceive of their “rights” in terms which enormously overlap, and far surpass possibility, and that conflict of rights, while it is the only discussible form of conflict, is far more serious than conflict of interests. Only as rights can interests be discussed; interests are asserted, not argued, except as values, i.e., judgments about values. And discussion is the only way in which problems of conflict are really “solved”; force, which includes persuasion, yields no real solution of any problem. Yet in the discussion of rights, the very notion of their sanctity tends to result in an appeal from discussion to force.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Explicit mention should be made of international relations, especially since the immediate threat to civilization comes from war. It goes without saying that no country or nation can solve its problems or save itself alone. Some effective political world order is indispensable. But, as prohibition of usury, now recognized as a stupid policy, was the dominant principle of Christian economics in the Middle Ages, the most conspicuous result fairly attributable to Christian teachings in modern Western society would seem to be that “pacifism” which has made the peace-loving peoples so helpless and at the mercy of those who frankly worship force.

Social-ethical problems not centering in economic organization have had to be passed over here because of space limits. The general notion of “purity,” for example, occupies a large place in moral ideas, from the most primitive beginning, and it is not implied that “morals,” in the meaning conveyed by the quotation marks, do not present an important problem in modern society.

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## *The Meaning of Democracy: Its Politico-Economic Structure and Ideals*

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**T**he prospect of saying anything about democracy, at this date in history and in the compass of a short essay, which will contain at once enough truth and enough novelty to be of value, seems to the writer to be small, and the attempt rather presumptuous. This article will merely attempt to present some notes on basic principles, which may possibly help thoughtful readers to clarify the nature of the ideal, and may shed some light on the problems which threaten the existence of democracy in this day of crisis.

### *Preliminary Definition: Freedom, Causality and Coercion*

The popular, everyday conception of democracy is political liberty or free government. Another familiar definition is government by discussion. We shall start out from the former notion and proceed to explain it by use of the latter. We may

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note at the outset that the notion of free government presents a paradox, a seeming contradiction. For coercion, the antithesis of freedom, is of the essence of government. And to consider the notion of free government, as a reality, or something more or less approximated in reality, and as an ideal which is to be more closely approximated as well as preserved, we need to go still farther back and begin with some notice of the problem of freedom in the individual life. Freedom is a mystery, which, as everyone knows, has been discussed by philosophers and theologians through the ages. It seems to violate the principle of causality in nature, which is regarded as a presupposition of all science, and even of all knowledge.

We cannot, of course, embark here on any extended argument of this metaphysical problem. For our practical purpose, sufficient "proof" of freedom in human conduct is found in the fact that we raise the question and deliberate about it, and discuss it. Machines, we submit, do not bother, or argue among themselves, about the question whether they are machines, or beings with some freedom and responsibility. Human beings certainly *know*, more certainly than they know anything else, that they think and choose, and that it is the last word in contradiction for thinking to deny its own reality. One cannot say that one is not saying anything. Our conduct differs from purely mechanical process, ruled by cause and effect alone, in that we raise and answer questions, solve problems—with results which are more or less right or wrong.

In addition, everyone knows that conduct brings him into relations with other free persons, or selves, and that in these relations there is a difference between free association and coercion of one party by the other. The ultimate meaning of this contrast also is difficult to formulate; perhaps it is impossible to state it clearly in words, or even to form a satisfactory conception of it. But it is still literally undeniable. Again, the fact of discussion settles the matter. This article

is a case in point. I, the author, am not coerced to write what I write and the reader is free to read or not read and to agree or not to agree. (Please note that coercion includes all persuasion, of which the essence is deception, and because the victim is not conscious of it, persuasion is the most dangerous form.)

It will be noted that we have already brought in, or come in sight of, the conception of government by discussion. It is in our intellectual life that we find what is perhaps the highest level of free association, a kind of "ideal type" for democracy. However, there is not much "government" in it, though there obviously is some, in any organized discussion, hence any which involves more than a very few participants. A main aspect of our task of explaining or illuminating the nature of democracy as free government lies in bringing out the contrast between political and non-political association. Either type may present widely varying degrees of freedom or coercion, but freedom in government involves special difficulties and more serious limitations.

### *Freedom in the Evolutionary Scale*

We have found it necessary, for a starting point, to go back to mechanical process, where freedom and coercion have no meaning. Our "control" over the objects and processes of nature involves nothing of the nature of coercion or persuasion. It will be useful to think also of some of the changes which meet the eye as we contemplate the ascending scale of living forms. Even plants, to which we do not impute consciousness or intelligence, seem in a way to solve problems, to be adaptive or purposive; and problem-solving is the essence of free activity. But of more concern for the argument is the life of *social animals*. These are best exemplified in the elaborately differentiated and organized "colonies" of some insects,

notably termites, and in a lesser degree, in the bees and wasps. The contrast between insect society and human society helps to bring out the nature of the latter. In a wasp's nest or termite colony there is highly organized behavior, hence "law and order" in a real sense. But since the behavior is instinctive, not intelligent, and from our point of view entirely mechanical, there is still neither freedom nor coercion, but only causality. Apart from the sense in which this is true of plant forms, the members of an insect community do not solve problems, either individual or social. Their behavior does not involve effort, or error.

It is of course the solution of social problems which is significant for our problem of democracy, but the crucial point is that the two sorts of problem solving, the individual and the social, are by no means inseparable. In contrast with such organized social life as that of the termites, the life of what we call the "higher" animals, and especially the higher vertebrates, is not socially organized, but quite individualistic. Even life in herds may involve relatively little organization. However, these species, especially those most closely related to man, are unquestionably intelligent, as bees and termites are not. The apes in particular show much capacity to solve problems of a considerable degree of intricacy. But they are purely individual and purely instrumental problems. Animals do not "discuss," and thus reach a group decision on group action, nor even individually deliberate about "ideals." From an evolutionary point of view, it is a very interesting fact that intelligence and social life evolved separately, in different branches of the animal kingdom, widely separated in biological characteristics, and in order and time of appearance, and that of the two, socialization appeared earlier and lower in the scale. It is as if nature's first effort to produce intelligent association—and that development of individual intelligence which is impossible without association—had first ended in

failure in the insects, as if it had been found impossible to add intelligence to socialization on an *instinctive* basis. It was necessary to make a fresh start, and develop a considerable degree of intelligence in species living individualistic lives, and then "socialize" such creatures, and on this foundation to go on with the process of developing life on the pattern represented by man.

The distinctive character of human life is that it is both intelligent and social, with the two features inseparably connected. It is intelligently social and socially intelligent. To carry on the mode of life which we call human, i.e., to be human, men must solve problems, both individually and socially. In fact, very little if any, of the pattern, order, or "law" which is characteristic of human life seems to be instinctive, in the proper sense of the word. It is doubtful whether man is instinctively social, his urge or drive to association is so vague and inconsistent. The familiar adage that he is "naturally" a social (or political) animal is misleading. In sharp contrast with insect society, in which there is relatively perfect "law and order," but neither courts nor legislature, human society must in large part both enforce and make its "law." And it does both very imperfectly indeed! It is permeated with immorality, criminality, conflict and disorder, and would surely seem intolerably anarchic to a termite with intelligence enough to judge. Man is a social *being*; but his sociality is bound up with individuality, in a sense absolutely foreign to the "individual" member of an animal society. The latter is in a position more like that of a cell in an organism than that of either a citizen of a democracy or the subject of a despotism.

On the other hand, it is equally important that man is only to a limited extent intelligently social. For the most part, comparatively speaking, the organization pattern of any human society at any given time, and the forces or "laws" which

govern it, belong to an intermediate category, between instinct and intelligence. They are a matter of custom, tradition, or institutions. Such laws are transmitted in society, and acquired by the individual, through relatively effortless and even unconscious imitation, and conformity with them by any mature individual at any time is a matter of "habit." Traditionalism was significant for evolution through greater flexibility, in comparison with instinct biologically transmitted. In so far as social life is a thing of custom and institutions, it is still "mechanical." It is not intelligent, and hence, like insect society, it involves neither freedom nor coercion. It becomes different, distinctively human, only as men become critically aware of their institutions, and deliberate, choose, and act with regard to their modification or preservation.

However, it is not at all certain whether this idea of men "becoming" conscious of behavior patterns already existing is historically valid or not. We do not know, and probably never can know, how human social life developed, particularly the comparative roles of gradual and more or less unconscious institutional change or drift on one hand, and violent struggle and ruthless domination on the other. No doubt both played a large part; but we cannot here concern ourselves with this speculative problem.<sup>1</sup> We do know that in present and historical human society men are more or less clearly aware of established patterns of action, often designated by the general term "usages"; and they have many different attitudes toward these usages, in different types of cases. Of many we are practically unconscious, while others are simply "there," and are taken for granted. We do not ask how they came into existence—unless we are anthropologists—and we conform habitually

<sup>1</sup> It is quite clear that despotism, deeply grounded in religion, was the first form under which human beings achieved reasonably effective organization on a large scale. Apart from extremely small and primitive communities, democracy, where it has existed, has always been established by a revolutionary overthrow of tyranny.

and more or less unconsciously, with no thought of what would happen to us if we did not. In other cases, we are conscious of a problem; we want to conform and know that we should feel much "embarrassed" if we ignorantly or inadvertently failed to do so, though no punishment would follow, except our own feelings—or that other people might be amused, or feel sorry for us. It is an open question whether the notions of freedom and coercion are meaningful in this connection.

But there are other "laws" which we know to be coupled with explicit provisions for enforcement through some penalty or punishment inflicted on those who break them, either by the group, as in some primitive communities, or by individuals acting as agents of "society," organized in the form or body which we call government or the state. Even most of these laws "we" would also obey as a matter of course—though there are some who would not! We should obey, either because the conduct prescribed is recognized as right, or merely because it is the law, and we recognize that it is right, and necessary, to be law-abiding.

In our attitude toward still other laws, the question of their actual content is closely associated with that of their source, or who "made" them, and how they came to be made. In some cases, we may think the law wrong, and conform only to escape the penalty, or may "take a chance" and not conform, or may even openly and publicly defy the law and the agencies of enforcement. (It is an important fact that laws practically cannot be changed without first being "broken.")

In thinking about law and government we inevitably form the notion of an ideal state, as (a) one in which no coercion would exist except in accord with law and (b) one where all law would be "right," and recognized as such by all right-thinking men. Hence, coercion would apply only to men who were not right-thinking, because of either incompetence or an

immoral attitude. This definition of the ideal state does not logically imply democracy as a form of government, in the usual understanding of that term (and on the other hand democracy is conceivable, or is commonly thought to be conceivable, without law). Democracy as the ideal form of the state rests on two further considerations, which are familiar to all who have given much thought to the problems. The first of these is the instrumental consideration that democratic political institutions are believed to be the surest and best way, if not the only way, to secure that the laws, including procedures of enforcement, will be "right," or will come closest to conformity with this ideal. (Hence the relation mentioned above between right law and law made in the right way.) The second consideration is an intrinsic or "absolute" value judgment; it is held to be inherently right that men should themselves make the laws under which they live. In the familiar phrase, *free* government may be considered more important than *good* government—within some limits, and assuming that the two may conflict and that a choice must be made between them.

### *Freedom as an Ideal: The Meaning of Human Living*

One general difficulty connected with defining democracy lies in the fact that it is inherently and so largely a matter of degree, both as a reality and as a normative ideal, as well as highly diverse in kind. In its ultimate meaning, democracy is simply the fact of consciously intelligent group life, or group action. Democracy consists in the fact that the individual *members of any group* recognize themselves and each other as a group, which faces group problems, and that they consciously act as a group in solving these problems. One of the first difficulties is that what we may call the pure abstract

idea of democracy, or democratic group life, does not necessarily have any necessary logical implication about either government or "law," either law enforcement or law making—while the concept of government may also be separated from that of law. Ultimately, to repeat, democracy is simply group action, the decision of group questions by group process. It is practically identical with discussion, the intellectual-cooperative quest of right answers to questions. Right answers are known by the fact of agreement that they are such. Hence the very notion of a "right" answer implies some society, and social recognition of truth or norms which have "validity," in contrast with merely individual opinion or preference. The intellectual life appears again as virtually the pure ideal of democracy, or *free* group life. Truth is established only by discussion, in the absence of *coercion*, either by individuals in their private capacity or in the exercise of authority, *or by any majority*. An opinion really is not an opinion at all unless it is "freely" adopted and held, on grounds of intellectual conviction. Coercion also includes "persuasion," in the distinctive and proper meaning of that term, the core of which is deception (recognizing that any form of coercion may proceed from benevolent motives).

Putting these considerations together, the ultimate nature of democracy is simply that of *human* life. Men cannot live, as human beings, outside of *free* society, outside of association based on free agreement as to the nature of the society (meaning its constitution and laws) and its activities, and free agreement and disagreement within this framework. On the *other hand*, the human type of association implies *differences, conflicts*, which always combine conflict of interest and difference of opinion. Mental life seems to be relative to such differences; there is no conscious interest apart from conflict of interest and no opinion apart from difference of opinion, and these two aspects of mental life are inseparable. On one

hand, it is only in the form of differences of opinion that conflicts of interest are subject to discussion. Only "rights" can be discussed, not mere individual or subjective wants, which can only be asserted—and fought over! On the other hand men seem naturally to convert any feeling of interest which encounters opposition into an opinion that it is a "right." But to have any social (hence any human) life, men have to recognize the necessity and the possibility of reaching agreement through a social-intellectual activity or process. If they do not have some sphere of freedom, but are completely coerced, they are not men; and they cannot "agree to disagree," and go their separate ways "in peace" without destroying all society and human life itself. A "Crusoe" existence is possible only to an individual previously brought up in society. (But of course no tyranny can possibly suppress all freedom, individual or associative.)

### *Maximum Freedom*

The principle of democracy as an ideal means that freedom is ethically good and coercion, evil—or that life is good in being human life—whether the coercion is practiced by one individual or one group over another, or by the majority in any organization over the minority.<sup>2</sup> It means that any interference in individual freedom, including mutually free relationships between individuals, even by the most ideally democratic government, is to be justified only on the ground that it increases total freedom, immediately or in the long run. This doctrine of *maximum liberty* is ultimately a deduction

<sup>2</sup> The most serious general problem in the practice of political democracy is that of the limits of majority rule. Some balance must be struck between complete individual irresponsibility and caprice—which, since men will not in fact agree spontaneously and unanimously, would exclude order and efficiency, if not peace itself—at one extreme, and the right of the majority to enslave any minority at the other.

from the principle already announced, that free discussion is the only method by which differences of opinion are settled "rightly," or any problem really solved. Either statement must stand as a moral axiom accepted as such in modern thought. The contrary principle, the alternative axiom, would be that it is intrinsically good for men to "obey" in belief and action, rather than to act as free agents. But a duty or ideal of obedience implies someone in the opposite role, to be obeyed. That is, it implies the division of the population into two classes—castes in the most extreme sense—born or called in some supernatural way to the respective rôles of authority and servitude. Such notions have indeed been accepted and believed in, at various times and places in human history, but in our modern world they no longer command respect.

The ethical ideals of modern Western man are not ascetic, or quietistic, or monastic. We, as modern men, believe (as we assume here) in material well-being, not poverty, as the basis of the good life. Moreover, our ideal of life is active, progressive, and individualistic, or libertarian, as against "community" in any mystical sense. We believe that personal relations should be on the basis of mutual respect and mutual consent, which carries a presumption of mutual advantage, and that association should be restricted within these limits. Freedom to refuse association, including cooperation, on any terms on which either may be offered, takes precedence over any conflicting "right." We believe in freedom of opportunity, and especially in freedom of the individual to get ahead, or improve his position, by his own efforts and means. We believe in freedom not only on the utilitarian ground that it is the best provision for efficiency and progress, but also for two further and deeper and more serious reasons. First, it is assumed that the typical human being, and specifically the man of intelligence and good will, desires to be free, to live

responsibly, "stand on his own feet" and to "play his own hand," even at some possible material cost. And second, freedom is held to be an ideal value, a thing which men ought to want, even if they do not; it is an unquestioned principle of modern law and politics that an individual does not have the privilege of selling or contracting himself into servitude, either by error, or if he should deliberately choose to do so.

To be sure, none of these principles is to be taken in an "absolute" sense. Within limits, modern society recognizes the necessity of protecting individuals against themselves, against their own incompetence or prejudice. And individuals are given many rights or valid claims, both against others and against society as a whole—notably the right to education and to assistance or relief when in distress, either as a result of some calamity, or because of incompetence. Modern individualism does not mean antinomian anarchism! Moreover, it does not mean that each individual must always decide every question for himself, even within the limits of the law. He need not, for example, be his own physician when ill; he may consult with, and in a sense place himself under the orders, and even temporarily under the power, of an expert or specialist in the field of any particular type of problem. In this connection, individualism means a reasonable degree of freedom in choosing one's own physician, or other expert consultant—though even the most democratic states find it necessary to enforce some limits on the freedom of individuals to set themselves up as experts, or to advise and prescribe for others, in matters where special competence is obviously called for. The *primary* function of government is to *prevent coercion* and so guarantee to every man the right to live his own life on terms of *free* association with his fellows.

In the actual working of democracy, the activities of government itself are recognized to be tasks for individuals with special competence and special training. This means that

in the making of laws, but more especially in their interpretation and application, the personnel of government at any moment, and particularly individuals in key positions, necessarily have considerable discretionary power. And it means that the concrete problems which are put up to the electorate take the form primarily of choosing officials, on the basis of their competence to decide special issues, or even more remotely, of their competence to select and appoint the officials who actually make concrete decisions. Only a limited number of questions of policy, and those typically in very general form, can possibly be decided directly by the people, in any election, and then chiefly by the selection of agents whose integrity and judgment must be trusted, within wide limits, in carrying out the verdict of the people, always meaning some "putative" majority. Government becomes highly "indirect," as to the content of legislation, as well as its interpretation and enforcement.

### *The Government and the State: Its "Just Powers"*

Turning to the problem of government as such, we must retrace our steps a little. We go back to the observation made a few pages back, that the pure abstract conception of democracy, as exemplified in the intellectual life, does not of logical necessity carry the meaning either of group *action* or of *government*. And moreover, action or government, by discussion, does not necessarily imply law, i.e., any established or enduring pattern of action. It is doubtful whether it is actually possible to form a realistic conception of group life without some more or less stable constitution and laws, though men have thought that they formed the concept and even believed in it as a working ideal for society; the position has a name, antinomian anarchism, or simply antinomianism.

In any event, the notion of government, implying a constitution and laws, and generally law enforcement and law making, is far broader and more inclusive than the notion of the state. Reflection makes it clear that any group with any degree of permanence or stability whatever has some government in this sense. This is really true in some degree even of a casual social gathering or conversational group. And in proportion as any group has permanence and stability, it must have government (since men do not agree unanimously) and must exercise a degree of coercion over its members, depending on the amount of disagreement, and limited by their freedom to quit the organization. And more or less in proportion to the size of any group, the coercion exercised inevitably takes a more or less personal form, through the specialization of particular individuals for the functions of law enforcement, or law making, or both.

The difference between other societies or organizations and the "state" is ultimately one of degree. It is a matter of the degree of "compulsion" upon the individual to belong to the organization, or of his freedom not to belong. Yet the difference in degree is very important. The main peculiarity of the state as a society, among forms of organization, is that an individual has categorically less freedom and power of choice as to whether he will belong to it or not. He is not only born into some particular state—that is also true of other societies, notably churches and political parties; but in practice it is typically "impossible," or nearly so, for him to cease to be a member of the state in which he is born. This is a consequence, in the first place, of the fact that the state, in the modern sense, is based on "territorial sovereignty." Considerable organization on the territorial basis is virtually inevitable, since those who live near each other have, in consequence of that fact, a wide range of common problems. But the actual division of the world into states, and provinces,

etc., with definite boundary lines, is of course largely the result of "brute force and accident," in the course of past history.

The existence of territorial states inherently sets narrow limits to the freedom of the individual. At most, he might have some freedom of choice among the different states, or jurisdictions, among which the habitable earth has happened to be divided up. But in addition, the states themselves have for the most part refused to recognize, or have destroyed, even "legal" freedom to transfer membership. (The qualifications which would obviously be called for are not in point in a brief survey.) These facts make the "sovereignty" of the state so different in degree from the coercive power or authority of any other organization that it amounts to a difference in kind. The state has virtually absolute power over the individual, except as it is limited, especially with respect to new measures, by *moral forces* (and other associations) and the fear of arousing revolt. At the same time, every state, considered as a "society," has inherited from the past a vast mass of law, and the conditions of modern life require constant and rapid growth in the volume of law. (Large scale technology is of course one of the main "conditions" referred to, but the matter cannot be taken up here.)

It is now possible to see what we must mean by democracy in relation to the state, or free government. A perfectly democratic state, as already observed, is one in which, first, there is no coercion except by authority of law and according to law, all other coercion being prevented by legal process; and second, the law itself is in accord with what *normal*, right-thinking men consider to be right. And we must add, and emphasize, that men must consider the whole body of law to be "necessary," as a condition of its being right. For law is coercive, and being a restriction of individual freedom, largely by the will of others, it is justified only when it really

adds more to freedom in some way than it directly subtracts. Modern man does not believe that any existing law was supernaturally ordained, or that any living law-maker has divine authority. All law, therefore, is regarded as created or maintained by human agency; and the only condition under which law can be right is that it is made and enforced through some political machinery or organization by which the general consensus and will of the people as a whole is constantly embodied in law, through legislation adding to or subtracting from the existing body of law, or reformulating it. Consequently, where there is any serious difference of opinion as to any rule, liberty must prevail; no man or group of men, and specifically no majority, has a right to make law which binds others, beyond a substantial consensus that the rule in question is right and is necessary to the general good.

### *The Limited Significance of Political Forms*

We are now ready, at last, to consider the specific subject of our study, the political and economic structure of democracy, in relation to the ideal. The political side can be quickly disposed of. A modern democratic society will typically present an almost infinite complexity of organization, with the greatest diversity from one state to another. We tend to think of "the state" as the national government. But on one side, the sovereignty of the state is limited by at least some formal and informal framework of international order or law. And on the other side, sovereignty is split up internally among jurisdictions in a more or less hierarchical order, such as "states" or provinces, counties, municipalities, and smaller local units. The concrete pattern of this organization may be indefinitely varied, and may change in any way in a given "country" from time to time, without significantly affecting the degree of approximation to ideal democracy. The only requirement

in this connection is that the frame of government or constitution itself shall be in accord with the general wishes of the people, that it shall not be forced on any major fraction of the (non-criminal and mentally competent) population against their will. The form of government might be "absolute" monarchy, without violating the requirements of democracy, provided the "people" have effective freedom to change the monarch, or the constitution, at will. In practice, to be sure, this is hardly conceivable apart from some electoral machinery which is maintained by being more or less regularly called into use.

What is essential to democracy, then, is little more than this: that there be a real "will of the people," or public opinion, i.e., that there be a general consensus among the people on fundamental ideals or values, and on the major problems and issues confronting the society. If such a consensus exists, the form of governmental organization is *relatively* unimportant. Under this condition it is in the first place so unlikely as to be virtually impossible that the personnel of the government itself will desire to act contrary to the public will in any important way or degree. For the individuals who administer the government are members of the same society; they have their own opinions, and norms, molded in the first place, from childhood, by the same cultural influences or forces; and they associate, on duty and off, with ordinary citizens, and hence are certain to be continuously responsive in the same general way to changes of any sort which produce changes in the public opinion or will. In the second place, even if we assume, by a stretch of imagination, that the various officials of the government should be sufficiently united among themselves on a policy contrary to public opinion, and disposed to carry it out by force, they could hardly expect to be successful in doing so against a reasonably strong and unified public disposition to the contrary.

Of course these statements must not be interpreted in an extreme sense, particularly in view of the fact that governments constantly have to decide issues of varying degrees of importance with respect to which the public at large cannot have adequate information or even a substantially unanimous opinion and desire. It is by no means to be inferred that the machinery of government is a matter of little consequence. But its importance is much greater in connection with the formation of public opinion than in connection with conformity to it when formed, more important in connection with leading than with following. And in connection with freedom vs. despotism, the problem of form is vital chiefly for the maintenance of a dictatorship already established. It is still difficult to imagine a dictatorship replacing democracy in the face of any reasonably unified democratic will opposed to this eventuality. Apart from the unlikelihood of any conspiracy being able to control the army and the police, there are too many unofficial organizations with power to paralyze the activities of government, such as labor unions, churches, and various associations representing powerful interests.

### *Freedom and Economic Organization*

The second aspect of our subject, the economic organization, or structure of democracy, brings us to the zone from which danger threatens. The great bulk of the issues discussed in modern political life, and dealt with by government, whether by the national government or some other political unit, are economic, in the broad sense of the term. Historically, democracy in the modern sense arose out of a successful struggle for the two main forms of freedom or individual liberty, namely, economic and religious.

These two struggles for individual liberty were closely interrelated, but the latter does not concern us here, since the

religious structure of democracy is not included in our topic. We assume, as a matter of course, religious freedom, with complete separation of church and state. We may note that this issue was considered to be settled, at least in America, practically from the beginning of our national life. The issue of economic individualism was never settled at all so completely; but the main difference is rather that it would not "stay settled." Progress of *laissez-faire* individualism aroused increasing opposition, almost from the beginning of the movement, in that direction, both on the part of interests or classes, notably wage earners, which felt themselves disadvantaged, and in society at large, on moral grounds. It should be noted however that under present conditions the issue of religious freedom also tends to be revived, even in our own country; and it is doubtful whether any closely planned and controlled economic organization would or could do without some religious basis, or practice *complete* religious toleration.

What can be said about the form of economic organization is essentially a particular application of the more general political principle that democracy implies maximum individual liberty in all fields of action. Where interests conflict, the freedom of the individual must be limited by the free consent of other individuals affected by his actions. Relations of economic cooperation present in a somewhat special degree—or at least in a peculiarly obvious form—the combination of harmony or mutuality, and conflict of interest. The tremendous gain in the efficiency of action through association, and particularly through specialization and organization, forms a community of interest of great power. But the distribution of the fruits of collaboration, and the adjustment of the power relations which are necessarily involved, are potent sources of conflict. It is hardly a mystery that the major social problems arise in this field. But in this connection as elsewhere, the primary ethical principle is freedom, meaning mutual consent.

And the obvious meaning of mutual consent is free exchange, with each party in the position to deal with any other and hence to select the "other" who offers the best terms. Generalization of this relation yields the form of organization known as free enterprise, regulated by market competition.

The general theory of free enterprise, as set forth in any sound textbook or treatise on economics, shows that in such a system freedom for all is realized to the maximum possible degree—for given individuals. Under the "ideal conditions," described by general economic theory—corresponding in a general way to abstraction from friction in theoretical mechanics—the enterprise or market organization also leads to maximum productive efficiency. That is, both total product and the income of every individual are the largest that is possible with the available means and without uncompensated transfers—robbery or gift. The organization of the free market for goods and services is demonstrably the only possible way of combining effectiveness in cooperative production with individual freedom. It would, moreover, have to be employed by any socialistic state, even if totalitarian, communistic or fascistic, as the only feasible method of administering a large scale organization. But it would particularly be necessary for democratic socialism, concerned for the liberty of its citizens. Even in the most democratic organization, on the scale necessary to utilize modern technology, the voice of the individual in the government would be infinitesimal, and no compensation for regimentation in the affairs of every-day life.

However, this agreeable conclusion that freedom of the market leads automatically to both maximum liberty and maximum efficiency consistent with liberty, rests upon several "assumptions"—the theoretically ideal conditions—which must not be taken for granted in real life. (a) The individuals

must know their own interests and act intelligently in their own interest, but without exercising coercion of any kind—force or fraud or "over"-persuasion (i.e., any real persuasion, as distinguished from communication of facts). (b) Perfect competition must exist; resources and products must be minutely divisible, and there must be no monopolistic action, either by individuals in positions of power, or through collusion between individuals. (There is no "bargaining" in an effective market.) (c) Transactions between individuals must not substantially affect, either for good or for ill, other individuals whose interests are not represented.

Moreover, the ethical character of the results is subject to the further and vitally important reservation that in the mechanical operation of the economy, the individual is treated as "given," specifically in his three economic components. These are (1) his wants and (2) his productive capacity, which in turn comprises (2-a) personal endowments, original and acquired, and property owned and (2-b) technique, or knowledge of productive methods. The content of freedom is relative to what one wishes to do—and men's wants must be "right" as well as "rational" if the result of action is to be "good"—and is also dependent on the possession of *power* to act. In exchange relations, moreover, effective freedom requires power not too far inferior to that possessed by the other party to any transaction; hence general freedom implies some limitation on inequality. In any case, the individual cannot possibly be treated as given, in any realistic discussion of society or of social policy. For it is a simple fact, not merely that individual attributes are largely determined by social processes, but also that determining the character and endowments of the individual members of society is the supreme problem of social policy. It is particularly indefensible to treat economic performance as the measure of individual moral

desert, or of socially imperative income, in the case of dependent persons. The family is in many respects more real as a social economic unit than is the individual.

### ***Political Intervention in Economic Relations***

Every one of the mechanical conditions listed is likely to be more or less violated by the facts; and to that extent, there is occasion for intervention by the state or some other agency, without violating the principle of maximum freedom, but rather effecting its realization. In addition, as has always been recognized in liberal thought, social action is called for in many fields where the future of society as a whole is involved, or where the beneficiary at the moment is rather the community than a particular individual, and also where technical conditions facilitate monopoly or require "natural" monopoly. These mechanical considerations map a large area in which market competition needs to be supplemented or modified by other forms of relationship—legal compulsion, or public enterprise, or special forms of cooperation, or "charity."

There is no implication of *laissez faire*. If society is to remain free in the economic and other fields, it must in the first place act to maintain the general framework of free enterprise (miscalled "capitalism"). It must create and maintain the conditions of the free market. For one thing, this clearly means limiting the size of the bargaining unit—instead of encouraging the formation of interest groups with so much power that only the omnipotent state of totalitarianism can cope with them. (Much of what is currently preached as liberal doctrine leads straight to the destruction of liberty.) In the second place, the laws must allow sufficient incentive to induce free enterprise to venture and experiment. The actual amount can only be learned from experience, but the facts show that it has not been sufficient in recent years; and no

experimentation should be needed to show that the individual will not play the game if the government fixes the terms of risk-taking on the basis of "heads I win, tails you lose."

Again, liberals have always recognized that many fields are unsuited for private enterprise, at least in the complete sense, some because the conditions are those of natural monopoly, others for other reasons. (The importance of monopoly as an evil is enormously exaggerated in the popular mind—and the most serious monopolies are those created or fostered by the government itself.) Here, also, experience and the analysis of situations are necessary to show where it is best to draw the lines between private enterprise, public enterprise, and regulation. Society must also set limits, through relief measures, to the effects of unsuccessful competition on individual lives; especially it must constantly safeguard the oncoming generation.

Comparatively speaking, however, all these mechanical problems are simple. Infinitely more serious problems of social action arise in connection with the creation or formation of individuals to enjoy freedom—in economic relations as usually conceived, and in all relations. The older liberal thought undoubtedly erred in taking individuals too much for granted and viewing the social problems merely in terms of free relations between given individuals. (Our traditional Judeo-Christian religious ethics, promulgated under far more primitive conditions, no doubt contributed to this error.) Modern democracies have at least made a beginning in the way of facing the larger problems and have sought to provide, and to enforce, proper training and a reasonable start in life for the young. It needs emphasis that education for freedom involves a large moral factor; free men must somehow be taught to feel and to exercise responsibility. Probably limits will have to be set even to freedom of expression, for those who love to trouble the waters to make better fishing for

themselves, and regardless of whether such persons are self-seeking or well meaning but ignorant and romantic.

In spite of the difficulties, the writer must reemphasize the necessity of maintaining economic freedom, in the general form of free enterprise, as a condition and a prerequisite to other forms of freedom, as well as because economic activity, in the usual popular meaning, must be the main concern of the bulk of the population. Economic and other freedoms cannot be separated. The underlying reasons are not based on economic theory, which is rather on the other side, but are political, psychological, and moral. A very little examination of the political aspect of socialism will show that the difficulties of making competition work are multiplied many fold by throwing all the details of economic organization and management into the arena of politics. Reflection will also show that a government which controls the economic life of a modern nation must ruthlessly suppress opposition, and all conduct likely to lead to serious opposition. Hence it must suppress freedom of discussion and be a dictatorship. Even if the persons in power did not want this it would be necessary, to keep the machinery going and secure even minimum efficiency; and it is hardly imaginable that people who did not like power could get into the control positions.

### *Conclusions*

In conclusion: The political and economic structures of society are so closely interrelated that they are ultimately little more than aspects of the same organization. The problems or issues with which modern society has to deal arise predominantly in the field of economic life, and particularly in connection with the terms of economic association and co-operation. The main function of government in the modern world is to provide and enforce a framework of rules for

securing freedom, and the conditions necessary for effective freedom, in economic life. This means that either politics or economics can be regarded as a sub-division of the other. The ultimate ideals which must guide action are of course an ethical problem, and the fundamental requisite for democracy is a reasonable degree of consensus in the whole population as to the "right" meaning and character of life, individual and social. If this consensus exists, there is little danger that the society will be undemocratic in any large degree. And if it is absent, any large measure of democracy is impossible, and the eventuality will be either social disintegration or strife, perhaps war, between the proponents of different ideals—more or less closely associated with special interests—or finally, society may be held together and a kind of peace preserved through the establishment of dictatorship.

It follows that the ultimate task of society as a whole, and of government as the organization by which society acts as a unit, is to create such individuals, in such a total culture situation, that agreement on right ideals will be possible, and will be achieved, by nonpolitical processes. Finally, under modern conditions, and especially modern economic conditions, this is a task which no state or country can accomplish for itself alone; it is largely an "international" problem, or one for a world political order in some effective form.

## VIII

With reference to the relation between science and philosophy, the supremely important matter is the danger that social problems will be viewed exclusively or primarily in scientific terms, and effort be directed to solving them by "the scientific method." As we have seen, the nature and operations of science are instrumental and individualistic (or relative to the interests of a group taken as given). A "scientific" approach to the study of society, from the standpoint of action, proceeds on the assumption that the problem is one of finding the given properties of the "material" with a view to its manipulation and use for the purposes of the knower as manipulator. Apart from the question as to how far these purposes are likely to be wise and benevolent, this is the antithesis of the concept of democracy, or political freedom. And individual liberty must be the first principle of rational political ethics. It is a necessary requirement for complete human status to be a free judge of one's own interests and life-purposes and a free agent, possessing the necessary power, in promoting or realizing them. This may, of course, involve free consultation with others, under freedom to follow or reject their advice. And it is an implication of any public discussion of social problems (such as the present example) that they are "of right" to be solved by discussion, by all the parties concerned.

The contrary principle, of one-sided control, is justified only to the extent that those subject to it are explicitly denied the full status of human beings. That is, it is justified in the case of "infants" to be educated, or that of adults objectively determined to be antisocial or undeveloped and subject to re-education, and of any who require overt control to prevent their acting destructively.

In the social field the natural function of knowledge and thinking, in the scientific meaning, is either to give every

individual power over every other, which is a prescription for the war of all against all, or to give "the government," meaning some individual or group, power over the mass of the population. Even as a matter of correct definition, the social problem, as a problem for society as well as of society, is one of rational *consensus*, as to desirable change, not of *control* in the correct meaning of manipulation. The application of positive or instrumental categories by any subject to itself is a self-contradictory expression. As we have seen, science deals not with activity but with the given conditions of action. It is true that the determination of the existent in relation to the active in the individual and in society is one of the most baffling philosophical problems.

We may conclude by repeating two observations regarding the concept of "control," so commonly confused with the problem of social procedure. The first is that all "control" relations, in the proper meaning of the word, between human beings, are "ideally" immoral, though they may be necessary, and in that sense right, under the un-ideal conditions of real life, especially where biologically human units are real human individuals in variously limited degree. In the right view of the problem it is a matter not of control but of arriving at a rational consensus. Second, the knowledge used by any human being in controlling others, when his activities do take that form, rightly or wrongly, is descriptive and instrumental, and hence scientific, only in a highly abstract sense of the word. Positive knowledge of human beings is so different in origin and mode of application from the natural sciences, based on sense observation and used to manipulate inert things, that it seems more confusing than helpful to use the same word—"science"—to refer to both.

## IX

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*Fact and Value  
in Social Science*

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## I

**T**he problem of method or procedure in the social sciences is raised and emphasized especially by their failure to parallel the modern achievements of the natural sciences, either in startling discoveries of truths unsuspected by commonsense, or especially, in laying the basis of techniques for transforming the character of life. This paper is an investigation of the reasons for this "failure"—or of the question whether it is correct to apply the term.

The position to be taken is, in the first place, that because of fundamental differences in the subject matter, and especially in the nature of the problems, in the two fields, no such revolutionary results were or are possible, in the nature of the case. Consequently, in the second place, the great need of the hour in the social science field as a whole is for an understanding of the nature of the material, the problems and

the possibilities. Only on the basis of such an understanding can we expect so to define our concepts and choose our methods as to avoid not merely waste of energy, but the production of consequences which are positively evil. In the field of social policy, the pernicious notion of instrumentalism, resting on the claim or assumption of a parallelism between social and natural science, is actually one of the most serious of the sources of danger which threaten destruction to the values of what we have called civilization. Any such conception as social engineering or social technology has meaning only in relation to the activities of a super-dictatorship, a government which would own as well as rule society at large, and would use it for the purposes of the governors.

In the social field, as elsewhere, knowledge is wanted both for its own sake and for use in the guidance of action. It is a serious reflection that the unsatisfactory state of affairs in social science has largely resulted from the very progress of science, the revolutionary development of techniques for acquiring knowledge, and applying knowledge, which is an outstanding feature and achievement of civilization in our own and recent time. It becomes the primary function of a discussion such as this to contend against the twofold fallacy which has been current, if not predominant, in social science circles. The root fallacy is that social science should be or can be a science in the same sense as the natural sciences in which the revolution referred to has occurred. It is argued that the problems of pure science on the one hand, and those of its application to life on the other, are to be solved by carrying over into the study of society the methods and techniques which have led to the celebrated triumphal march of science in the study of nature and the application of scientific knowledge of nature in technology. In other words, the philosophical basis of social science is held to be positivism, with respect to pure science, and instrumentalism or prag-

matism when considered with reference to application in action.

In this connection in particular—more or less characteristically for social problems in so far as they can be solved—it would seem that a clear statement of the issue ought to be sufficient to resolve it definitively. It ought to be obvious that the relation of knowledge to action cannot be the same or closely similar, nor can knowledge itself, apart from the question of action, be at all the same, where the knower and the known are identical as where they are external to each other. In a genetic-historical view the fundamental revolution in outlook which represents the real beginning of modern natural science was the discovery that the inert objects of nature are not like men, i. e., subject to persuasion, exhortation, coercion, deception, etc., but are “inexorable.” The position which we have to combat seems to rest upon an inference, characteristically drawn by the “best minds” of our race, that since natural objects are not like men, men must be like natural objects. The history of British-American social thought in modern times is particularly interesting in this connection. In general, it has represented the combination mentioned, of positivism and pragmatism—two philosophical positions with respect to the nature of man and his place in the cosmos, and specifically with respect to social action, which are at once contradictory between themselves, and equally indefensible as a basis of social action. For man, conceived in positivistic terms, could not act at all; and conceived in pragmatic terms, he could not act upon himself, which to do is in fact his most characteristic trait.

## II

A survey of the problem of method in the study of society will naturally begin with the point of view of pure science,

the achievement of knowledge and understanding without reference to any use to be made of them in action, and will then go on to consider the relations of science to action which, in one sense or another, are determinative in all fields, for theory as well as for practice.

The primary fact which limits the development of “science” in the strict “positive” meaning of the term, in the field of social phenomena, is the virtually infinite heterogeneity, and unpredictable variability in time, of the subject matter or data, i. e., human beings and their behavior, and social institutions. The basis of all science is classification, supplemented by the analysis and measurement of attributes, by which differences in kind are reduced to differences in quantity or degree. From the point of view of classification, chemistry is the ideal natural science, while from that of measurement, physics is similarly the ideal-type. With reference to classification, the mere naming of an “object” as a sample of a certain purified chemical conveys to an informed person most of the information that would ever be desired about that object. In contrast, the designation of an object as a “man,” or, say, a family, or a deliberative assembly, serves chiefly to raise questions. (Data of botany and animal biology range themselves along a scale between these two extremes.) The natural way of meeting such difficulties is subclassification; but this procedure soon runs into the familiar dilemma between size and homogeneity of statistical classes. Where individual objects or instances are highly unique, classification can only be crude.

The effort to analyze and measure—especially to find quantitative correlation between antecedent and consequent, which is the meaning of causality in science, encounters at the outset the difficulty that there simply is no real measurement of distinctively human or social data. It is doubtful whether these phenomena should even be called quantitative, so

different must be the meaning of the term from that which it has in connection with physically objective magnitudes or variables. Human and social phenomena unquestionably present differences of degree. But in the nature of the case these differences can only be estimated, not measured. The nature of measurement is illustrated by the simple case of thermometry. It is not men's feeling of temperature which is measured, but some physical phenomenon which, as we learn by a complicated theoretical analysis of experimental data, corresponds in some way to the feeling of heat and cold. But it does not correspond at all accurately, or measurement would not be called for, or would lose its meaning. What is called measurement in the social sciences, including psychology, is the averaging of estimates, and the use of the term measurement is a *misnomer*.

The difficulties of classification and measurement, amounting to impossibility, if the terms are to imply any high degree of objectivity and precision, suggests and indeed rests upon, the essential fact that the data with which social sciences are concerned are themselves not objective in the physical meaning—are not data of sense observation. They consist of meanings, opinions, attitudes and values, not of physical facts. It is these subjective data or facts which are at once social in nature and of interest, to scientific as well as to vulgar curiosity, and especially from the point of view of action. They constitute the "reality" into which it is the function of social sciences to inquire. To be sure, there is always some correspondence or parallelism with physical facts, but as the example of temperature is sufficient to suggest, the parallelism is of a sort which rather accentuates the difficulties and limitations of scientific procedure. Not merely is the correspondence crude and imperfect; in addition, there are two sets of physical facts involved, and they are not closely or quantitatively parallel between themselves. These

are respectively physiology and overt behavior. Expression and communication are generally included in the latter though only by something of a *tour de force*.

From the point of view of science, the situation presents a paradox; our difficulty is not so much the absence or inaccessibility of knowledge, but rather that we know too much. Knowledge of these subjective data has to be obtained through observation of overt behavior, or especially through intercommunication, doubtfully to be classed as observation. Hence the problem becomes primarily one of *interpretation*, the uncertainties of which are notorious. The *crux* of the matter is the relation between *motive* and action. And as suggested, we not merely know this relation very inadequately, but we *know*—at least as certainly as we know the nature of physical data themselves—that there is no close or simple relationship, as a matter of fact.

The expression of motive in action, and specifically in language, gesture, etc., is subject to error. Men do not even at all accurately know their own motives, but in "fact" act in part experimentally, to learn what they want, and also deliberately change their own motivation, as will be emphasized later. All this is in the nature of man as a knowing and acting entity, or as in part "free" or problem-solving. Thus motives are analogous to the "forces" of mechanistic science, but not parallel. There is no such strict and necessary correspondence between the "force" and its "effect" as there is where forces are known only by inference from their effects. Motives differ in being also known from other sources, *communication and interpretation*. Moreover, as we also know, men do not always try to express their motives to others at all accurately, either in communication or in overt action, but very often explicitly attempt to conceal or to deceive. The contrast between physical objects and such a choosing, struggling and scheming emotional and romantic entity hardly

needs explicit mention. The limitations in the use of physiological data as a source of knowledge of motivation, or of feelings and emotions as facts, or for the prediction of overt behavior, are equally familiar and call even less for elaboration. One need only think of this method of investigating the feeling of temperature.

### III

As soon as we look concretely and realistically at the problem of knowing about man and society, and specifically that of getting the knowledge we actually want, either for its own sake or in connection with action, we confront the simple fact that our subject matter has to be interpreted in terms of a highly pluralistic system of conceptions or categories. The root of the difficulty is that we know, and are interested in, man, in contrast with "nature," not merely or primarily as known and acted upon, but also and especially as knowing and acting. It is hardly mysterious that this contrast between man and nature as known, or the identity and mutuality of relation between man as knower and man as known, makes a profound difference in the activity and results of knowing. Men "exist," so to speak, in several different universes of reality, between which philosophy has so far built no adequate thought bridges, and does not seem to be in the way of doing so.

It is an indisputable fact that man is a physical object, a mechanism, and that the phenomena into which he enters are in considerable part to be explained by the same physical sciences which we use in interpreting inert objects. And just as indisputably, man is a biological organism, more specifically one of the "higher" animals. Hence he is also in part to be explained by the biological sciences, in their whole range from the lowest plant life to the most highly evolved animal

species. Of course this raises the issue whether unconscious biological phenomena might ultimately be explained as physical phenomena merely. The question cannot be argued here, beyond noting that biological science does constantly use teleological categories, such as struggle and adaptation, and that it is sheer dogmatism to assert that they could be reduced to purely physical or positive content.

Next, it is as indisputably a matter of "fact," in the inclusive sense, that man and human phenomena present characteristics which any discussion must and does recognize as sharply different from those of non-human biology. Man as investigated is, like man as investigator, a being who *thinks*, and who acts on the basis of thinking, who *solves problems* of many kinds, in a way which sharply differentiates him from any other organic species, and which we have to assume is not characteristic of inanimate nature at all. Other distinctions will be developed in the detail allowable, as we proceed. It should at once be clear that man is at the same time many different kinds of being or entity, which are not reducible to any one kind. The appeal of the contrary notion is readily explained. Man as intellectual inquirer is characterized by a craving for simplification and unification, for "monism" as against pluralism. And since "he" cannot deny that "man" is a physical being, this craving leads him to deny that he is anything else. And of course the "triumphal march" of physical science and technology, already mentioned, contributes largely to the strengthening of the prejudice. But why these considerations should actually lead men to accept knowledge of man as a physical being and deny to him the characteristics which he, the inquirer, exemplifies *even in denying them*, must remain in the status of mystery, as far as the present writer is concerned.

We enter upon the domain of social science when we name the next familiar distinguishing characteristic of man—that he

is a "social animal." But the social nature of man is utterly different from that of the animals which are properly and distinctively called social, such as the colonial insects. It is misleading to call man a social animal, since it is not as an animal that he is social. The social phenomena of the termite colony, for example, are based upon *instinct*, which positive science interprets as mechanism. Man is social as a feeling, knowing, thinking, desiring and acting *individual*. He is an individual in a sense categorically beyond the meaning the term has in any other connection. His social life must be interpreted in terms of individual interests and social interests, and especially in terms of *conflicts* of almost infinite complexity between diverse interests of both classes. Man, we repeat, is a *problem solver*; and the distinctive character of human society, from the point of view of the significance of knowledge for action, is that it presents problems, both to any society as such, and to the individuals who compose it, closely inter-related with their individual problems. In this respect, it presents a virtually absolute contrast with termite society—as far as we know, and as science must assume. And this characteristic, this fact, is vital for science, as description and interpretation, as well as in relation to action. These facts throw us back upon the notion of man as a motivated individual.

But the relation of priority between individual and society at the human level is a mutual one; each presupposes the other and this fact accentuates the complexity of the problems. Human society presents another fundamental aspect, with respect to which it is in one sense similar to animal society, but in another sense sharply contrasting. It is largely "institutional" (in Sumner's "crescive" sense) in its basis and character. In other words, human behavior, individual and social, is to a large extent "traditional." In this aspect, behavior is nondeliberative, not problem-solving, and is even largely unconscious, and mechanical, like the behavior of

termites. But the character of the mechanism is very different. It rests upon unconscious imitation. The "social inheritance" involved is distinct from the biological inheritance of instinct, and has played a vital role in human development.

Turning again to the individual, the analysis of human emotions, attitudes, motives, and rational nature cannot of course even be surveyed in this essay. But one important detail of such an analysis imperatively calls for notice. Still another element in the pluralism of human phenomena is found in the fact that man as an individual, in one of his aspects, at one of the levels at which he exists, deliberately uses means, to realize ends which are given or are simply "there," while at another level he also deliberates about ends. The "possession" of individual ends, and of means, and of more or less knowledge as to how to use means to realize given ends, are the factors which make up and define the "economic man"; or, they serve to define economic behavior—two ways of saying the same thing.

Two facts need the utmost emphasis. On the one hand, every conscious subject is an economic man, and behaves as such in every conscious act. Every activity involves the use of given means, in accord with given knowledge, to achieve ends which are given or factual in some sense and in some degree. This is true of play activity, individual and social, as well as of work, and of the intellectual, esthetic, moral, and even the religious activities, as well as of those which we think of as connected with "subsistence." (This term has practically no meaning in connection with civilized life, for all human motivation is relative to standards.) The pursuit of all ends alike is "expensive," meaning that it requires diversion of means or *power* from other uses. And in so far as any activity is rationally purposive, it presents the problem of "efficiency," or the economy of power. That is, man is impelled to use power in such a way as to achieve the

maximum possible realization of "ends-in-general," as given or desired, aggregated in terms of some common denominator of desiredness. (In all developed society, there is of course a conventional unit called money.)

The second fact referred to as calling for equal emphasis is that just as all activity is economic, none is purely or merely economic. For, while the three elements of economic behavior—means or resources, knowledge of their use, and ends for which they are used—may be taken as "given" for a given subject at any moment of action, in a larger view and a longer run they are not given, but changing; and the effecting of changes in them is commonly an essential and even a major factor in the motivation of the activity itself. This fact is especially important with regard to the "ends" of action. Under critical scrutiny, the given ends of action generally turn out to be not given, but themselves instrumental to *purposes*. And the essential character of purposes is not to be given or static, but to be inherently dynamic, progressive, looking toward indefinite growth in directions which are largely to be determined in action itself—action always including thinking.

#### IV

These facts serve in a way as a bridge between the points of view of science for its own sake and science as a basis for action, in the social field. On the one hand, if we are to tell the "truth" about man, the most important truth, or fact, is that he is a free or problem-solving entity or being, or in a word, is *active*. This means that his doings as behavior events are ultimately more or less indeterminate, and cannot even theoretically be exhaustively predicted or described in advance. It is abstractly possible to formulate "laws" which will fit any past behavior or course of events, to any desired degree of accuracy. But, as already observed, we *know* that man is

a deliberating and choosing subject, that human behavior differs from that of inert objects in that it involves effort and error, in a manifold sense. This fact of freedom is connected with and accounts for the peculiar heterogeneity and unpredictable variability in time already emphasized as factual characteristics of human phenomena. But the problem-solving characteristic has itself to be subdivided and considered at different "levels." We *know* again that men deliberate and choose with respect to the use of given means to realize given ends, and that they also deliberate about and choose ends.

Such deliberation or criticism of ends gives rise to many problems which cannot be explored here, but especially to the problem of valuation and of values. In all the folk-lore to which human thinking has given rise, in connection with human beings themselves, perhaps the most false and misleading single item is the common notion that men "know what they want," or that there is no arguing about tastes. It would surely be much nearer the truth to say that there is no arguing about anything else, or specifically about "facts." The principal thing that men actually want is to find out what they do really want; and the bulk of what they want, or think they want, is wanted because they think that in some sense they "ought" to do so, that it is "right." They "want" to be "in the right," in an infinite variety of meanings which cannot be explored here. (They also want to explore for the sake of exploring.) Such factors are at least as important for concrete motivation as is the achievement of any given end. This is another way of saying that the given ends are only provisionally given; ultimately they look beyond themselves to purposes, which have the antithetical character to givenness. And problem-solving and choice at this higher level are correspondingly important as a source of indeterminateness in the phenomenal sequence of human events.

The distinction between personal desire and value, or

“ought” in the most general sense, is one which is made by every human being, at practically every moment in his deliberative life, and most interestingly in the effort to prove a theory that the distinction has no validity, i.e., in maintaining “positive scientism” as a position. Very little critical analysis is sufficient to show that other values have the same objectivity as truth, including scientific fact. As soon as any question is raised, the problem of fact is one of evaluation, and truth itself is a value. The distinction between individual wish or opinion and truth as a form of validity—indeed the most fundamental imperative or “ought,” or “oughtness”—is presupposed in any serious utterance whatever (any but “conversation,” which is perhaps the greater part of all actual utterance!). To say that there is no distinction, no *validity* beyond individual acceptance as a state of mind, would be to say, “I am not saying anything”; and this is surely a contradiction, an absurdity and an impossibility far beyond the familiar example of A and not-A in formal logic.

These considerations serve, as already suggested, as a sort of bridge between individual and social phenomena and problems, and also between science for its own sake and science as a basis for action. For, to begin with, valuation is inherently a social activity, in contrast with individual motivation as simple desire. Values arise out of conflicts between interests, and out of reflection and discussion about these conflicts—the essential and distinctive feature of human social life, as already brought out. It is only as asserted *rights* that interests in conflict can be discussed or treated as a *joint* problem—in contrast with a problem for each of the parties in conflict of overcoming the other party by some kind of force. A value is the solution of such a problem. Values are established or validated and recognized through *discussion*, an activity which is at once social, intellectual, and creative. No discussion can be carried on in propositions beginning with the words “I want” or even “I think”—without further

implications which are their real meaning. And even these assertions themselves, in so far as they make any real sense, raise the question of their truth, which is a question of valuation, and one to be settled only by discussion as a social-intellectual-creative process. Truth is the fundamental type of value, and in an important sense includes all other values. For a “valid” valuation, in esthetics or morals (and in religion if that is recognized as a distinct category), takes the form of a “true” proposition. The *general nature of validity* is the same everywhere as in natural science itself, and the validity of valuation as a category should not call for discussion beyond “pointing” to any scientific discussion, or to what we are doing here and now, as an illustration.

This argument is fundamental for any “science” of human-social phenomena, apart from problems of action. Man is, in fact, a being who exists and behaves at all the levels indicated—to carry the process of making essential distinctions no farther than we have done. He is a mechanism, and a biological organism, and the “bearer” of a culture tradition. At all these levels, his behavior is to be described in terms of mechanism or scientific law, in one or another sense, the conception not being pressed too far. In addition, he is a being who solves problems in the sense of using means to realize ends. Even at this, the “economic” level, his behavior is not exhaustively describable in terms of science, for to assert that the solution of any problem, or result of any experiment or exploration, is given in advance is a denial of its character as a problem.

But man is also a problem-solving entity at the higher level of critical deliberation about ends, or free choice of ends on the basis of thinking, illustrated by the pursuit of truth. That is, he is a being who seeks, and in a real sense creates, values. The essential significance of this is the fact that man is interested in changing himself, even to changing the ultimate core of his being. This is the meaning of being active. It marks a categorical distinction between men and all other

objects of knowledge. We cannot be sure that other objects are not conscious, or even that they are devoid of will; but if they have any conscious will-attitude toward themselves it is limited, as far as we can tell, to the *perseverare in esse suo*. They do not strive to change their own nature or character—or indeed to “convert” fellow-members of their species; and in so far as scientific categories apply, they do not undergo change at all, in their ultimate nature. In contrast with natural objects—even with the higher animals—man is unique in that he is dissatisfied with himself; he is the discontented animal, the romantic, argumentative, aspiring animal. Consequently, his behavior can only in part be described by scientific principles or laws.

Even at the level of economism, scientific description applies only to “perfectly” economic behavior, which both abstracts from all forms of error and also relates to motives assumed as given, but these in fact cannot possibly be accurately known, even to the behaving subject himself. These facts invalidate the common effort to reduce the evaluating process from qualitative to quantitative form, to a matter of “maximizing” aggregate fulfillment of desire, even for the individual. And of course such a maximizing theory completely eliminates any “obligation” to consider the interests of another subject beyond the point where the first person may happen as a matter of fact to be interested in the other, to a degree which takes precedence over any more strictly individualistic interest. Any social science which does not take full account of problem-solving activity at both these levels simply ignores the most important facts about its material.

## V

We turn to explicit consideration of the relation between knowledge and action, and of knowledge as a basis of action.

It is in this connection especially that we encounter the categorical differences between social and natural science. The fact that there always is some relation between knowledge and action surely need not be argued or developed here, beyond noting, perhaps, that even the simplest experimentation is action, as is also all communication of knowledge in any form. Action may be instrumental to knowledge as well as conversely. Science itself, even, considered purely as an end, is a part of the social and socially purposive life of man. It is through intercommunication that most of any person's knowledge is gained, that all knowledge becomes objective by verification, and that the capacity for rational knowing is developed in the individual, or that it was developed in the race.

All action by man, including expression or communication, begins with action by a purposive subject, with a motive, on his, or its, own body; and its next link is the use of bodily changes to produce changes in the world outside one's own skin. It is through, or *via* changes in the physical world that one human individual acts upon, or communicates with, another. This is theoretically important especially because at virtually every step in any action, the physical processes involved consist essentially in the directed release of potential energy, and in such changes there is no quantitative relation between physical cause and physical effect. There is no minimum limit to the energy of a spark which sets off a conflagration and no maximum limit to that of the conflagration which it sets off. Hence, as far as physics is concerned, the degree of indeterminism needed for effective human freedom is infinitesimal and far beyond experimental detection.

The question of knowledge in relation to social action in the natural sense of “overt” action must be considered under two heads, action by man as an individual upon other individuals, and social action in relation to social problems.

With regard to the first, the essential mutuality of both the knowing and the acting relationship means that the procedure employed takes such forms as suggestion, persuasion, coercion, and especially deception—and beyond these the cultivation of affection and trust—or such forms as communication of information, the rendering of reciprocal favors, etc. None of these procedures has any meaning whatever in the relation of men to inert natural objects. (As usual, the animals, especially the “higher” species, are in an intermediate position.)

In the second place, action upon other individuals by any individual, or exercise of power over them, in so far as it takes the form or has the meaning of a one-sided manipulation and use of them, is regarded, in modern free individualistic culture, as the essence of immorality. And this moral judgment is at least closely connected with the “fact” that the consequences of violating the principle may be expected to be undesirable to the actor himself. Even where the action is performed on behalf of the party acted upon, serious questions are involved: first, as to the validity of the altruistic interest, and even more as to the presumption of knowledge of the other’s interests superior to that of the other himself. And if the relationship is not ultimately mutual—as, e.g., between the doctor and patient—the person acted upon is at least treated as an inferior type of being, not as a human in the full sense (e.g., treatment of criminals, children and the incompetent).

## VI

We come finally to the most important consideration of all, that of social action proper. After all the introducing that has seemed necessary, this must be disposed of so briefly that the treatment may well seem dogmatic. But it surely ought to be

evident that social action is not a problem of manipulation of an inert object-matter, by any subject, and hence is not one of “technique” in the proper sense of the word. That is, instrumentalist categories do not apply. In social action—action by any group, as a group—the really social activity, the solution of a social or group problem, consists in the establishment of agreement or consensus among the individuals who make up the group, as to what action is desirable. Consequently, the process is essentially that of *discussion of values*, the nature of which has already been suggested. Indeed, social action is not merely of the same form as the pursuit of truth, but that is always its essential character. To refer again to the former illustration, social action is what we, the parties to this discussion, are doing, here and now.

Social action in the proper sense is the solution of a social or group problem. With reference to overt action, which is to say, in the field of politics in the broad sense, it consists in reaching a decision in and by the group in question, upon the desirability of some change in its own character as a group. Agreement as a quest presupposes a question, a conflict of interest, a difference of opinion, and an objectively right answer (or at least a better rather than a worse answer) to be found by joint intellectual inquiry. More concretely, a social problem always has the content as well as the form of changing the “laws” in which the character of a group as a group is formulated and contained. In practice, social change is usually carried out by voting upon general objectives of policy and delegating individuals as agents of the group to formulate and to enforce specific laws. Thus all concrete action is carried out by individuals—apart from mob or lynch law, more or less characteristic at primitive levels. But in so far as the action is really on behalf of the group these agents are “responsible” to the latter. Social action always looks forward to embodiment in new institutional patterns or to culture

change, and to related changes in the nature of the individuals who make up the group. It is a matter of group self-change, an activity even more remote from technical or instrumental intelligence, not to mention mechanical process, than is individual self-change—and the notions of social mind and social will and choice are correspondingly more repugnant to the reducing and simplistic proclivities of our minds.

The little that can be said, i.e., stated in intelligible and unambiguous verbal propositions, about "method" in this field of value creation and self-change is vague and tenuous at best, and the meaning of essential terms is more or less figurative rather than literal. This is apparent in the literature of "criticism," in all the fields of value. It is especially clear in esthetics and ethics; but it applies also to "logic," including science itself, when it goes beyond the mechanical and more or less commonplace into issues which are really problematic. The problems of discussion or criticism or value creation by group intelligence cannot be taken up here. That is the task of philosophy, not of social science or its methodology. But social science must recognize and emphasize the reality of group action as well as individual action, and must attempt to say what can be said about it in terms of generalized description. Hence there can be no clear line between social science and philosophy. (In fact there is no clear line between natural science and its methodology, for at the growing point, where the really acute problems lie, these are essentially methodological and evaluative.)

These considerations would naturally lead into a discussion of the various positive—or more or less strictly and purely positive—social sciences, as sciences and in their relation to action, individual as well as social. Within the limits of this essay it is possible only to touch upon the problems raised. Discussion would re-emphasize the pluralism of categories required in the realistic treatment of human-social subject

matter. The foregoing argument has shown that man must be described in terms of at least a half-dozen fundamental kinds of entity or being. He is (a) a physical mechanism; (b) a biological organism, with characteristics extending from those of the lowest plant to the highest animal in the biological scale; (c) a social animal in the traditional-institutional sense; (d) a problem-solving individual in the economic sense, an economic man; (e) a problem solver at the higher level of critical deliberation about ends; (f) a social being in the sense of the free association of individuals with characteristics (d) and (e). (He may also be to some extent a social animal, in the proper instinctive sense; but, if so, it is to such a limited degree that for present purposes it may be left out of account.)

It is evident that at least the first three of these types of existence can each be the subject matter of a distinct positive science or group of such sciences. And these sciences have already been more or less extensively developed. We do have more or less distinctively human physics and chemistry, human biology, and institutional science, sociology, or cultural anthropology. And of the last, in particular, there are many branches, including institutional economics and descriptive ethics and esthetics. Each of these sciences deals descriptively with an aspect of human phenomena which is isolated and treated in the positive terms of "uniformities of coexistence and sequence," on the general pattern of a natural science. At least one further distinction must be made—a fourth type of scientifically describable form of existence recognized. Consciousness is not necessarily or always active, deliberative, or problem-solving. And to the extent that it is not of this character but is merely phenomenal (or epiphenomenal), it is possible, in theory (and more or less so actually) to describe consciousness in positive categories. Such description is the task and subject matter of another highly developed science—that of psychology—in the meaning indicated by the statement,

which is its original and proper meaning, in distinction from various special physical and biological sciences such as neurology, physiology, and "behaviorology."

It is also evident that all these sciences must in a sense take account of the social nature of man. Yet they are not social sciences, with the exception of culture anthropology. This is in a sense *the* science of society, if the word is restricted, as far as the subject matter allows, to the category of a natural or positive science. It will naturally be subdivided along the lines of the major distinguishable branches or aspects of cultural life, such as language, law, religion, technology, economic organization, social usage and recreation. But it should hardly be necessary to emphasize that the content of culture anthropology as a positive science—namely, institutions—is not learned like natural science data through sense observation merely, but primarily through intercommunication and interpretation. In consequence, the results must be far less definite and precise than those of natural sciences, particularly with respect to the vagueness of classification and the absence of real measurement already emphasized. And the science can have no direct significance for social action in the society of the scientist himself; for if it results in such action, its conclusions are no longer true. It does, however, need to be emphasized that the phenomena of our own society are very largely of the traditional institutional character, and this must be true of any society which is even intellectually conceivable, just as any real or possible society must involve human beings in all other "lower" aspects. The study of these phenomena may itself bring them above the threshold of social awareness and make them problems of social action.

A few words are called for regarding economics, at least as to the existence of a purely deductive quasi-mathematical science of theoretical economics or economic theory, in addition to the description of economic behavior patterns as

institutional phenomena, already mentioned as a subdivision of culture anthropology. Economic theory as a branch of knowledge and inquiry deals with two main topics. The first is the abstract principles of individual behavior oriented to the maximizing of "want-satisfaction" through the correct allocation of limited given means among alternative modes of use. The second is the principles of *organization* of economic activity through the free exchange of services (or "goods" as the embodiment of future services) between individuals, giving rise to markets, and to the theory of the perfect market. Economic theory assumes—because it is an indisputable fact—that men do economize, and that economy is an ideal only partly realized in fact. They strive more or less successfully to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of means in realizing given ends. But these facts are and can be known only intuitively; they cannot be verified or established by sense-observation, as even the principles of mathematics can be—within the limits of accuracy and generality set by the labor and expense required.

The methodology, or logic, of various social sciences, in the abstract, and as far as they go as positive sciences, is not essentially different from that of the natural sciences, including that various mixtures of inductive and deductive procedure which these present. The main difference, as already noted, is in the large degree to which sense observation is replaced by intercommunication and interpretation. The relevance of the positive, or quasi-positive, social sciences for action, is essentially that of revealing and clarifying the "given conditions" of action—which again is true of the natural science also. The actual nature of the "given-ness" in this connection, and of action itself, and the relations between the two, belong, again, to philosophy rather than to social science as such. It is not the province of science to say what values society ought to strive to realize in action, any more than it is in the case

of natural science as the basis of technology. Science does not even explicitly tell how to realize any values. But it is its province to show by implication, through description of real and hypothetical courses of events, what would be the results of proposed lines of action—or what lines of action may be expected to produce any results accepted as desirable.

## VII

In conclusion, a few words seem to be in order as to the relevance of this discussion as a whole to the present crisis in Western culture. The predicament in which free society finds itself at the moment arises precisely out of the fact that any free society must, by virtue of its nature as free society, reach agreement, by discussion, on fundamental values, wherever “serious” conflicts of interest arise. For, as already pointed out, it is only as conflicts of values or of “rights” that conflicts of interest can be discussed, and any solution of such a problem is in the nature of the case a value or mode of rightness. Now scientific inquiry has, and rests upon, a moral code, or in sheer fact a “religion”; and it is supremely important at this hour that scientists recognize this fact, and even more important that society consider carefully the moral code and the religion of science, and its general applicability in connection with social problems.

As we have already emphasized, truth is a value, and science itself is the type of the pursuit and creation of value as a social activity. The basic principle of science—truth or objectivity—is essentially a moral principle, in opposition to any form of self-interest. The presuppositions of objectivity are integrity, competence, and humility. The combination of the three gives the essential principle of freedom, i.e., problem-solving through rational discussion, a social-intellectual creative activity, the quest and definition of values. All coercion

is absolutely excluded, in favor of a free meeting of free minds. Three aspects or forms of coercion particularly need emphasis. The first is the exclusion of persuasion which, as appeal to emotion, i.e., to *wrong* emotions (emotions conflicting with the love of truth or validity) is a form of coercion, and perhaps the “worst” form because the most insidious and therefore likely to be misconceived and adopted or condoned. The second form is coercion of any minority by any majority. Truth, or validity, is not a matter of a majority vote. The third point is that only in the most extreme cases can coercion be justified by considerations of “sentimental” morality, such as personal love, or the desire to do good. In general, these things have no more place in the solution of other value problems than they have in relation to science and truth. This is not merely a matter of moral idealism, but a *fact*, as to the nature of problem-solving.

The writer does not need to be reminded that serious questions are raised. “Real” discussion is rarely if ever “really” and purely discussion. Even scientists acting in their own field are frail men, and affected by original sin. They can only struggle, and “pray,” for liberation from wrong emotions, dogmatism, sentimentalism, and the will to dominate, overcome and coerce, and especially to persuade—even in the interest of truth. And in the fields of economics and politics, social order is admittedly impossible without much coercion, in the ordinary use of the term. (International relations present the most serious problem in this regard.) Practical politics is necessarily a matter of compromise, of balancing evil against good. At least, the use of force might be largely—though by no means entirely—restricted to the negative form, coercive prevention of coercion. This was the central tenet of the older and genuine liberalism, which is *unhappily tending to be overshadowed by the romantic craving for action, involving “thinking with the blood,”* which even

appropriates the designation of liberalism itself. Space limits preclude more than mention of these topics. But surely, competent scientists ought not to be—as they too frequently are—heard favoring and advocating the placing of “intelligence” in charge of social affairs, not recognizing that this means putting *politicians* of some breed and brand in charge of all other people, including scientists.

## *Some Notes on the Economic Interpretation of History*

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**I**t has already long been recognized that one of the intellectual vices of that far-off age, the nineteenth century, was the excessive “rationalization” of human behavior and human nature. The economic interpretation of history was a phase or product of this error. The modern rationalistic world-view may be said to have come in with the European Enlightenment; but it was given a special twist by the empirical-practical English mind in utilitarianism, of which the classical economics, the science of the economic man, was essentially an application, after considerable logical purification. Marry this to the German-romantic rationalism, or rationalistic romanticism, of Hegel, and the Marxian interpretation of history is the natural, reasonably predictable, offspring.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of our title is already well on its way

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<sup>1</sup> It is notorious among critical students of economics that Marx and Engels got the main points in their position, and especially their most palpable economic fallacies, by copying from the Ricardian economics but paraphrasing in a somewhat more rigorous, and “consequent” or thorough-going presentation.

poetry, involves this process in a form different from that of science and philosophy and with more emphasis on emotional qualities; but these are also clearly present in connection with intellectual discovery and belief.

These activities are "high" in the sense that they involve a distinction between high and low. What men actually say and think is in all degrees, and, indeed, in innumerable meanings, wise or foolish, beautiful or ugly, good or bad—in content, motive, and result. Moreover, the content is still largely determined by impersonal, nonpurposive processes of social life, backed up and modified by coercive force. Speech always means the use of some particular language, which has been created by a particular culture and learned in and through that milieu. The learning and use of language is inseparable from the acquisition of the content, also cultural, whether intellectual and emotional or merely trivial, which speech is used to express to others or to mediate to the individual in his thinking, and from the various ends which expression is used to promote. There is practically no sense in speculating as to what any man would approve or disapprove, in conduct, belief, or taste, apart from the context of some cultural background, some complex of social institutions. Even our beliefs about the most rudimentary "physical" facts are only to a limited degree an exception; and so, at the opposite extreme, are the most "original," romantic, and false ideas of the "crackpot."

The degree to which the attitudes and beliefs of the most independent and critical-minded individual of today are really determined by culture and tradition, "sanctioned" by various "forces," is a fact which one is reluctant to admit and which one comes to realize only through a process of education and self-discipline. At the level of "primitive" society, meaning through most of human history, intellectual and spiritual independence hardly existed. The mores made anything right

(and true and beautiful). In the most primitive societies of which we have any knowledge and in any society we should call human, there is plenty of "difference of opinion" and even a kind of discussion, or proto-discussion. But, as far as one can learn from anthropologists, there is in known primitive societies no true critical discussion (or virtually none) involving an appeal from customary and established criteria to such "higher" norms as are represented by the idea of natural or moral law. (Discussion of morality and law undoubtedly emerged long before discussion of scientific or esthetic problems.) In any stable social order all norms generally recognized in practice at any time are necessarily traditional and are called in question exceptionally or not at all. The formulation of ulterior norms, as rational grounds for judging, approving, or condemning established and accepted criteria, goes with a high degree of cultural sophistication. This tendency to criticize what is established is obviously a force making for social instability, and one main function of religion, throughout history, has been that of suppressing or checking it. Criticism undoubtedly "began" in a very limited sector of a society already possessing a relatively high civilization in the sense of concrete achievement—among a few priests or lawspeakers or in some relatively functionless elite or leisure class. It has spread downward with the growth of freedom of discussion, and especially in consequence of democratic government (to be contrasted with the upper-class republics of antiquity), until in our own culture practically everyone freely judges what is in terms of what (he assumes) ought to be.

The general idea expressed by such phrases as "natural law" is that of supposedly rational principles used as norms to criticize law and tradition. (Criticism, of course, includes defense against negative criticism, as well as attack or condemnation.) Natural law is any general unwritten norm or principle which is cited or appealed to on any moral or political

issue. In the nature of the case the issue must be one which is not thought to be settled "rightly" by the written law or by custom equivalent to law; hence the issue involves passing judgment on the law, written or customary. However, norms themselves are validated, or become effective, only by acceptance in some community of discourse, or possibly through the use of literal force by an advocate. An individual may, of course, take his stand upon his own opinion "against the world," like Athanasius; but this amounts to assuming he is "God" or stands in some unique relation to ultimate truth; and, again, such a position becomes effective only as it is accepted by others (and/or is backed up by force).

A moral law, in terms of content commanding respect, is clearly a phenomenon of moral progress, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the differential nature of progress, the "lag" of generally accepted laws or standards behind more advanced views. To be strictly objective, we should say "cumulative change" instead of "progress"; but, since there is no criterion of validity beyond the "verdict of history," men have to act upon the faith that the trend of change is forward, or upward, toward what is better. The "true" moral law is defined in any society by a "consensus of the competent"; but there is at any moment no objective or absolute test of competence beyond the consensus itself of the competent group and its recognition by wider circles. In this respect the moral law is in exactly the same position, in the abstract, as scientific truth and as judgments of beauty or of any value. All such judgments are forms or species of truth—truth "about" different kinds of subject matter. To the extent that any truth is subject to a supposed objective test, as in natural science, the issue is merely carried back to the validity of the test, which depends on the same social criteria. It is worth noting that the truths of mathematics and formal logic can be tested empirically to any degree of accuracy and

universality which is considered worth the trouble; hence, only their "absolute" accuracy and universality is in at all the same position as moral and esthetic truth, i.e., directly dependent (without testing) on a consensus reached through judgment and discussion. The same reasoning applies, of course, to logical demonstration.

We must recognize an ultimate paradox in connection with all judgments. They are meaningless apart from some issue; and, as long as there is an issue, either party can affirm its position as truth only by asserting the incompetence of the opposition—or by backing up its own position with overwhelming force. On the other hand, when an issue is finally settled and no longer in question in any way, the matter of truth or falsity has lost all relevance and all meaning. It may be assumed that reasonable men now admit that force does not really answer questions in terms of truth. But this position, again, rests on the faith that force as expressed in the historical process is ultimately on the side of "real" truth. Through most of human history, truth has been a question of the morality or immorality of belief (or sanity versus insanity) or especially of religious orthodoxy versus heresy; and all these issues have actually been settled by force in the most overt meaning—and this is strikingly true in the history of "Christian" civilization.

It will be evident that "natural law," properly defined, is the opposite of "natural." To the extent that men are aware of it, it is a highly artificial product of social mental life, exceeded in artificiality only by the creative products—or mere aberrations—of individual minds. We may perhaps think of moral progress, in the etymological meaning, as occurring automatically and unconsciously, but such change can hardly be called moral in the higher sense to be distinguished as ethical. A true moral law rests on a recognized conflict between what is and what ought to be, or at least upon some

conflict which is not resolved by established customs and norms and which presents a problem for solution. It reflects a threefold cleavage, in varying degree, within the individual (self-criticism), between different individuals in a culture group (mutual criticism), and within the group as a whole (group self-criticism). A moral law, with any content whatever, about which there is no disagreement or even no serious disagreement is essentially a contradiction; if not self-contradictory in the abstract logical sense, it is at least contrary to all historical reality.

The philosophical problem is one of interpreting moral progress, which, to repeat, involves interrelating this with other aspects of man's spiritual development. The familiar triad may be interpreted to cover the whole field. In all its aspects, progress means advance through effort, in which the activities of individuals and groups can be only partly distinguished, even in abstract analysis. When a society becomes conscious of its problems, these are tremendously complicated by the fact that, within limits, the primary consideration is social order and peace, hence the necessary degree of agreement, with less regard for the abstract merits of the position on which agreement is reached. This makes for conservatism. However, since agreement is the only test of truth, we must assume that the two quests coincide and that deliberate compromise is only a working approximation to a right answer to an unanswered question. Any forward step must begin with some individual digression, and this leads to real advance only through acceptance on intellectual grounds. Most incipient innovations are certainly wrong and never take root or are rejected by "history."

Progress is thus a matter of the two factors, innovation and critical discussion, leading eventually to a consensus (or to social division or disintegration or conquest). The first factor is freedom, under another name. It is an intellectual mystery

or surd, yet the most certainly known of all facts, since it is a presupposition of all thinking and cannot be denied without asserting it. (That it is a mystery is itself hardly a mystery, since mind as subject clearly could not well adequately see itself as an object.) Moral freedom is not to be conceived as arbitrary whim or caprice or blind chance but as the active endeavor to get right answers to questions; it implies the possibility of error, to which (effortless) mechanical processes are not subject. Innovation, and particularly rational freedom, are both experimental and narrowly limited in scope. The critical mind itself is, of necessity, formed for the most part by forces antecedent to itself and, at any moment, by its own prior history; it can only in small part be self-created. Complete or absolute freedom operating *de novo* at every instant (as if the actor had no past) is unthinkable. It is equally essential to recognize historical determination and process and the fact that the spiritually developed individual, in a spiritually advanced social milieu, has the capacity to react critically, creatively, upon himself and upon the culture which has largely made him what he is. We must assume that all peoples, or publics, and their individual members, must experience the threefold cleavage of self-criticism, when they reach a certain stage in the historical progress of mental and spiritual development.

If men are to think critically and yet escape moral skepticism and a destructive relativism, they must have faith, on some ground, in the validity of thought and discussion and in the ultimate verdict of history, i.e., in the reality of progress. In the historical past and in our present Western civilization the majority of serious minds have viewed their faith as founded, first, in ultimate real norms which do not change but are merely progressively discovered and, second, in some idea of "God" as the ground of this reality. But there are enough examples to the contrary to prove that neither of these

conceptions is necessary. To many competent minds (as to this writer) it is as reasonable to regard values as progressively created, or actualized, in a world in which they have been potential but not actual as it is to conceive of progress as the discovery of an immutable reality. And it seems to such minds more reasonable to view the nature of the cosmic ground of the distinction between the valid and the invalid in all fields, or the nature of the objectivity of this distinction, as an open philosophical problem. It also seems to such minds more reasonable and better to recognize that the validity of all accepted concrete judgments is only more or less provisionally established. This seems to be the only view which is reconcilable with the facts of historical progress, in which new insights have constantly superseded old knowledge or changed it by reinterpretation.

Nothing properly called absolute truth is possible for any principle or proposition, or even the simplest fact. The highest certainty, beyond the direct awareness that thinking is a free activity, is that it takes place in social beings living in a social milieu, i.e., in connection with discussion, and that discussion recognizes problems which are discussable. The precise way in which we conceive or picture ultimate cosmic reality—as far as we picture it at all—is largely a matter of taste and convenience as long as our conceptions make a place for the belief that the effort to solve problems is real and “makes a difference.” Experience shows that men confront a real danger of arguing themselves into a world view which denies this essential fact, though ultimate denial would be madness. This fundamental requirement excludes both absolute mechanism and absolute will and makes absolute values tainted. One may believe in such values only under the explicit condition of admitting that he does not know what they are and that absolute knowledge would be identical with nihilism. The danger here lies in the psychological fact that one who believes

in the absolute character of values in the abstract is likely to go on to use that proposition as a premise to establish conclusions which are highly relative.

This reasoning applies still more cogently to the belief in God. Again, a conviction that intelligence and moral will are operative in the cosmos and in human history is admissible and should be useful, provided that God is thought of in such a way as not to negate the essential consideration of human achievement through effort. But this is extraordinarily difficult. God must not be thought of as statically complete or “infinite,” in any ordinary meaning. In fact the ideas of omnipotence, omniscience, and infinite goodness are self-contradictory; in the final analysis they negate the ideas of power, knowledge, and goodness. If God, or the ultimate cosmic reality, is to have any of these spiritual attributes—to which “taste” should certainly be added—he must be thought of in essentially human terms of struggle to achieve the several values. It is then necessary to think of co-operation, a working-together, between God and men, and this is where the greatest difficulty is encountered.<sup>9</sup> Those who try to make the will of God practically meaningful in moral and social life seem inevitably to fall into the error noted above in connection with absolute values, i.e., they think they know what God wills with respect to controversial issues. The idea or feeling of communication with God (even indirectly through a prophet or demigod or inspired organization) seems to have too much attraction for frail human nature, though neither the channels of commu-

<sup>9</sup> There is a scriptural reference to God as working—John 5:17—but in its context it has no intelligible meaning; and it is difficult, if not impossible, to give the idea any practically significant meaning. The use of the word “hitherto” in the saying of Jesus cited suggests the position known as “deism.” This is an intellectually respectable position and was prominent in the eighteenth century. But the idea that God created the world and man and then turned both loose, the one to follow its natural-scientific laws, the other to struggle along as best he may, amounts for all practical purposes to leaving God out of the picture.

nication nor the content of the revelation stand up under critical examination. The common result is pride and bigotry, in a sect or people, though usually on matters of form rather than matters of substance.

What has been said should make it clear that the problem for modern thought and life is that of the validity or objectivity of values. The fallacies which men tend to fall into may be approached in two ways. From one point of view the error to be avoided is a false dichotomy between absolutism and relativism, with respect to all values, whereas these terms themselves should be used in a relative and not an absolute sense. From the other point of view it is the treatment of truth, where the error is treatment of scientific and logical truth as absolute and the relegation of moral and aesthetic judgments to the level of relativity. It is better to approach the problem by looking first at the fallacy in the second form. Here the essential fact is that even the truths of science are finally judgments of value. When there is any issue, it is a matter of weighing evidence and the cogency of reasoning; and, when there is no issue, any assertion is nonsensical. Again we confront the paradox of the inherently progressive or "dynamic" nature of intellectual life; truth is the answer to a question; and, when any question is definitively answered, there is no longer any question, and no truth, in any significant meaning of the word. Further, an objective answer to any question, in science as elsewhere, is a social judgment, dependent on verification.<sup>10</sup>

All questions are questions of truth or falsity, whether they relate to matters of "fact" or to "values" in the narrower

<sup>10</sup> We restrict our discussion to discussable questions, such as presuppose an answer that is valid for some group, some community of discourse. We leave aside purely private problems—if there are any such in the strict sense—in which an individual merely has to decide between conflicting purely personal values, no one else being involved. Even the answers to such questions may have a kind of objectivity, but we cannot go into that here.

sense of morals and esthetics. On the other hand, truth itself (*where any question is at issue*) is a value, a matter of what one "ought" to believe, of better and worse reasons for believing; and the obligation to believe what is true because it is true, rather than to believe anything else or for any other reason, is the universal and supreme imperative for the critical consciousness. All discussable questions come down finally to good judgment, including "good" taste and "right" moral discrimination versus "mere" taste or preference. It is true that moral questions involve a further imperative or obligation, that of *acting* in accord with true judgments as to what is good or right, but they are not peculiar in this respect. Esthetic judgments have their creative aspect as well as that of appreciation. And truth about "facts" is also expressed in action, giving rise to the imperatives of economy (versus waste) and of "workmanship," which also involves esthetic norms. None of these distinctions can be sharply drawn. In a special sense the judgment of truth is a moral judgment, since—truth being a social category—the obligation to believe what is true is inseparable from the obligation to "tell" the truth (apart from other grounds for this rule). Yet the different forms of value imperative also conflict. Literal truth in discourse must very often give place to other values, both esthetic and moral; and, while beauty may be viewed as a kind of truth (or conversely), the two may conflict as well as coincide. There are also conflicts within each category, conspicuously in the case of moral values or duties; but different truths also conflict, in spite of the logician's prejudice to the contrary.

Looking at all value problems, then, from the standpoint of truth, we return to the position stated above: that no such judgment can be "absolutely absolute" or "absolutely relative." Absoluteness or relativity is a matter of degree of certainty, the only test of which is the degree of agreement

in a community of discourse, the consensus of the competent (and unbiased). The simpler axioms of mathematics and everyday matters of fact are "relatively absolute," in comparison with disputed rankings of works of art—or any matter which is controversial among competent and serious (honest) students. Of course, what any individual believes to be true is based chiefly on what he believes to be the consensus of the competent, a community to which he does not usually profess to belong for most of the field of knowledge. The only meaning of "absolutely absolute" truth or validity is a *judgment on a matter about which there is assumed to be no possible question—a commonplace and a species of nonsense.* When anyone makes an assertion as an absolute truth, in the face of disagreement, he merely sets himself up as an absolute authority or as a spokesman for such an authority. The meaning of the position is to forbid discussion by fiat and finally to claim the right to silence opposition by force.

At the other extreme an "absolutely relative" judgment would not be a judgment at all but would merely describe an *individual state of mind.* Thus both absolutely absolute and absolutely relative judgments negate discussion and all intellectual life, the first by asserting dogmatically that there is nothing to discuss, the second by limiting discourse to utter banality. In so far as any assertion of the absolute validity of a proposition is meaningful, it is so by raising the issue of the relative competence—or honesty—of those who assert and those who deny it or of some authority for which they speak. (The authenticity of the spokesman's credentials may also be at issue.)

The meaning of all values is rooted in a process of progressive sociocultural achievement, including resistance to change in wrong directions. A value is something sought rather than finally possessed. This is the meaning of the statement that man is a rationally social being, or "potentially"

such. The determination of truth by free discussion is also the meaning of democracy as a social philosophy. Its antithesis is authoritarian society, which is a mixture in varying proportions of traditionalism and arbitrary dictatorship. In another view the issue is between a "liberal" and a "religious" ideal of social life and conception of belief. A dictatorship must be religious in some sense, and a democracy must be rational. However, the ultimate ideal of liberalism or democracy, government by (rational) discussion alone, is antinomian (in the sense of enforced law) and is inherently unattainable. But *progress in that direction is the final meaning of social-moral progress.* The ideal has the two aspects, free government and a minimum of government by enforced law or by authority, i.e., maximum freedom for individual disagreement and nonconformity. Where agreement is "necessary," i.e., where other values are more important than freedom (even if lower in ideal rank), it must, of course, be secured by some mechanism of compulsion enforcing the closest achievable approximation to a social will based on a common opinion.

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*The Planful Act:  
The Possibilities  
and Limitations of  
Collective Rationality*

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Conscience compels me to begin this lecture with a disclaimer and a caveat, with respect to my role in starting off this series with such a discourse. Like the Lacedaemonians at Thermopylae, I am here in obedience to orders, and would not have much ground for either surprise or complaint if I also were left dead upon the field. If my advice had been asked, I should have recommended against both the topic and the speaker. In my opinion, the series should have begun, if not exactly with a "pep talk," at least with something that would stimulate interest, and not with a heavy philosophical and critical discussion of presuppositions which must seem to throw cold water on the whole project. Such inquiries should not be pushed too far, even in one's private thinking, to say nothing of a public oral address, and one of a series, which to some extent the audience is bound to take whether they like it or not. I can only point out that

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A public lecture given at the University of Chicago in 1944, the first of a series on planning.

the question of possibilities and limitations is logically fundamental and also practically important if discussion of planning is to look toward action and not merely intellectual entertainment, or propaganda. If those interested in planning mean business, they surely need to have reasonable expectations as well as romantic faith, or dreams. My assignment being what it is, and I being what I am—on which point my superiors should have sufficient knowledge to tell them about what to expect—I must use my allotted time to say what seems to me most needful to be said about collective rationality and its possibilities and limitations.

As I suppose we all recognize, men as individuals, and as groups, have to live largely by a mixture of two ultimately irrational faiths, the faith in reason, which we know is fallible, and the faith in inspiration, which we know is arbitrary. The modern student of history and social process soon learns that societies have lived in a state of relative peace and order by not raising problems they cannot solve and discussion of which would only stir up antagonism and probably lead to conflict, if not to a social nervous breakdown. Scientific sociology shows further that one primary function of social institutions has been to prevent the raising of such questions. This is done through "conditioning" the individual from infancy to acceptance of what is established. Social custom, tradition and authority are either not consciously questioned at all, or they are sacred. The burning problems of modern civilization, which are currently discussed with so much heat and an uncertain amount of light, particularly under the head of social planning, arise largely out of the partial replacement of this age-old type of institutional order and mental attitude by active critical inquiry and endeavor toward improvement and progress.

Freedom to criticize and to change things is the fundamental meaning of democracy. Its origin may be dated a couple of

the final decision must rest either with the governed, or with some individual or group ruling by force. Even this exception is logically unreal, since the governed must be the judge of the validity of the inspiration, or higher knowledge and wisdom claimed by its rulers, unless acceptance is forced, either overtly or through some form of "persuasion" which is really force or fraud. The ultimate question is the twofold one of freedom as a means to good government, and of the relative value of political freedom and efficiency, insofar as the two conflict.

The general thesis of this discourse is the old-fashioned liberal position that the main emphasis needs to be placed on freedom, on both counts. We shall argue that very "strong" government is more likely in the long run to be bad than good, and that freedom itself is of transcendent importance as a condition of the moral life. Accordingly, sound policy requires restricting the positive functions of government to things on which there is general agreement. Its main task is the negative one of preserving freedom by preventing coercive action by individuals and groups, through force or fraud. This view runs counter to present tendencies in the climate of opinion, even in our own society, which is still formally committed to the democratic ideal and is actually carrying on a terrible war for its preservation in the world. The present vogue of the "planning" idea is a natural social-psychological product of a condition of economic crisis; this situation makes men think in terms of security rather than freedom, and hence romantically exaggerate the need and possibility of action by governments, ignoring its evils and dangers. (It goes without saying that a considerable amount of "social planning" is inevitable, as well as that maximum freedom itself calls for sweeping restrictions upon the literal freedom of individuals and groups.)

A comprehensive and logically ordered survey must break

up our general topic into four or five heads. First, something must be said about the possibilities and limitations of rationality in the individual life, insofar as human life can be individual. Second, we must consider rationality in "casual" association, without formal organization. The third head is more or less enduring and stable organization on a "voluntary" basis. The final and main problem is rationality in the political unit or collectivity; and here we must distinguish between political organization under the dominance respectively of a majority and of some minority, specifically a minority "party," which always has an individual head, "leader," or "father," usually in a more or less religious, prophetic, or "charismatic," role. Even in the group of two individuals, doctor and patient, the position of the former is typically surrounded by something of an "aura" of inscrutable superiority in wisdom and power.

### I. Individual Rationality

That "man is a rational animal" is one of those interesting statements which do not have to be proved, since the subject admits it. In fact he says so himself; and the objective value of the statement is to be appraised in the light of that fact. It must also be viewed in the light of other statements "man" makes about himself. By the same authority, he is also a groping ignoramus, a fool, and a miserable sinner, quite unworthy of redemption. The list of opposite characteristics could be indefinitely extended, and all the statements would be true, in varying degree and numerous interpretations. But by the same token each is false or, taken singly and alone, is an exaggeration and over-simplification. Man is certainly a romantic animal. For a general characterization, he is perhaps less distinctively *homo sapiens*, the knower, than he is *homo mendax*, the liar, deceiver, hypocrite, actor, pretender, practitioner of make-believe. Other animals have effective if not

explicitly conscious knowledge, and an interest in truth; man alone prefers fiction to fact, with respect to the world and especially to himself. He covers his body with clothes and that is trivial compared to the concealment and misrepresentation of his intellectual, emotional and moral nature in language and expressive behavior. This is by no means all to the bad. Insofar as man is wise or good, his "character" is acquired chiefly by posing as better than he is, until a part of his pretense becomes a habit.

In no case are rationality and its opposite to be identified with what is respectively good or bad. A leading American economist has observed that "an irrational passion for dispassionate rationality" would take the joy out of life. It would also exclude most of the esthetic values, which depend upon taste (and about taste there is proverbially no argument) and also most of its real morality; hence it is not truly rational at all, nor moral. "Love is blind"; but this does not mean that devotion and loyalty ought to be abolished. Rationality is paradoxical in another sense. If it has a definite meaning, it is the interest in truth, as "naked" and "cold." But our real interest in truth is in the last analysis largely romantic. Truth is interesting chiefly because it is either "useful" or marvelous, or at least novel. "Mere" truth, completely established and beyond question, is a commonplace and a bore. Especially, truth is interesting because it is controversial, and in any case it is something to be pursued rather than to be possessed. And the ordinary meaning of rationality in action, its most objective meaning, is efficiency. But you may have heard the story of the football club that hired an efficiency expert as manager; his first step was to put all the men on the same side, because of the waste and absurdity of half of them pushing against the other half.

Individual rationality—or irrationality—may be illustrated by Plutarch's story of Pyrrhus and Kineas. Pyrrhus, you will

recall, was that king of Epirus in Greece, who set out to conquer Rome about 200 B.C., and gave to language the expression, a Phyrriic victory. Kineas was his favorite counsellor, and the story is of a conversation between the two on the eve of the great adventure. Briefly, Kineas pointed out the difficulties and hazards of the enterprise, and asked just what his master expected to gain by it in the not too probable event of success. He was told that the answer was obvious; *victory over Rome would clear the path to Sicily. And when Kineas pursued the question into the gain to result from this further conquest, he was reminded in a similar tone that Sicily was on the way to Carthage and all of Africa. Led on as to what he would do when he had conquered the whole world, Pyrrhus laughingly observed that perhaps he would sit down and take his ease. Asked if he would really be in a better position to do this than he was in the beginning, again in the improbable event of ultimate success, Pyrrhus changed the subject; and Plutarch ends the account by observing that the conversation embarrassed the king considerably, but produced no change in his plans.*

This story suggests another, which illustrates collective rationality. It was told at the University by Professor Radcliffe-Brown, and said to be authentic. After the first World War, some missionaries in South Africa got the bright idea of improving the life of the natives by beginning with its economic foundations. This meant teaching them more "rational" procedures in farming, such as they would be in a position to practice. But it was to be done with wisdom and subtlety, through example rather than precept. An intelligent young man was selected from each of a number of villages and taught the rudiments of "dry farming," in accord with the local requirements. These students were also instructed not to preach or exhort, but simply to practice what they had been taught, each in his own village and plot of ground, leaving

others to imitate the obviously better practice. It happened to be an exceptionally dry season, and the particular young farmer of the story was achieving excellent results while on the other plots vegetation was drying up. The anthropologist told the story to illustrate ideas and practices of witchcraft, but remarked that it was not a very typical example, since the case was too obvious. With little of the ritual or formalities characteristic of more doubtful cases, the community simply took the young man in hand, cut his body into as many pieces as there were fields in the village, and buried one piece in each field. The next year, being a season of adequate rain, everybody had a good crop. And at the same time, the white inhabitants of the South African republic voted the government of General Smuts out of office, because of the hard times due to the same drought. As you all know, essentially similar things are done in our own contemporary culture, especially in the field of medical beliefs and practice, to say nothing of mob action and religious revivals in some parts of the country.

Returning to the notion of rationality in the individual life, a thorough-going analysis would require use of the Crusoe hypothesis, sometimes employed in economic theory. It was once more employed than it is now; it has been found that any rigorous conception of rational behavior seems too unrealistic to the public and to students to be useful for expository purposes. But if this is true in the discussion of the use of means for ends taken as given, it seems pointless to attempt a definition of completely rational thinking about ends, outside of the narrowest philosophical circles. Modern civilized man has in quite recent times become "reasonably rational" in his thinking and conduct in economic life, where the exigencies of the market force concrete choices into the form of quantitative comparison. But this is not the case with our thinking and discussion of more general interests. The best illustration is the case of health and disease, where both the end and the

procedure for realizing it are in the highest degree subject to objective determination. While our own civilization has largely gotten away from the crudest techniques of primitive exorcism, magic and witchcraft, the treatment of illness is still saturated with superstition, occult practices and quackery of many sorts, which are based on reasoning of the same kind. Not long ago, I asked a well-informed medical friend at what date in history he would say that even professional medical practice began to cure more people than it killed, or help more than it injured. His answer was that scientific, professional and general education should probably be allowed another generation or so to reach this point. With respect to collective rationality in dealing with the problem of social health, we are still mostly in the "moralistic" or retributive stage of finding someone to blame for any supposed ailment and treating the case by punishment or "liquidation," which is strikingly similar to primitive witchcraft.

More remote and general ends, individual and social, are the province of esthetics and morals, which are admittedly in a sadly "unscientific" state. Of course it is an absurd and romantic idea that their treatment should or could be made scientific, or that the mental activity of thinking, deliberating and judging, could be planned in advance. Rational mental activity is problem-solving or question-answering, and cannot be thought of as either mechanical process or pursuit of a foreseen end. Moreover, each of these conceptions—mechanical process and the intelligent pursuit of given ends—excludes the other; and yet, to a very large extent the "best minds" in modern civilization contend that human conduct fits both descriptions. The thinking of the intellectual elite, and vulgar thinking, take us to the heart of the problem of collective rationality.

On the other hand, ultimate ends, and specifically moral ideals, make us think of religion, which is commonly held to

be the only foundation for the validity of such values. Man seems to be a religious animal. But it is obvious that religious beliefs are for the most part inherited—in the cultural or social meaning, of course, not that of biological heredity. Frequently, to be sure, religion is based on conversion, but the least examination of this phenomenon reveals that it is rarely much more rational than cultural inheritance. The principle of social inheritance applies also to political allegiance and general moral convictions, such as the disapproval of head-hunting, cannibalism, and incest or non-monomamous marriage. It is true that men typically defend their political, moral and religious convictions with great intellectual ingenuity, but this fact does not reduce the irrationality of the grounds on which they actually rest. The logic of the polemic may be meticulously correct, but it is evident to critical examination that the premises are really inferred from the conclusions.

Moreover, scrutiny should make it clear that the connection between religion and morality in which men so commonly believe is unreal or rather, again, the causality is inverted; religion “sanctions” moral beliefs already established on different grounds. This is its general social function. An illustration is the attitude of the churches towards slavery, in our own country and only a short time ago, historically speaking. The position of religion, and of moral idealism, depended on the geographical location, north or south of the line dividing the territory in which the institution was or was not established. Religion has also sanctioned witchcraft wherever and whenever people generally believed in it (Cf. Exodus 22:18; “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”) and “God” and even the same churches, as well as “right” are still on both sides in every major war. In religious ethics, the end justifies any means believed appropriate, and religion makes it wicked to inquire critically into either ends or means. The meaning of religious belief seems to be that it is sinful to

question it; and again, apart from formal religion, it is immoral to inquire into the grounds of any moral conviction which is effectively established in any community. If we wanted to use language “rationally,” in the sense of stating truth, we should undoubtedly say that men “cherish” or are “devoted to” or “love” their deeper convictions and not that they “believe” them, when the source is social conditioning in infancy, or mental processes for which “thinking” is hardly a correct name. Individuals who on their own initiative form or change their fundamental beliefs through genuine critical reflection are so rare that they may be classed as abnormal. Moreover, the “true” value of truth is so limited by conflicting moral and esthetic values that the communications of a human being of competence and good will are doubtless less than half motivated by the aim to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

## *II. Rationality in Unorganized Social Relations*

Our discussion of the first topic has unavoidably carried us well over the boundary into the second, since there really is no such thing as individual rationality. Rationality itself is social in nature and a product of stable group life. This would even be true of any Crusoe capable of self-maintenance, as to his fundamental beliefs and conduct. Certainly, any conscious idea of general truth and untruth is a late arrival in the growth of civilization.

Man is a social, or political, animal. This is another statement he makes about himself; and in this form, though literally true, it is essentially misleading. What is distinctive of human nature and society must be defined by contrast with animal life, particularly where it is highly organized, as among the social insects. The structure of human society rests to a

stabilized dictatorship, the main reliance will be control of elementary education, under religious or quasi-religious auspices. Under such a system, most of the people may have far more of the feeling of freedom than they do in a democratic order with its inevitable differences, confusion, struggle and frustration. The pretense of a ruling minority party, that it offers the people real, positive freedom, as well as "freedom from" particular evils and problems, tasks and responsibilities to which they are unequal, may both be entirely sincere and have a substantial basis in fact.

Essentially authoritarian propaganda is put out in the contemporary world in three main forms, Marxism, religious Catholicism, and patriotic nationalism, with differences in detail under each head. The main real difference is the matter of "who is to be boss," in the familiar expression of Lewis Carroll. All three are ostensibly cosmopolitan, and more or less explicitly advocate world unity through conquest by force. Everybody is finally to be converted, through some mixture of education, propaganda and coercion, and incorporated into the party or church, as the case may be. Marxism most explicitly emphasizes the temporary and educational character of the dictatorship; after an interval, the state would "wither away," leading to a classless and therefore (in Marxian theory) stateless society, administered scientifically, with impersonal objectivity. The assumption seems to be universal intellectual agreement, the final ideal of collective rationality, and of anarchism. According to Catholicism, ultimate power should be in the hands of the Church, which gets both supreme wisdom and supreme power direct from God, and the righteous and enlightened (or properly conditioned) individual would find ideal freedom in obedience. Nationalism receives its light from the mind of the master race or folk. Each of the systems presupposes a special kind of "charismatic" leadership. The right of the ruling group, under its individual "leader," to

rule, is always based on a combination of superior wisdom, from a super-intellectual source, matched with an absolute duty of emotional loyalty on the part of the ruled.

The merits of this type of political philosophy cannot be critically discussed and appraised in the compass of this lecture. We must be content with the observation, as an assertion, that it has merits. Within limits, a case can be made for freedom as well as order through a natural harmony of interest between a ruling class in some form and the general public, in contrast with an extreme democratic emphasis on freedom under equality of status and continuous responsibility of rulers to the wishes of the mass. Complete equality is anyhow unattainable, and orderly society is impossible without both authority and super-rational loyalty. The problem, as we have said before, is to secure the best compromise and balance between conflicting principles, each valid in its measure and place.

### *VIII. Conclusion*

This address is not to be taken as an argument for aimless drifting, but for the intelligent use of intelligence, individual and social, beginning with an objective appraisal of its limitations and its real possibilities. The demand for centralized social planning rests on romantic claims on behalf of intelligence, especially that of the planners. Such claims mean the opposite of rationality for others, since the first presupposition of rationality is a free mind and freedom to act in obedience to its dictates. In the face of this romanticism, one is forced to recall that the human race and its pre-human ancestors both lived a long time and made considerable progress—from the first primitive slime up to a high state of civilization—before social and political theorists, and poets and prophets, came along to announce that everything is wrong and the way to

fix it is through a revolution putting the right people in charge of social life. What this means, whether it is denied or more or less explicitly recognized, is setting the historical clock back a few centuries or a few millennia, to the state of affairs that prevailed before the common man became infected with the virus of aspiration for freedom. And one is also reminded that as much intellectual and humanitarian as well as material progress was achieved in the short epoch of liberalism as in all previous history, as such things are measured.

This argument leaves out of account the question of whether active freedom founded on freedom of thought and expression is intrinsically a higher ideal or ultimate moral value than either voluntary or unconscious submission to tradition and authority. The latter question we have not attempted to discuss, and it could hardly be argued, beyond pointing out (as we have already done) that public discussion presupposes acceptance of the principle of freedom on some mixture of utilitarian and absolute grounds. This conclusion would seem to be escapable only by holding that the idea of discussion itself is an illusion, that what purports to be discussion is really preaching and propaganda, on behalf of some interest, or that it is merely mechanical process. The former accusation will undoubtedly be brought against the present lecture by some at least in the audience who have embraced the doctrine of social planning.

We have assumed that our culture is committed to the ideal of freedom, which indeed the "planners" in our own society ostensibly accept for the most part, and have attempted to bring out some of the conditions requisite to preserving and progressively realizing this ideal. These conditions include, as we have attempted to show, a fairly narrow limitation of the functions of government, in accord with the doctrine of old-fashioned liberalism. This means in particular a limitation of the positive functions of the state, and a further development

of the negative function of preserving freedom by limiting the powers of individuals and organized groups. Extensive positive action as a unit by any large group, defined by residence in a contiguous area, means delegation of power to a limited number of officials, politicians and bureaucrats. If this is done on an extensive scale, as advocated by planners and "neo-liberals," the agent cannot be held responsible for the use of power, even to a technical majority of those for whom he acts. Such grants of power tend to become irrevocable and the power itself tends to grow beyond assignable bounds. All this means that rationally free social change must be subject to the principle of gradualness.

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*The Sickness of  
Liberal Society*

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**T**he sickness of modern civilization is a familiar theme and a fact which is obvious and not in dispute. The occurrence of two world wars within less than a generation is proof enough; and quite as sinister is the strong probability that, in the second case at least, international conflict came as the alternative to internal class war, or to chaos, in some of the major countries involved. Antagonism, war, and preparation for war between nations and allied groups can be viewed as the one psychological force capable of overcoming tendencies to conflict between interest groups within nations, groups formed chiefly along economic lines.

Agreement on the fact of social unhealth does not carry us far toward common acceptance of a program of action and may, indeed, work in the opposite direction, aggravating the malady. Awareness of social disorder makes imperative a reasonable unity of opinion as to what is the matter and what

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to do about it, or—in medical terms—on diagnosis and treatment. In the current scene we find the most acute disagreement on these crucial points. There is intense controversy especially between two opposed schools of social-medical thought, as to the very meaning of social health. The one school views our social malady as a too-exclusive reliance upon science, upon knowledge as power, and the accumulation of means for making knowledge effective in terms of “material comfort,” to the neglect of the “spiritual” values, intellectual, esthetic, and moral. The opposed diagnosis finds a failure to “follow through” with the scientific development, especially to apply scientific method to the solution of the social problem, and more specifically the economic organization. The methods of treatment advocated follow obviously from the diagnoses. The first position is typically advocated by our humanists and literary intelligentsia, as well as by the “preachers” in the narrow religious sense, but perhaps derives its most serious support from organized religion. The countermovement is represented by a substantial proportion of contemporary scientists, including the human and social as well as the natural sciences, and philosophers of the “pragmatic” school.

In this essay criticism of these social philosophies will be incidental to a more constructive task. This is the ambitious one of surveying the twofold problem, of indicating the nature of the trouble and the method or methods of treatment most likely to be effective. Our main concern is with the meaning of social health, especially the facts as to what are the ideals or spiritual foundations of modern civilization. These ideals will be referred to as liberalism or individualism. The former term directly suggests the ethical ideal of freedom, and freedom is the fundamental moral value exalted in the modern view of life, individual and social, in thinking and in practice.

*Freedom, the ethical meaning of liberalism.* The first major difficulty, both for analysis and in the practical application of

freedom as the ideal, is, of course, the ambiguity of the concept. The word has been claimed as a designation, and used as a slogan, by the most diverse ethical and social philosophies and programs, ancient and modern; in our day, this applies also to "democracy," its synonym in political discussion. Both the older and the newer antiliberal ideals of social order, the ecclesiastical authoritarianism surviving from the Middle Ages and the contemporary totalitarianisms—communism, fascism, and "naziism"—claim to be or to embody the "real freedom," or democracy, in opposition to liberalism. Further, the new use of the word "liberalism" to refer to supposedly democratic stateism—socialism or economic planning—now compels us to restrict the term explicitly to the conception which went by that name in the nineteenth century social-philosophic theory and was the norm of social policy in countries where it was accepted. Our task is to show, in relatively concrete terms, the meaning of freedom, the autonomy of the active personal self, in its relation to the social problem. (A philosophical discussion of freedom would merely lead into endless metaphysical speculation.) The main point for emphasis is that freedom is an ethical principle. Its acceptance does not involve a repudiation of morality or idealism, but rather does involve an inversion of the ethical principle which has ruled in all civilizations prior to liberalism. All these earlier systems of social order have been rooted in tradition and authority, and it is by opposition to these that liberal freedom is to be defined.

The important fact is that liberalism asserts a new ethical ideal, thereby rejecting or modifying ideals which had previously been accepted; this rejection of old ideals has frequently been misinterpreted as an abandonment of all morality and ideals. Our first task is to make clear the content of the liberal ideal. Two points need emphasis at the outset. The first is that freedom is an intrinsic value, as well as instrumental to

other goods. It is assumed that greater "well-being" will result if, in general, each person is the final judge of his own and of the means of achieving it. But historical liberalism has probably overemphasized this utilitarian argument. It is also a part of the liberal faith in human nature to believe that normal men prefer freedom to objective well-being, within limits, when the two conflict. Freedom always includes the right to consult others, provided one may choose his own counselors and follow or reject their advice. But the liberal doctrine goes further, holding that men "ought" to prefer freedom; and the institutions and laws of liberal states do not allow anyone to contract away his freedom, to sell himself into servitude for any price, however attractive. Thus freedom is paradoxically limited in the interest of its own preservation. An agreement binding the individual for the future will be invalidated if it is shown that he has entered into it under duress or deception or even gross incompetence to manage his own affairs.

The second point is that freedom does not mean unregulated impulse, or "license," but action directed by rational ideals and conforming to rational laws. The ideals and laws are to be discovered in individual and social life and recognized and imposed upon themselves by individuals and groups. Somewhat paradoxically, again, conformity to law is combined with spontaneity in choice. The fundamental notion of obligation is found in problem-solving activity, the raising of questions and quest of the "right" answers. But, at the same time, liberalism exalts a more literal spontaneity, a limitation of the whole "serious" side of life; it has meant an ethical rehabilitation of the play interest, along with a new conception of work. Thus it has brought about an enormous extension of the field of value and of the human interests and activities accepted as ethically worthy. Freedom must mean the freedom to change; hence, a central feature of liberalism is the ideal

of progress, viewed as the goal of rationally directed action, in addition to its recognition as an evolutionary and historical fact. Earlier thought, particularly in our own religious-ethical tradition, inclined to view history in terms of degeneration from an original perfect state, recovery of which would be the supreme ideal. Modern ideas place the "golden age" in the future, not in the past, and regard betterment as to be achieved gradually by human action, not through a supernatural cataclysm.

Liberalism conceives of progress in terms of cultural values, intellectual and esthetic as well as moral, all based on material advance. It is a cumulative achievement in the individual life, and in various societies and the world as a whole, through the ages. The maintenance of a civilized standard of living, defined in cultural terms, and its progressive advance or elevation, has come to be the serious business of life. This involves the gradual transformation of the world, of society, and of the individual human being, including his appreciations and his creative powers. This is the meaning of "work," defined as purposive activity, in which the real motive is some desired result. But the good life includes play as well as work. In play, also, activity is usually directed toward some end, but the relation is reversed; the end is not "real" but symbolic and instrumental; it is set up for the purpose of making the activity interesting. The value lies as much in the activity of pursuit as in the enjoyment of the result. The work and play interests are actually so mixed on both sides that concrete activities can hardly be classified between the two heads. The ambiguity is particularly evident in the direct pursuit of cultural values, the professional intellectual, and esthetic life. But all work is ideally, and to some extent actually, affected by the play interest.

On its serious side, liberalism might be called "secular rationalism," in contrast with naïve theism, ethical and

metaphysical idealism, and also with that philosophical rationalism which finds the solution of all problems of life in immutable principles, supposed to be known, or somehow accessible, to all men.

Liberal thinking about conduct tends to proceed in two steps—the critical evaluation of ends and the selection of appropriate means or modes of using means. The main subject of discussion in these pages will be "economic liberalism," or individualism, since it is chiefly in the domain of economic life, the organization of the use of means, that the reaction against liberalism centers and radical reform or revolution is advocated. However, it is to be emphasized that economic liberalism is merely a part, an aspect, of a system of values centering in individual liberty and applicable to all departments of human interest and activity and all social relationships. Economic freedom and other freedoms are inseparable, and authoritarianism must likewise be all-inclusive. The term "*laissez-faire*" actually means simply freedom; and it is for historical and rather accidental reasons that the phrase has come to refer to the economic life, or what is usually thought of under that designation. A thorough examination of the relation between ends and means, or between duty and pleasure, will make it clear that more is finally to be learned about life and morality, even in the economic field, from the study of play and of cultural pursuits than from the direct study of economics as ordinarily conceived and in terms of the assumptions usually made in economic discussion.

*Economic individualism.* Discussion of economic problems has been prominent in liberal theory for two main reasons. Achievement of most ends, higher as well as lower, depends on the use of means and is limited by an actual scarcity of means. The world is poor; and so are the wealthiest countries, compared to the resources, material and human, that would be required to give everyone a "decent"—morally and

esthetically satisfactory—life or standard of living, to say nothing of what men would like to have. The basic ethical principle, the meaning of freedom and democracy, is the equal right of everyone to the good life, or a fair opportunity to get the means necessary for it. It is wrong for one to have these at the expense of another or by using another as a means. It follows that social betterment requires an increase in total means available—resources or capital—along with an equitable distribution, and also the most effective use of means, and improvement in “technology.” Liberalism finds hypocrisy as well as falsehood in the older ethical attitude of exalting poverty—which always tended to mean that poverty was an ideal for others, the masses, not for the “elite” who preached the doctrine. The contempt for means, and for the common forms of work, which persists among the *élite* today is a survival of the attitude of a slaveholding aristocracy, always supported by religion. (In our own country and within the lifetime of people still living, slavery was defended on scriptural grounds, where it was established; in Europe, official Christianity never condemned it until it was undermined by other forces.) Means are emphasized, then, because progress depends on increase in means and their better distribution.

The second reason for emphasis on means is that according to liberal theory each individual ought to be and in the main can be free to choose his own ends, while access to means is more directly dependent on the social situation. Consequently, means present a social problem, a problem for unitary social action, while ends, in the main, do not. These statements are, indeed, subject to limitations, which liberal political thought has doubtless tended to underestimate. The subject of qualifications will come up at a later point. Liberal society first came under severe criticism in terms of its own fundamental values, and specifically with respect to the economic organization. Opposition developed, not on grounds of a repudiation

of the liberal ideals of freedom and equality (or “just” inequality) and progress, but rather the failure of the liberal order to realize these ideals, in a way reasonably satisfactory to a major section of society, which has felt itself unfree and unjustly treated. (We refer here to the countries which have remained democratic, primarily the English-speaking world; we shall not go into the explicitly anti-liberal, totalitarian social philosophies and movements, now painfully familiar.)

The course of events under liberalism, beginning even in its formative period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, led to increasing discontent and to an attempt to organize the “disadvantaged” classes. Later, other functional interests have been organized. They try to secure economic advantage for themselves, partly through unitary economic action—essentially monopolistic—under existing law, and in part through legal change or government action, by acting as political pressure groups. We must also remember that all through the liberal period there were movements advocating revolution to replace the “capitalist” system with some form of politically organized collectivism. Originally, the collectivist order was to be thoroughly democratic. But after the middle of the nineteenth century, socialism in the “scientific” version, under the lead of Marx and Engels, lost faith in democracy as a method of change. It was felt that the “vested interests” were too strong, and the movement looked to forcible seizure of power by a small “party,” claiming to represent an advanced section of the working class; hence the “dictatorship of the proletariat”—meaning a dictatorship of the propagandists. This would theoretically be a transitory measure, to reorganize society and re-educate the people toward the ultimate classless—and hence stateless—society. The ultimate ideal was an anarchist utopia, administered “scientifically,” without any exercise of power by men over men. The scientific social order advocated by Professor Dewey,

referred to earlier, is essentially identical except for omission of the transitional dictatorship—without replacing it by anything else; and the professed ideals of the moralistic school, and indeed of utopians or reformers of all ages, are strikingly similar.

The basic ideals of liberalism have been indicated briefly but, in order to deal with contemporary problems, it is necessary also to sketch briefly the main facts and principles involved in the application of liberal ideals to the political and economic order. For the economic system envisaged and partially constructed by liberalism, "free enterprise" is perhaps the most descriptive designation—certainly less misleading than "capitalism." An adequate treatment of this topic would obviously extend first to a treatise on economics and then to a similar treatment of politics and the more basic social sciences, including psychology. We can point out only a few of the main general principles and conclusions; these will be contrasted with popular misconceptions, and attention centered on the merits and defects of the system.

From the standpoint of social and political ethics, free enterprise *in its theoretically ideal form* is an embodiment and application of the fundamental principle of liberalism, i.e., individual liberty, including free association. In economic discussion liberty means the right of the individual to choose his own ends and the means or procedure most effective for realizing them. And association, in economic terms, means cooperation, for the purpose of greater "efficiency," more effective individual action in realizing individual ends—always including community ends freely chosen by all members of any group.

It is easy to show that, wherever goods and services are roughly standardized, free cooperation must take the form of regular exchange and will result in the establishment of "markets." The theoretically ideal market is described in

terms of "perfect competition." This is a most unfortunate term since psychological competition or emulation is not involved and is in fact inconsistent with economic motives. A free market means simply provision for effective intercommunication, so that every man as buyer or seller (or potentially one or the other) is in a position to offer terms of exchange to every other, and any pair are free to agree on the most favorable terms acceptable to both parties. A free market will establish a price, uniform for all, on every good or service, with the general result that all parties will specialize in production in the manner and degree which secures for each the greatest advantage compatible with the free consent of all. The market rests on the ethical principle of mutuality with each party respecting the equal freedom and rights of others. The mutual advantage of free exchange is the meaning of the "invisible hand" directing each to serve the interests of others in pursuing his own. It replaces the idea that what one gains the other must lose. Any two parties are always free to exchange on terms other than those fixed by the market, upon which they can agree as better, or preferable for any reason.

Free association also allows for the organization of groups to act as units in production or trade, in the interest of still greater efficiency. These, again, may have any form of internal constitution on which the parties can agree. As things have worked out historically, such groups have been widely set up, chiefly under the "entrepreneurial" form. Either an individual or a more or less numerous body takes the initiative in production—decides all detailed questions, and assumes financial responsibility for the economic result by buying labor and property services at definite prices fixed in the open market. Typical today is a group of comparatively large size, organized in the legal form of a "corporation," with a representative system of control similar to that of political democracy, except for the different basis of voting power.

Effective competition between industries will tend to direct production into the lines most in demand by consumers; and competition within any industry tends to compel every productive unit to adopt the most efficient methods—as a condition of remaining solvent and staying in the business. The price of any product will be equal to the money costs of the productive services required to produce it, i.e., to the prices that must be paid for these to meet the competition of producers of other products, fixed by the demand for the latter. Thus the entrepreneur will have neither a profit nor a loss. Product prices will be as low, and prices for productive services as high, as is compatible with freedom of choice of consumers and producers. Any profit will reflect superior achievement by the enterprise-unit receiving it, either in gauging consumers' demand or in technical efficiency, and any loss a similar inferiority. Profit or loss can only occur temporarily; a profit to one unit means a loss by others, and vice versa, and the inferior unit or units must either do better or be eliminated.

This form of organization is widely condemned on various moral and economic grounds. Criticisms usually center in the idea that "profit" is unnecessary and reflects "monopolistic exploitation," of consumers or those who supply productive services (labor and property), or of both groups. Critics ignore the facts about profits that have just been pointed out and are obvious or easily verified. (Theoretical reasons which we cannot go into here lead to the expectation that losses will actually exceed profits, and this conclusion is on the whole confirmed by the best statistical evidence available.) Those who oppose the entrepreneurial or "profit" system have frequently experimented with organization under other forms. These are commonly distinguished as "cooperative," reflecting failure to understand that exchange itself is a method of free cooperation. The results of these experiments have usually been failure (with some exception for the special and limited

field of "consumers' " cooperation). The facts are a matter of common knowledge; the reasons are not hard to find and need not be given here.

*The theoretical merits of free enterprise.* The brief description just given should suffice to show that the free enterprise system of organization, *in its theoretically ideal form*, combines maximum efficiency with freedom for all. It produces for every individual the largest yield from his "resources" (person and property) that is compatible with the free consent of others. Further, it embodies "justice" between individuals, in the "commutative" sense that what is given up in exchange is equal to what is received; hence the individual share in the total product is equal to his contribution to it, including personal services and use of property. This is "natural" justice; each receives the consequences of his own conduct. The conclusion is commonly drawn, both by those who condemn the system and those who defend it, that these three features constitute an ethical vindication of it as socially ideal. This conclusion is wholly unjustified, and its rejection in no way discredits the theory itself, as is commonly assumed. Its validity clearly depends upon two sets of facts or conditions and may be destroyed by facts contrary to either set. On the one hand, the system as it actually exists may have "mechanical" imperfections; it may fail to work in accord with the theory. And, on the other hand, the principle of reward on the basis of productive contribution may be rejected on ethical grounds. The facts under the two heads must be briefly summarized.

*Two major mechanical weaknesses.* The mechanical imperfections of the system as it actually works are only too familiar. Two ways in which reality deviates from the theoretical ideal are especially important. Monopoly, and other tendencies, partly inherent in the "given conditions," physical and human, partly contrived by individuals and groups for

their own advantage, make competition more or less imperfect. Popular criticism with respect to monopoly is, indeed, much exaggerated and misconceived. Every monopoly obviously has competition, and the notion that monopoly is always bad may be met by the two reminders: monopoly is often deliberately created by social action, as in the case of patents on inventions; and other monopolies commonly function in the same way, to stimulate and reward useful innovation and compensate for the risk and the losses that they involve. Most monopolies are in fact relatively temporary. Yet monopoly is certainly a real evil in many cases and presents a very difficult problem. No simple legal procedure can preserve freedom and the incentive of profit and at the same time prevent individuals from seeking economic power and organizing for this end or from seeking gain through monopoly and restriction.

Far more important in practice is a second mechanical weakness. This is the familiar tendency for economic activity to expand and contract in more or less regular "cycles" of prosperity and depression, both in particular fields and in society as a whole. Depressions involve widespread suffering and the equal or greater evil of insecurity and fear. The worst feature of the situation, from the political point of view, is the "panic" type of thinking which seems to be natural to human beings in a crisis. The drowning man not merely grasps at straws but is likely to seize hold of one who attempts to rescue him in a way which results in the death of both. It would take us too far afield to show in detail the falsity, or very limited truth, of the two common assumptions that depressions are inherent in the nature of capitalism and that the problem would be avoided under any other system of organization, or at least any which allowed individual freedom of purchase and sale. (Most theories of collectivism, and the practice of both communist and fascist states, do embody these activities as basic to the social-economic structure.) It

should, however, be evident that the cycle problem is purely one of scientific knowledge and political competence. It is not one of conflicting interests, since all classes suffer in varying degree from a depression and practically no one is profited.<sup>1</sup>

*Ethical limitations of individualism.* This brings us to consideration of the ethical postulates of economic individualism, specifically the principle of reward according to contribution, or "reaping what one sows." If men's behavior is "economically intelligent," competition will mean sharing in the social dividend in proportion to "productive capacity." We then face the question whether this "commutative justice" is defensible as an ideal of human rights, or how far it is even compatible with social necessity. The ethical limitations of this principle are far more serious than the mechanical imperfections of the market in invalidating an apologetic interpretation of economic theory. The social result of the principle will clearly be any degree of inequality—opulence at one end of the scale and poverty at the other—in accord with inequality in ownership of productive capacity, in its two forms. In an exchange economy, the principle directly implies destitution for any who have nothing to sell in the way of services, of person or property, for which—or for their products—other persons are both willing and able to pay. The principle can be defended only to the extent either that the distribution of productive capacity itself is ideally just or that nothing can be done about it, and both these assumptions are patently contrary to fact.

It is a fallacy, rooted in prejudice and superficiality, but

<sup>1</sup> These mechanical imperfections do not (as the uninformed public tends to assume) invalidate the economic theory which at the most general stage of analysis pictures them absent. Theoretical mechanics similarly has to assume the absence of "friction," and deal with idealized conditions in other respects, which diverge quite as far from literal realism. Analysis must begin with general principles which must be properly qualified in application to practical problems.

nearly universal in popular and reformist thinking, that economic inequality is, or is mainly, associated with the ownership of "wealth" or property. To begin with, many of the largest incomes are actually derived from personal services; for example, "prominent" lawyers, doctors, and artists, including prize fighters and movie stars. Moreover, the difference is largely unreal, since property and personal earning capacity come into the possession of individuals through practically the same channels—inheritance, effort, and thrift, all largely affected by "luck." It follows that the familiar sharp distinction between the ethical claims of the two sources of income to their economic earnings is indefensible. All forms of capacity for rendering useful service are largely artificial, but chiefly in the social and historical sense, not that of individual creation. They are components of "civilization," and so, in fact, is appreciative capacity, or economic wants. The whole problem of inequality and injustice is rooted in the two factors of natural endowment and the participation of individuals in a total accumulated social inheritance, and this is mental or spiritual or "cultural," as well as "material." And to all these sources of inequality must be added the large factor of accident.

*Individualistic theory versus facts.* What has just been said does not mean that the moral qualities of the individual are economically unimportant. It does not even logically imply that superior inherited capacity ought not to have a superior reward. These propositions set problems that are to be discussed on their merits and in the light of facts and social ideals. But it does follow that the whole social philosophy of individualism is subject to sweeping limitations. Freedom is a sound ethical ideal, but "effective" freedom depends on the possession of power as well as mere absence of interference, at the hands of other individuals or of "society." And it is also relative to tastes or wants. The assumption underlying

the individualistic economic ethic is that the individual is either unalterably "given" as he stands, or is morally "self-made" and that in either case he is the real social unit. The element of profound truth in this view is basic to the moral life and to all serious discussion of human and social problems. But it is only part of the truth, and liberal thought, particularly in its formative stage, tended to neglect other factors fully as important. Freedom and power are like the factors in an arithmetical product; the result varies in proportion to each separately and disappears entirely if either factor is zero. Both wants and "capacity" (in both forms) result from a complex mixture of individual effort reflecting moral qualities, with various forces and conditions that are beyond individual control. As is usually the case in human problems, no clear or accurate analysis is possible; "judgment" must be used in comparing and combining factors which seem important but are never measurable.

The limitations of individualism are particularly obvious from the standpoint of economic analysis. The theory of market competition takes individuals as given, with respect to their three economic attributes, i.e., their tastes or wants and their productive capacity, the latter in turn consisting of personal qualities, and external agents and materials owned, and recognized and protected by the existing legal order. In sociological terms it may almost be said that the individual is unreal; any nation or other society which acts as a unit in external or internal policy is a complex of "institutions"—traditions, knowledge or belief, and common-interest groupings, rather than an organization of independent individuals. Our "individualistic" society would be more descriptively called "familistic" and—as it has worked out in the past century—nationalistic and "classistic." The individual is not a datum, and social policy cannot treat him as such.

Again, it is useful to think of social life as a game, and

consider its particular features. It is played by groups, or teams—in this case an indefinite number. In fact, inequality and injustice exist far more in the relations between groups than between literal individuals. The family, in some form, is the minimum real unit, and many other communities, up to states and even larger units, are only less important, both as interest groups and in making the individual what he is on entering social life as a functioning unit. The fact that inequality applies “fundamentally” to families and communities, regions and states, rather than to literal individuals, is the basis for the rivalry and conflict which result both in international war and in the “class struggle.” The tendency to conflict is greatly aggravated by differences in “culture,” as well as wealth, and by cultural, group, and national loyalties; such groups always feel an urge to perpetuate themselves and their way of life, and to expand at the expense of others. Secondly, the social game is played for stakes which involve the major values of life. And, finally, it goes on continuously, generation after generation, with “players” constantly dropping out and being replaced. Hence, in addition to the procedure of play itself, the rules must cover the terms of admission of new players. Any new entrant must be trained to play, and dealt a “hand,” and must also be given some share in the “chips”—the stakes which the activity must not only distribute but maintain and increase by using it.

In free society the preservation and increase of wealth and culture are largely left to individual, family, and voluntary-group initiative. The inevitable result is a tendency toward increasing inequality, between self-perpetuating groups of all sorts, as well as (or rather than) between individuals. This is most conspicuous with respect to productive capacity (internal and external) though just as true of all elements of culture. It is a case of “to him that hath shall be given.” Any individual or other unit which at any time has more is in a better position

to acquire still more. Capacity and taste develop together and inseparably, though wants typically grow more rapidly than the means of satisfying them—human nature being as it is (and probably ought to be). The tendency goes beyond the individual life, through various forms of inheritance, appearing in each new generation as the injustice of an unequal start in life.

Liberal societies have as a matter of course, if gropingly, recognized these problems in practice and have tried to meet them through such measures as progressive income and inheritance taxation. This is designed to reduce inequality, at both ends of the scale. It sets some limit to accumulation, and the proceeds are used to provide a decent minimum for all and especially to provide education and other requirements for the young. The liberal ethic goes beyond law, in many directions. Modern civilization has been as much distinguished from others by humanitarianism and “charity,” voluntary and politically organized, as it has by the unprecedented development of science and technology. The attitude toward rights of convicted criminals and toward animals is in point here.

*Complexity of the problem of free society.* The facts briefly pointed out make the social-ethical problem of liberal society one of tremendous complexity, scope, and difficulty. Liberal society may be defined by the fact of consciously facing its own future as a social problem. It is a human or world problem, not merely a local or national one, and is spiritual as well as economic or “material,” even in those aspects which can at all properly be even roughly distinguished as economic. It is rather an accident that the conflicts which threaten peace and order arise in the economic field, even when this is properly defined to cover the use of means for all ends, higher as well as lower, and the distribution of means. A little reflection, along the lines of the foregoing argument, should make it clear that harmony and conflict of

interest, giving rise to problems of lawmaking and enforcement, are characteristic of informal association, play, and cultural activities, as well as of "business" life, and that the problems have essentially the same form in all fields. Without law and obedience to law, and moral ideals and self-restraint going far beyond law, even a casual conversation may degenerate into a quarrel and then a fight. It is increasingly recognized that conflicting economic interest is relatively unimportant as a cause of war. The parties could almost always gain more through peaceful exchange and cooperation, and they really know that this is true. All this is true also of "class struggle," and all clashes of economic interests. Careful calculation shows that even colonial exploitation is not usually profitable economically. In European history religious differences loom large as a cause of war—supplemented by cultural competition and by sheer partisanship. Economic interests, real or supposed, are also involved, but an "economic interpretation" is largely rationalization. In war, as in general, the real motives are unanalyzable and often seem paradoxical and inscrutable and in any case irrational.

*The deeper meaning of liberalism.* One who approaches the social problem from the economic side, and who at the same time tries to be objective and face obvious facts, must be struck by the limitations of the economic view of conduct. Economic analysis treats production as a "means" to consumption, or at least to some ultimate use of some result. But reflection will show that in "economic" life itself the motives are highly mixed and in large part not distinctively "economic." That is, the "value" to individuals and groups of the goods and services they want and strive to get is not mainly intrinsic; they are symbols of success. Economic activity has at least as much the character of a competitive game or sport as that of providing the means for satisfying substantive wants or needs. This applies both to consumption

and to production; people are largely motivated by "keeping up with the Joneses"—and/or getting ahead of them. Economic "success" is largely competitive; and the symbols are in large part culturally determined, and their concrete form more or less a historical accident.

In so far as the ends of action are real, i.e., valued for any intrinsic quality, the content is primarily esthetic, as indicated by the expression, a "decent" standard of living. But esthetic values also are distinctive of particular cultures and are much affected by the motives of emulation and prestige considerations. Real beauty cannot be separated at all sharply from rarity and costliness, and these clearly reflect the craving for conformity and distinction. But it is "beauty" in a broad interpretation, which makes up the bulk of the cost—beyond purely competitive standards—of a scale of living, even at a "decent minimum" in modern society. Physical comfort, in anything like a literal interpretation, is hardly at issue in civilized life under ordinary conditions. It is a right, both recognized and provided for through charity, public and private, and even for incarcerated criminals. If anyone is physically destitute, it is because of the repugnant social terms on which "relief" is offered. Nothing is more familiar than the voluntary sacrifice of comfort and security for "appearances," or even the mere love of adventure. Esthetic creation, in contrast with the reduplication of existing works, is so much more than a matter of economy in the use of limited means that it seems trivial, absurd, if not repulsive, to think of it from the latter standpoint at all, though it always has this aspect also.

Beyond obvious and fairly narrow limits, it becomes entirely unrealistic to look at the good life in economic terms, or under the form of means and ends, even with the choice of ends not treated as given but also included in the problem; indeed, there are limits to viewing it as a problem in any

sense. As an American economist has observed, "an irrational passion for dispassionate rationality" would take all the joy out of life. And it is just as true that an irrational passion for duty can destroy goodness. The castigation and lampooning of Puritanism (or of its caricature) is a familiar theme. That social life is much more than cooperation for increased efficiency has been illustrated by the story of a football club which hired an efficiency expert as a manager; his first innovation was to have all the men play on the same side, it being obviously wasteful to have half of them pushing against the other half. Our ethical thinking runs into similar paradoxes, if pushed too far along any line. J. S. Mill, perhaps the leading representative of liberal social philosophy and ethics as well as economics in the nineteenth century, held that pleasure is the ultimate end but had to admit that, to get maximum pleasure, we must to a large extent forget it and pursue other explicit ends. The observation can be generalized for all ethical theory; all thinking about conduct seems to run into a principle of indirection. Friendliness and generosity toward others lose much of their ethical quality if the motive is merely a sense of duty—and even more obviously if it is personal salvation, in terms of eternal heaven and hell.

To get at the real meaning of liberalism, we need to consider more fully the observation made earlier, that the ideal of freedom involves both a rehabilitation of play and a changed conception of work. Liberal thought recognizes that man is a social being—though in the light of many radical differences between human society and that of nonhuman species, it may be misleading to call him a "social animal." The liberal ideal of society in accord with the principle of freedom is free association. It is useful to distinguish at least four forms or aspects of a good social life. Arranged in a descending order with respect to the degree of reflective seriousness involved,

they are work, cultural activity, formal or organized play, and pure or spontaneous, even frivolous, "sociability," typified by casual conversation. The different types overlap and fuse, beyond the possibility of clear distinction, and all have both individual and social aspects. The point here is to emphasize that "the good life" involves all of them inseparably, particularly the last—and that more is to be learned about liberalism by considering the roles of the other three factors than that of work. This last term may be used to include all "economic" activity, everything that is undertaken primarily for the sake of some end felt to be intrinsically or "finally" desirable, or necessary. A vague and largely arbitrary distinction must be made between work in which the value of the end is individual and that in which it is social or involves the "good" of others. The latter seems to be the meaning of ethical value, or "duty," though personal enjoyment or avoidance of pain, beauty, and moral obligation all enter into all four forms of activity, in varying ways and degrees.

The permeation of all conduct by the different factors or aspects may be brought out by noting the paradox in the meaning of play and work, as the main contrast in the rationale of conduct. The difference is largely a matter of the more or less arbitrary attitude of the participant. It depends on whether the end is "real" and the activity instrumental to it, or the reverse is the case. No empirical classification of activity into play and work is possible; it would be hard to find any concrete activity which may not be one or the other, depending on "circumstances." On the one hand, play has its serious purpose; as exercise, it is developmental, and undoubtedly necessary, to man, for health, physical and mental. But if the player thinks about the activity in terms of its purpose, it becomes work and not only loses its distinctive value as enjoyment, but may also fail to accomplish the serious purpose. On the other hand, work ideally has the play aspect of being

interesting, and doubtless always does have more or less of it, at least if it is above the lowest drudgery. Perhaps the most serious human activity or work is the task of democracy, the discussion of ethical and social problems. But discussion itself is largely mixed with the play interest—and also with esthetic motives. These tend to outweigh the reaching of sound conclusions, and we cannot say that discussion is in general more fruitful in its primary function if attention is seriously fixed upon the serious end, excluding the other interests.

The paradox perhaps comes to a head in the attempt to discuss conduct itself, in the abstract, to give a truthful description of it, hence in the “methodology” of the moral and social disciplines. The urge for scientific objectivity calls for ignoring motives and reducing behavior to purely physical process—the “behavioristic” point of view. But in such a treatment, in a rigorous sense, conduct ceases to be conduct and becomes mechanical reaction—and it is a manifest absurdity to take this view of the discussion itself, which is also a form of conduct. A similar paradox applies to all mutuality in social relations; we cannot verbally define free association, or state the distinction between exchange and “robbery” through either fraud or force. All human relationships involve an unanalyzable mixture of mechanical interaction, free exchange of things or services, and also both giving and taking, by coercion or deception, on both sides. We cannot realistically ignore motives—especially because we are usually more interested in these than in the physical facts—though we can never say at all accurately what the motives are. It is a scientific truism that an individual’s motives are known only to himself; they cannot be observed by anyone else. But the facts are often to the contrary; the motives professed, and even actually felt, depend largely upon the norms which are currently “fashionable” in the cultural setup. Men give, even honestly give, moral or sentimental reasons for their acts—

affection, patriotism, or religion—when an observer cannot help seeing that the “real” reasons are largely of the opposite sort and the converse situation is perhaps equally typical. In the Middle Ages thought and expression were dominated by an ascetic-religious ideology; the counsel of perfection was the monastic ideal of poverty, chastity, and obedience. But, as everyone knows, the monks assumed that the world owed them a living, and they expected and normally secured a degree of comfort and security as high as contemporary civilization afforded and far above what was possible for the mass of the population which supported them. Further, the means considered legitimate for securing this support often amounted to pious fraud and violated modern standards of common honesty. In our own day the opposite situation commonly prevails. The modern spirit abhors sentimentality and pretense. This results in the familiar “hard-boiled” pose, where the real motives are often clearly sentimental.

The modern devotion to critical objectivity—as soon as we reflect about that—“brings the eternal note of sadness in.” While our better instincts run in the direction of making work into play, our inclination toward “too much thinking” has the opposite effect, converting our play into work. Philosophy as well as science tends to destroy romance and only partly to replace it with another “beauty” of a colder intellectual kind. But all the distinctively human values are romantic; love must proverbially be blind. And beauty also, to a degree; it is hard for the scientific botanist not to lose the beauty of the flower, which, of course, he cannot find with his microscope or by any use of the scientific method; and the argument applies as well to the economic botanist.

*The ethical significance of play.* We have suggested that for an understanding of the social ethic of liberalism, its general principles and their application to political and economic life, it is highly important to consider carefully the

phenomena of play and the cultural pursuits. Both will be discussed without reference to any economic aspect, though this is always present in one form or another and cannot finally be ignored. We have also pointed out that economic life, in the meaning ordinarily understood, really has much of the character of play. It is a mixture of solitaire and competition and also "ritual"; but attention may here be confined to competitive play. The ethics of play or sport is a topic strangely neglected by moral philosophers, even in modern free society, and is virtually ignored in all discussion under religious auspices. (In the Bible one finds no explicit reference to having "fun," or to rivalry or emulation, as a part of the good life.)

The first characteristic of play, as of all social activity, and indeed of that which is called individual or private, is that freedom is conditioned and limited by "law," in several meanings of the word. Even in the most informal sociability, such as casual conversation, not usually thought of as play, there must be a common language and this in itself implies a vast stock of common ideas, meanings, and values and of accepted formalities. These are necessary to mutual understanding and anticipation by each of the way in which the other will "react." However, this foresight is and must be limited. An element of curiosity and surprise is equally essential to interest in any activity. There is always an element of luck; there are games of pure chance, but a game of pure skill is a self-contradictory idea. The basis of mutual understanding is a common cultural background. This is never perfectly uniform, and cultural as well as individual differences are a source of misunderstanding and strife; the former are the main factors in international relations.

In the pure ideal form of play all the "laws" are taken for granted; the moment they give rise to any problem, the nature of the activity and of the association is fundamentally changed.

Law, in the inclusive sense, is the essence of any social group, and the acceptance of the laws is a condition of membership. In free and progressive society, every social problem centers in differences as to what the law either is or ought to be and takes the form of interpreting, enforcing, and eventually changing the constitution and laws. In free association, this is done by "discussion," ideally leading to unanimous agreement. "Government by discussion" is Lord Bryce's well-known definition of democracy. Discussion is an activity not directed to any concrete end but to the solution of the problem, necessarily unknown in advance. A social problem always combines conflict of interest with difference of opinion about what is right. Further, the differences must be associated with a common interest, the interest in perpetuating the group—in play, "the game"—while improving its character. It follows that freedom in social relations has three forms or components. First, every system of law allows some latitude for literal freedom of action by individuals and free groups. Second, social freedom requires equal participation in the activities of lawmaking—or this is a condition of full membership in a group. Finally, since complete unanimity is not usually to be had, complete freedom implies the right and the power to leave the group, hence to join other groups, and eventually to form groupings at will. In principle, any group is "political" to the extent that its members do not have this third form of freedom. In common usage political groups are defined by territorial sovereignty; leaving one group means physical removal to another and is limited by material cost, by cultural differences, and by the laws governing departure and especially entry into other political units, which practically cover the earth. The first task of law is to define its own scope, i.e., the scope of individual freedom within the law, or tolerance of differences.

In play, not much literal enforcement is possible, without

destroying the play spirit. It takes the form of excluding the recalcitrant individual—which is also the ultimate sanction of political law. Breaking the rules, or “cheating,” is the primary meaning of crime, and of “sin” as well. But it is human nature to feel a temptation to cheat, in spite of its irrationality (scoring or winning by this means is not really doing so at all). The satisfaction of the individual interest in winning and of the group interest in having a good game are completely interdependent.

All problems of social ethics are like those of play in that they have the two components of obeying the rules and improving the rules, in the interest of a better “game”—or other associative activity. We cannot here develop in detail the extensive parallelism between play and political and economic life. Both present problems of distribution of the “reward” in some relation to capacity, effort, and luck; and the fundamental values to be achieved—morality, intelligence, good taste, and enjoyment—define the philosophical problem. Intelligence is always both a form of capacity to act and a requisite for the use of capacity in other forms—a means and a mode of use of other means and an end. It is a vitally important fact that capacity to play intelligently, from the standpoint of winning, is much more highly and more commonly developed among human beings than is the capacity to improve the rules or invent better games. The difference between sport and action in the larger social arena is partly bridged over when a game is played for “stakes,” in contrast with mere points—i.e., for values felt to be substantial as well as symbolic of success.

Perhaps the most important ethical principle of secular liberalism—in contrast with our traditional religious ethic—that is to be learned from the consideration of play has to do with competitive self-assertion. As a matter of course, every party in a game must “play his own hand” to the best of his

ability; otherwise, there is no game. The ideals of charity or service simply have no place. Further, rigorous equality in the distribution of the results is self-contradictory (as is the complete elimination of luck, as already pointed out). The ethical ideal is a “fair” and an interesting game. Sportmanship is a large part of liberal ethics. The conception of fairness calls for a certain minimum of inequality in capacity among the players. This need is often met by classification of players, choice of the game, handicaps, etc. Such devices are obviously needful in connection with the larger social, economic and political game, and the difficulty of working out and applying them is a major aspect of the whole problem. The moral attitude of liberalism, being defined by the notion of law, is primarily impersonal. It is a matter of respect for the rules, and of ideals for their improvement, rather than a feeling toward persons, and the two things are as often conflicting as harmonious. The law is, of course, supposed to express the rights of men, which are in question only where these differ, or seem to differ, from their felt interests. The principle is not “love,” which covers a group of special feelings, all restricted in scope, and hardly a matter of duty or obligation. Friendliness and courtesy are, of course, good, and there is always a margin for generosity in interpreting and applying rules in doubtful cases. A game is more or less spoiled if the players are “too much” interested in winning, even in strict accord with the rules.

*Cultural values; development and progress.* In contrast with casual association and play, the cultural values are the content of liberalism on the “serious” side. The primary values are intellectual and esthetic; morality or “goodness” is chiefly a matter of distribution rather than a distinct value; personal relations, as obligatory, are largely comprehended in good manners or courtesy, which is more an esthetic than a moral category, and in “giving” in special cases of distress. In the

liberal view the serious values of life are intellectual and esthetic enjoyment and creativeness. From the standpoint of discussion or of reflective thinking, as we have seen, all values are serious. They are included in "truth," since all questions relate to the truth "about" whatever subject matter is in question. Truth is assumed to be ultimately the same for all, but it is neither necessary nor desirable to have universal agreement. Genuine belief cannot be coerced, and freedom of belief is the ultimate concept in terms of which all freedom is defined. The overt expression of belief can, of course, be controlled through reward and punishment, and even the feeling of believing freely can be established by social conditioning in infancy or by playing upon the emotions. But these procedures are abhorrent to liberal ethics, which calls for a sharp distinction, as a matter of personal integrity, between true intellectual conviction and any so-called belief which is at bottom an emotional loyalty or an esthetic appreciation or which rests on any ground other than the truth. To draw these distinctions clearly is one of the tasks of a liberal education.

The core of liberalism—what most distinguishes it from other views of life—is a manifold revolution in the conception of truth. We need not attempt to answer Pilate's famous question, "What is truth," as we need not give a formal definition of freedom in any metaphysical sense. We assume that there is an intelligible difference between believing, on the basis of facts, reasoning and the critical evaluation of evidence, and "prejudice," or believing by choosing to have faith in some traditional dogma or myth or authoritative pronouncement. These usually have no concrete meaning until interpreted with explicit reference to a particular issue, by an authority, itself based on traditional faith or some form of force.

To say the belief is free is to say that truth is inherently

"dynamic," subject to change and actually growing and changing. The liberal interest in truth is one of curiosity and quest, not of mystical contemplation or adoration. Truth is the right—or the best—answer to some intelligent question, and when a question is definitively answered it is no longer a question. Hence, any truth that is really "established" is no longer interesting, but a commonplace, even a bore. Truth is the supreme example of the principle that liberal idealism looks at the values of life in terms of pursuit as well as possession; they belong to the activity as much as to the result, to means as well as to ends. Truth is an end when it is unknown or uncertain, and especially if controversial; hence the truth interest is finally a romantic one. Established truth is valued instrumentally, as a means to the acquisition of further truth, or of other values, to be had through thinking and acting. Truth is the solution of a problem, and its pursuit is partly explorative, the goal more or less an unknown. This is clearly the case in mathematics, where we make the nearest approach to "absolute" truth; the answer to a problem is that unknown result which satisfies certain prescribed conditions.

The second feature of the liberal conception of truth is that it is a social category; its only test is unanimous acceptance in some community of discussion. Further, truth as social is ultimately democratic. As in most cases, democracy is indirect, and implies some kind of aristocracy, and some form of leadership. The consensus which defines truth is that of the competent and unbiased, even in factual observation. For most people, and in most of the field of knowledge and opinion, what to believe is necessarily a matter of accepting tradition or selecting the authority to be followed. Thus a truth judgment is moral as well as intellectual. But competence and freedom from bias are to be judged by the whole community of interested persons, and finally by each individual for himself. No sanctity attaches to tradition or to any authority; intellectual

leaders secure their position exclusively through appeal to the free judgment of their followers. It follows that telling the truth in social relations is a primary ethical value. However, literal truthfulness in discourse is seriously limited by conflicting goods, and every person is both free and morally obliged to make the best compromise he can between literal veracity and other values. Among the latter, the moral value of courtesy and kindness is conspicuous, and the conflict is a familiar problem. Fully as important are esthetic values of many kinds. Far more statements are interesting because they are not true, but imaginative and fictional, than are significant because of objective accuracy.

On the vital subject of esthetic value, and its relation to truth and to utility, only a few words are in order here. The concept covers a very wide range of experience, suggested by such words as "amusing," "exciting," "chastening," "cathartic," "edifying," and "thrilling"—"comic" and "tragic," "realistic," "romantic," and "classical." Undoubtedly, beauty is connected with and overlaps both truth and utility, yet some contrast is of the essence of the meaning of the word. The poetic statement that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," etc., is beautiful but not true. And so of beauty and utility—with due respect in this case to Ruskin instead of Keats. Recognition of beauty, natural as well as artistic, its enjoyment and creation, on their own account, as a part of the good life for everybody, is a distinctive feature of liberalism, almost on a par with the free and critical-skeptical pursuit of truth and its appreciation. Other systems of values have used art for didactic purposes and as a part of the "pomp and circumstance" making religious and political authority impressive to the masses. From the liberal point of view, all this represents special privilege and emolument, and prestige, for the elite. (In the Semitic religious tradition, a part of the

original Christian inheritance, representative art is explicitly prohibited.)

*Liberalism and religion; absolutism; pragmatism.* At this point, some negative observations are called for. The social and ethical philosophy of liberalism involves no repudiation of religion, specifically the more basic tenets of Judaism and Christianity, such as the belief in God, moral freedom and responsibility, personal immortality, churches, and even "faith." It does involve a radical re-interpretation of these fundamental doctrines, but it is one which large numbers have been able to accept while retaining allegiance to either of the two great religions of European civilization. The idea of God does not necessarily mean more than some kind of "ground" in the cosmos for the validity of spiritual values. Modern physics recognizes that matter itself is finally metaphysical in nature, not physical in the naive meaning. The church is for the liberal a free association of individuals for the pursuit of the religious life, not a supernatural entity with special authority to tell people what to believe or to do, or to dispense "salvation" on arbitrary terms. The belief in immortality will function as extending and enlarging the moral life and providing additional meaning and motivation. Otherwise, it is not practically significant, since the liberal will hold that the problems of the other world can be dealt with only by working as intelligently and conscientiously as possible at those presented by the present life. As to faith, all reasoning finally goes back to premises which cannot be demonstrated, or rationally argued, and usually to following authority with special competence.

Liberalism is also a "faith," a faith in the world and in man. It views the world as an environment in which it is possible progressively to achieve a better life, in terms of the values of truth, beauty, goodness, and enjoyment; and it

imputes to men at large the intelligence and the will to work for these values. It is a qualified optimism, in contrast with the doctrines of the vale-of-tears and original sin, which make men helpless, morally and materially, and dependent on miraculous intervention and aid. In practice, the latter doctrines have meant a duty of submission to the authority of some human group claiming to speak for God, and also claiming the right to enforce, by torture and execution, both belief and conduct. The liberal ethic is democratic; it exalts freedom against obedience and power. Either will be "abused"; but it is held both that the abuse of power generally leads to worse objective evils, and that even doing what is actually good, under authoritative command, is contrary to the ideal of the moral life. Within limits, self-government, by the individual and society, is to be preferred to good government, where a choice must be made. But only within limits; the liberal ideal is always one of balance and compromise, on the basis of "judgment," between conflicting principles and values, as well as interests. The best balance cannot be described in formal rules concrete enough to answer real questions, or not subject to criticism and revision.

In short, as we have stressed, liberalism is a faith in the capacity, and the courage, of man to find and follow truth and right. This implies a faith in the nature of the world as "such that" truth, carried as far as facts and evidence allow, will be finally in harmony with other values, including utility. Truth is to be believed because it is true, and for no other reason, though in particular cases objective accuracy may be subordinate to other considerations, as we have seen. For liberalism, no form of value is "absolute"; but this does not mean that one opinion is as good as another, or that error, moral choice, or good taste, is unreal. These things are rather "relatively absolute"; they are valid in the same sense that the objective world is real; i.e., we think in terms of a

substance or sub-stratum which may be "eternal and immutable," but its nature is to be progressively discovered, and never fully or finally known. The liberal faith begins with skepticism, and repudiates dogma and wish-thinking on absolutistic grounds or "rationalistic" in the idealistic meaning; but it equally repudiates the reduction of intelligence to will in the rational-utilitarian or "pragmatic" manner. It is assumed that men should know and face the truth, and will wish to, even when it is unpleasant; and also that the world is "such that" truth will be useful, in leading to the enlargement of personality and to cultural progress, and ultimately to "happiness." This does not exclude humor, frivolity, play, and esthetic escape, setting more or less arbitrary bounds to serious thinking and acting. The scientist must both believe that truth will be useful, while pursuing it as truth and not as utility, and at the same time accept it as a moral, and even a religious, value. There can be no science either if scientific workers are dogmatic absolutists or if their motive is utilitarian, not to mention the self-seeking interest of the charlatan.

Freedom of thought implies freedom of action as a corollary, as well as freedom of verbal expression, which is obviously necessary to freedom of thought itself. The ultimate contrast is between intellectual freedom and various forms of obscurantism. Freedom of association, or mutuality, in action, may be viewed as a form of freedom of expression. If the historical change to liberalism from "religious," i.e., ultimately theistic, idealism, with its logical implication in social practice of ecclesiastical authoritarianism, and a static social order based on caste, constitutes moral degeneracy, the liberal can only say, "Make the most of it." The only "proof" that can be offered for the validity of the liberal position is that we are discussing it and its acceptance is a presupposition of discussion, since discussion is the essence of the position itself. From this point of view, the core of liberalism is a faith in

ultimate potential equality of men as the basis of democracy. There are two possible alternatives. One is a conspiracy to seize power by force. The other is "preaching," which itself is really a form of force and can finally be successful only through "preaching down" or overt repression of other preachers of competing programs or gospels.

The liberal will admit that much is to be said for an aristocratic constitution of society, including slavery, in an idealized form—if it could be assumed that there is any practicable way of having it in an ideal form. This "if" is enough by itself to give away the whole case. An idealized "caste" relation between leaders and followers, in accord with the romantic picture of parents and children in the family, can be defended in terms both of "happiness" and of the possibility of a higher absolute level of cultural achievement. Such a system might endure indefinitely, preserved by conditioning each new generation to accept it, and in obeying to feel free. But there does not seem to be any way for a society once liberalized deliberately to "go back." It would have to give to some particular selected individual or group a perpetual blank check on power; and this is hardly thinkable as a rational performance—apart from actual belief in some special channel of access to a superhuman source of knowledge and taste open only to the ruling caste. If the change comes about, it must apparently be through some self-appointed leader and party seizing power by some combination of force and deception.

*The place of economic conflict in the social problem.* Enough was said earlier of the ultimate unreality of the economic basis of conflict, or the more or less accidental reasons for conflict appearing in this form. All conduct has the economic aspect, as far as purposive action involves the use of scarce means; and all associative life involves power relations. And on the other hand, the ends are never economic,

but are a mixture of esthetic and symbolic values. It is a serious question whether, if all economic limitations and conflicts were removed say, by the discovery of some effective magic for producing all material goods and services without effort or the use of scarce means, social antagonism and conflict would be removed, or even reduced, or essentially changed in form. It appears probable that conflict would be more intense, unless other interests and other traits of "human nature" were at the same time miraculously transformed, removing all desire to "get ahead" and all occasion for organized action of any kind.

However, there are obvious reasons why conflict, within and between societies, arises in the economic field. These begin with the two facts, that means are necessary for the good life, and that in any community they are "scarce" in comparison with what is required for a satisfactory standard of living for all. Thus arises the problem of distribution, since men have individual interests (in contrast with bees), and there is no generally accepted or acceptable norm for a "just" distribution, especially because the problem is tied up with family interests and the institution, and with the motivation of production. Finally, a tolerably effective use of means requires organization. And moreover, the progress of civilization and the accumulation of means require organization on a larger and larger scale. It is now on a scale where cooperative relations are largely "impersonal," and the moral forces that operate more or less effectively in the small face-to-face groups (and might operate even in a small democratic group) practically lose all their force. To utilize modern technology, economic organization has in many respects to be world-wide.

When we look at the problem of any society, or of the world, in economic terms, and from the standpoint of the disadvantaged individual and group, the major "real" evils

are on one side the esthetic sordidness of life for the poor, and on the other the dreary monotony and lack of effective freedom which affects highly specialized work under the direction of technical and administrative specialists. For completeness, we should add the overwork of those individuals who incur and accept responsibility, and the "boredom" of those who are independent and do not.

For the liberal moral sense, the major evils may be actually worse if they are not felt by those directly affected. A bad condition presents a social problem only if it is socially recognized. The diseases of liberalism may be viewed as results of the general inculcation of ideals of equal rights, combined with failure to impart an understanding of the limits of equality and of the methods and costs of securing that which is possible. This fact raises the difficult moral problem of the role of the "agitator" on the one hand, and the dispenser of philosophic or religious "opiate" on the other. The critical spectator finds discrepancy both ways between discontent actually felt and that which "ought" to prevail. People are satisfied with conditions they ought to rebel against, and dissatisfied with conditions better than they deserve or can reasonably expect—or they are justifiably discontented, but for wrong reasons. According to liberal theory, they ought to be discontented only with what is both bad or unfair, and remediable; it is irrational to object to what cannot be changed. But there is little agreement on these points, or upon rational procedure.

*Moralistic and scientific romanticism.* Since the essence of liberalism is the reliance on rational agreement or mutual consent for the determination of policy, and since the amount of agreement attainable seems very meager in relation to the needs for action felt in a large-scale, rapidly changing society, it is easy to understand psychologically, though not to approve, the tendency to fly to one or the other of the two positions mentioned early in the essay under the names of moralism

and scientism. There is much truth in both these positions; the error is in accepting either as true to the exclusion of the other (and still others), i.e., in the romantic disposition to oversimplify the problem. On the one hand, human nature is undoubtedly "sinful," and, on the other, the mind makes mistakes in the choice of means to achieve given ends. It is easy and attractive to generalize from either fact, and make it explain everything, and particularly attractive to account for the ills of society in terms of either the sins or the errors of other people. And as to the content of sin and error, there is much real virtue and wisdom in respecting tradition and established authority. There is also much truth in the idea that the desire to "get ahead," and especially to get ahead of other people, is the primary sin to be avoided. We can only mention the questions obviously raised—whether the play interest, including the emulative aspect, can be rationally condemned, whether civilization and progress are good, and whether it is possible to have them without the motives which religious idealism views as sinful. These views are as old as history.

The advent of modern science, with the power it has conferred on man to change the world and the conditions of life, has just as naturally produced the opposite romanticism, the "scientific" oversimplification. It is perhaps true that, especially under the influence of frontier conditions, liberalism had tended to stress activity as such and the cruder levels of achievement, to some neglect of the higher appreciations, the intellectual and esthetic life, and the moral value of fellow-feeling and "aimless" sociability. In any case, the problem of life cannot be reduced to one of means for achieving given ends. And this is particularly true of the social problem. Here, the end is right terms of association, and the essence of it is the definition of the result to be achieved rather than any concrete achievement.

The "sickness of liberal society" is not to be diagnosed

either as moral degeneracy or as arrested intellectual development, specifically in the scientific sense. Both moralism and scientism formally accept freedom as an ultimate value; in form, both are anarchistic, though in contrasting senses; but both eventuate in an authoritarian social order. Both theories aim at unity through free agreement, to cure the malady of social discord and strife. But such agreement is not to be reached either through preaching abstract ideals or through adopting the experimental method. The social-ethical problem is an indivisible whole; means and ends must be determined together, and by the same agent—either by society as a whole, implying equal participation in its decision, or by some prescriptive authority. Both the moralists and the “scientificists” really assume that other people “ought” to agree with them and freely accept their leadership in dealing with both ends and means. An anarchistic theory, in any form, is essentially an invitation to all to “leave it to me” (and “my gang”—those who already agree with me) to deal with the problem as a whole. It is, finally, immaterial whether “utopia” is pictured in moral or scientific-administrative terms. The Marxists are merely frank in cutting the knot by proposing a dictatorship—of themselves—for an indefinite period, to work out the solution and “educate” society to accept it.

The alternative to dictatorship is simply democracy in general as we have known it, struggling to solve its problems, along lines already familiar. It means cooperation in thinking and acting to promote progress, moral, intellectual, and esthetic, with material and technical progress as the basis of all, and all under the limitation of gradualism and “seasoned” with humor and play. The combination is the meaning of liberalism.

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