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The Role of Behavioral Scientists In a Durable Civilization

Scattered around the world are the remnants of civilizations long dead: the pyramids of Egypt; crumbling amphitheaters and other ruins, evidence of the grandeur that was Rome's; classic temples of Greece; almost forgotten cities of the Middle East; the Great Wall of China; jungle-hidden ruins in Central America, the only remaining evidence of the Yucatan or Maya civilization; and the few remnants of Aztec and Peruvian civilizations. For at least 7,000 years, perhaps much longer, men have been developing civilizations only to see them decline and fall.

Perhaps some observers of Western civilization complacently assume that the great technological advances will enable our civilization to endure; but many Roman citizens similarly were complacent 2,000 years ago when they reflected on the majesty of that supposedly eternal civilization centered in Rome. In view of the obvious dangers confronting Western civilization in a divided world, the great advances in the physical sciences may facilitate the destruction of our civilization rather than ensure its survival. In any event, the evidence available to date strongly suggests that men have not yet learned how to create a durable civilization so developing as to assure its own survival in a changing environment.

Some superficial observers have assumed that human societies, because they are composed of men, must be mortal, must die as do individual humans. However, more sophisticated observers see that such a conclusion is not justified. The babies born in this twentieth century A.D. are as adaptable, as capable of learning, as any who lived in the days when Greek civilization was advancing most rapidly, or when Rome was conquering much of the known world, or when the fathers and grandfathers of those now living were developing our present society. Civilizations have died not because they were mortal like humans but because the people of earlier civilizations failed to solve the crucial problems of men in society.

Various methods of inquiring into the problems of men have been

tried in the past. Oracles, seers, medicine men, and both secular and religious revelation at times have been relied upon. Numerous other methods of solving problems including application of proverbial wisdom or what was considered common sense (in the sense of the more common perceptions) also have been tried. However, during recent centuries the superiority of a different method of inquiry, that of evolving scientific procedures, has been established. The relative usefulness of this method first was demonstrated in the physical sciences, then in the physiological sciences, and is now beginning to be demonstrated in the behavioral sciences.

THE ADVANCE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

The great advance of Western civilization since the 16th Century was made possible by development of the physical and physiological sciences. Between the Chinese and European civilizations of the 14th and 15th centuries the differences in productive power were not great. But in subsequent centuries the West has advanced far more rapidly because of the application of scientific methods to the physical and physiological problems of men. The next major scientific advance may well be in the behavioral field. Here the West again has an opportunity to lead because in Russia the behavioral sciences are restrained by the Marxian dogma and because the underdeveloped nations are lagging so far behind in the general advance of science.

Today, many leading behavioral scientists in Western civilization, eminent anthropologists, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and others, agree that the problems of men in society, if solved, will be solved by the continued application of modern scientific methods of inquiry. This is not to imply that all of the needed solutions already have been found but that enough have been found and sufficient progress is being made to justify belief that pursuit of such inquiries offers the best and perhaps the only hope that men can solve their problems and create a durable society. For the purpose of further discussion we therefore assume that the behavioral scientists will be called upon to play a crucial role in the evolution of Western civilization during the decades ahead.

Already apparent is the fact that some existing governments recognize how important the work of behavioral scientists will become. For example: the Communist party in Russia has taken great pains to control the work of behavioral scientists with a view to ensuring that they serve the interests of those in power; and in the United States during recent years each political party when in office has used some behavioral scientists in ways evidently intended to further the retention of power. Whether or not some of the particular behavioral scientists concerned, either in Russia or the United States, willingly have prostituted their talents in the service of those seeking to obtain or retain power is not pertinent to this discussion. The

point is that some governments of each type ever invented by man have not hesitated to distort the work of scientists, even to corrupt or destroy scientists themselves, when those in power deemed such action expedient.

LESSONS OF HISTORY

Many people today are so impressed with the benign aspects of democratic or republican forms of government that they forget the lessons of history. The first democratic government in Europe following the French Revolution, which was inspired in part by the success of the American Revolution, beheaded Lavoisier, the father of modern chemistry. On the other hand, much early scientific work in the 17th and 18th centuries was made possible because benevolent despots in various European countries chose to defy some religious leaders and protect a few scientists as well as support their inquiries. More recently, the economic advisers of an American President apparently have endorsed proposed economic action so unsound that, in the words of a distinguished Harvard professor, it should "make every economist blush." Presumably those advisers endorsed unsound policies, or at least failed to make known their views in opposition to them, because inhibiting scientific inquiry and discussion was deemed expedient by those in authority.

In short, an important lesson to be learned from the experiences of history is that scientists should not expect to be assured of unrestricted freedom of inquiry and discussion by a government, any form of government, nor by any vested interests having special privileges or positions of power that those interests desire to defend and perpetuate. Especially should behavioral scientists be wary of becoming the tools of agencies that may inhibit full freedom of inquiry and discussion; because, of the three major fields of science—physical, physiological, and behavioral—the last deals almost continuously with controversial matters of vital import to one or another vested interest.

Behavioral scientists contemplating their role in a durable society are confronted with the question, How can such scientists be assured of the right to inquire into and discuss whatever they choose, free of all constraints that might hamper scientific inquiry? Some would answer this question by referring to the so-called "inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and many speak with reverence of these as "God-given rights." However, anyone not blinded by illusions can see that men actually enjoy such rights only when and to the extent that the society in which they live enforces them. As recently as early in World War II, American citizens of Japanese ancestry discovered that even the Bill of Rights embodied in the Constitution of the United States failed to guarantee their rights when American society chose to disregard them.

THE INDEPENDENT MINORITY

Although the problem confronted by behavioral scientists in a totalitarian form of society may seem insoluble, in a republic the situation is somewhat different. The difference lies not in any alleged reasonableness of representative government; as has already been pointed out, no government of any form yet devised has demonstrated that it can be trusted to assure scientists full freedom of inquiry and discussion. The important difference for a republic, at least for the United States now and in the foreseeable future, lies in the fact that an independent minority of educable citizens holds the balance of political power.

Professional politicians are divided into two major parties, the "Ins" and the "Outs." The former enjoy the pay, perquisites, and power of office; the latter seek them. Most citizens, by reason of their family or social environments, habitually favor one or the other major party at the polls. They usually vote as their parents or their friends have always voted. In most States of the Union the difference in number between the habitual supporters of the two major parties is relatively small. Consequently, the independent voters (independent even if registered as "Ins" or "Outs") determine who will be elected and what major policies will be adopted.

The actions of professional politicians reveal their understanding of the situation. The assiduous attention paid to minorities clearly reveals the continuous attempt to align on the side of the "Ins" or the "Outs" those whose relatively few votes can make the difference between election and defeat.

For example, fewer than one percent of the American people are farm operators who benefit from the farm program. Nevertheless, professional politicians among both the "Ins" and the "Outs" have sought to obtain the votes of this small group, because such politicians well know that the difference of a few votes may change the balance of political power.

Few people realize how great is the power of the Nation's independent minority. Even in the landslide vote of 1936, when Roosevelt obtained one of the greatest electoral majorities on record, a shift of only 1,119,500 votes in 17 States would have resulted in the election of Landon. As nearly everyone still remembers, the shift of only a few thousand votes in a handful of States would have resulted in Mr. Kennedy's defeat in 1960. The professional politicians are well aware of the actual situation, however. That is why they are so eager, 365 days in the year, to know the views of the independent minority.

The notion of two parties, differing widely in basic views and led by statesmen whose deep understanding and inclinations have committed them irrevocably to divergent paths, is but the naive dream of amateur political theorists. The facts of political life are quite dif-

ferent. Few professional politicians can afford the luxury of irrevocable commitment to any views, except possibly in favor of motherhood and the protection of babies in arms.

Rarely can a man who is not an extremely able professional politician hope to be nominated as President, to say nothing of being elected. Moreover, even an able statesman, no matter how great his understanding and how wise his choice of policies, would be hamstrung without the support of Congress. That support, free from the influence of pressure groups now feeding at the public trough, would not be forthcoming unless the Nation's independent balance-of-power minority had unmistakably indicated what they wanted.

The fact that such an independent minority holds the balance of political power in the United States and may do so for decades to come provides a possible solution to the problem confronting behavioral scientists. That minority is in a position to assure that some behavioral scientists have full freedom of inquiry and discussion.

Obviously then, a major problem confronting behavioral scientists might be solved if an important group of them could derive the principal support for their continuing research from many thousands of citizens among the Nation's independent minority. Such a broad base for support would be preferable to dependence on one or a few large foundations. Such agencies usually are managed by representatives of great wealth and sometimes are reluctant to be concerned with controversial matters. Also, on at least one occasion in recent years, a large foundation was influenced by subversive interests to such an extent that a man was selected as its head whose contempt for freedom of scientific inquiry was evidenced by his allegiance to communism and the Marxian dogma.

Support for a group of such leading scientists might be forthcoming if most of the Nation's balance-of-power minority were convinced that those scientists were helping to find solutions for the problems involved in developing an enduring civilization. The question that then arises is: What should be the principal features of an organization of behavioral scientists who would function as an advisory council for the citizens of the United States and others in the world seeking an enduring civilization?

ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF A BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE COUNCIL

The following aspects of such an organization of behavioral scientists would seem to be essential:

1. Provision should be made for ascertaining and extending the specifications for an enduring society desired by the citizens, based on the Constitution of the United States, Amendments, and pertinent indications of the desired features of society as ascertained by continuing scientific inquiry including modern polling procedures.

2. Priorities among research projects should be established by their relative importance in helping to achieve the desired features of society. Of course, such relative merit is not always readily ascertainable, but funds should not be dissipated on trivial projects.

3. The most modern scientific methods under continual development should be relied upon, and more comprehensive cross-fertilizing among the sciences should be fostered.

4. Public service as scientist-consultants, primarily to the citizenry, should be emphasized. The Council would foster scientific inquiry resulting in warranted "if-then" conclusions concerning probable costs and consequences of alternative courses of action for solving the major problems of men in society. Thus the citizens would have the best information obtainable on which to base their decisions. This information should be freely available to all men so that those of other nations also may join, if they choose, in the effort to develop an enduring civilization. The citizens of the United States or of other nations might considerably alter their present ideas about the desirable aspects of a durable society and about the best means of achieving that objective when given a better understanding of the costs and consequences involved. Such changes in views presumably would be ascertained by comprehensive polling procedures to be developed in further scientific inquiry and appropriately reported.

5. The citizens served have a right to expect that members of the Council would avoid any conflict of interest; i.e., no private or Government employees, in instances where conflict of interest might arise, or elected officials should be eligible to membership.

6. Membership on the Council should imply a primary moral commitment to modern methods of scientific inquiry for solving the problems of men in society. (A tentative code is suggested below.)

7. The qualifications for membership on the Council should be clearly stated so that those supporting the organization may be well informed.

8. The Council should have full power of inquiry into all aspects of any member's behavior with full disclosure to the Council re-required, all with a view to ensuring against perversion of scientific inquiry and to removing members found unsuitable. The purpose of this provision would be twofold: (1) to assure scientist members that the Council would have the necessary means and authority to preserve its scientific integrity (we assume that no conscientious scientist would wish to join an organization that lacked the means and authority to safeguard its own integrity); and (2) to justify public confidence in the organization.

9. Specific provision should be made to assure that all material published by the organization meets adequate standards for scientific work; i.e., approval by more than a majority of the behavioral scientists concerned should be required for publication as an official report of the Council, and provision should be made for simultaneous

publication of dissenting views when significant differences exist among the councilors concerning the scientific basis for conclusions.

A TENTATIVE CODE

For several centuries, the medical scientists have enjoyed the confidence of their fellow men in Western civilization. The fact that a physician has acted in accordance with the Hippocratic oath to save human life and to preserve inviolate the confidence of his patients has been an important factor in his deserving and obtaining the confidence of his fellow men. Perhaps a statement of moral obligation or commitment analogous to the Hippocratic oath would remind behavioral scientists of their obligations and would help them to merit by their actions the confidence and support of their fellow citizens. Such a code* is suggested in tentative form below:

My primary and overriding moral commitment or obligation is to serve as a behavioral scientist for the purpose of seeking solutions for the problems of men in society and publicly informing my fellow citizens as to the results of such scientific research. This implies:

1. Relying in such inquiries on the methods of modern sciences in their evolutionary development.

2. Endeavoring continually to improve my own ability as a scientist to develop warranted "if-then" conclusions or assertions by applying scientific methods and by subordinating any personal biases in order to assure objectivity in my work and findings.

3. Avoiding all conflicts of interest (such as might result from employment by special interests, etc.) that might inhibit scientific work or bias me in any way tending to pervert scientific inquiry.

4. Differentiating clearly in all writings and public statements so that those to whom I communicate will understand whether I am speaking or writing in my role as scientist within my field of competence or am simply urging in my role as a citizen or in some other specified role a course of action that I personally prefer.

5. Exposing as unscientific, without fear or favor, all purportedly scientific reports within my field of competence that (in the absence of such exposure) could be expected seriously to mislead my fellow citizens, whom I have chosen to serve.

* Problems connected with academic freedom, loyalty oaths, and witch hunting for Fascists and Communists have induced emotional reactions in some individuals to certain words. For the benefit of any who have thus reacted to anything said here, further clarification is in order. The behavioral scientists who have suggested the code do not propose that all behavioral scientists should function as suggested nor that behavioral scientists have any greater obligations to their fellow men than do physical scientists or physiological scientists. Those who drafted the code do suggest that the status of some behavioral scientists is analogous to that of some physiological scientists who are members of the medical profession and that formal recognition of their obligations is essential if they are to obtain a full measure of confidence and support for their work.

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