

A CHALLENGE TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*

Herbert Patterson

Oklahoma A. and M. College

(Abstract)

The natural sciences, after a long struggle, have risen in the realm of learning from a position of inferiority to one of superiority. Modern civilization has come about largely as a result of modern science.

The social sciences, while inadequately defined, are coming to be of tremendous interest to an increasing number of people. Recent surveys indicate that both in high schools and colleges during the past twenty years the greatest number of free electives have been in the social and natural sciences.

While not as far developed as the natural sciences, the social sciences in their search for truth make use of similar methods of research. Gradually in the social studies superstition and tradition are being displaced by knowledge. Hypotheses are being tested, revised, and tested again. When possible, experiments are being used. More and more does the social scientist approach his problems with an open mind, free from prejudices and loyal to the facts.

Illustrative of the immensity of some of the problems now being studied are poverty, population control, unemployment, occupational guidance of youth, and universal peace. So complicated are the problems that they reach out into many fields of the natural as well as the social sciences.

Because of such numerous interrelationships, the motto for the future development of the sciences should be: "Each for all and all for each." The dawn is here, of an age, when all scientists will need to work together for the creation of a better civilization. "We know enough today to know that there is infinite room for betterment in every human concern. Nothing is needed but collective effort." So writes H. G. Wells. "History," says he, "becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

The challenge to the social sciences is to lead the way toward a better world in which to live.

Can the results of scientific thinking in the fields of the natural sciences be used by the social sciences for benefiting mankind at large? One illustration suffices. Can our world be so organized that the many machines, invented and perfected by man, will be to man a blessing and not a curse? Can drudgery be done away with by these machines without robbing thousands of people,—yes, millions, of their very means of sustenance? Can vast machine-production be so regulated that the many, and not the few alone, will enjoy the necessities of life and some of its comforts?

In our own land, where freedom of the individual is our most sacred tradition, the Russian experiment with its great sacrifice of personal liberty makes but faint appeal. Likewise, the Italian policy with its dictator is not our idea of improvement. The return to the primitive ways of life, as advocated by Gandhi and his followers in India, is not the American solution of this problem. Our solution must be one which will preserve both the benefits of a machine age and the blessings of a democratic government. Inventions must continue to reduce the drudgery in life, but the resulting reduction of human labor must be for humanity at large an asset and not a liability. That this is possible is a hope,—a hope to be kept bright in the thought of all scientists. Never before has there been

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greater need for clear thinking, cooperation and friendliness among all searchers for truth, and loyalty to the scientist's eternal belief in progress. The challenge to the social sciences is real. Time alone will write the answer.

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