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THE INTEGRATION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Discussions of integration among social scientists are generally approached in a spirit of piety, as when physicists discuss religion. It is the sort of topic that is thought suitable for ceremonial occasions when it would be indecorous to display the knowledge and critical canons of a workaday specialist. Such discussions consequently turn out to be vague, amorphous, and elevated in tone, and are conveniently forgotten when the ceremony is over.

I am sure that our discussion today will be an exception to this pattern, that we are all seriously convinced that integration is a vital need in the social sciences and are aware of significant developments opening possibilities of greater integration.

Before speaking of these developments I should like to examine a conception of social science integration made popular by the patterns of wartime research. This conception may be

called the "container theory of integration," for according to it the way to integrate the social sciences is to place many different social scientists in the same container and to shake well. The container might be a professional journal, a seminar, or a research project; it does not matter too much so long as the individual men are willing to cooperate.

No one will deny the desirability of cooperation among social scientists and among non-social scientists as well. But one may doubt whether a "cooperative spirit" is all that one needs to integrate the social sciences. Despite its manifest appeal to idealistic motives, this approach to integration is quite mechanistic. It seems to assume that the present several social sciences departments, and the "fields" and "courses" within each, are permanent and ultimate elements which, like Lucretius' atoms, can be combined and recombined endlessly into "integrated" institutes, committees, conferences, and research teams .

This conception of integration is very comforting. It permits one to be in favor of integration without dislodging a single brick of the specialist's structure. It does not seem to me to be a conception which squares with the actual nature and necessities of integration in the development of the social sciences. In the first place, the existing departmentalization of the social sciences is itself the product of incessant historical change, influenced by many different factors —rational and irrational. Many of the fields —for example, economics— are both splinters from broader fields, like political economy and moral philosophy, and "integrations" of a heritage of observations, commonsense precepts, and deductive reasoning. And the development of new specialties and borderline fields which cut across them constantly compels reclassification of the social sciences. Whatever the ultimate "atoms" of social science knowledge may turn out to be, I doubt that they will resemble the "departments" and "courses" listed in current university catalogues.

A second difficulty with the "container theory" is that its application frequently leads to a worsening of the very condition it is designed to alleviate. Social scientists, presumably, need to come together and "cooperate" because the division of labor in

the social sciences has become so specialized that a single specialist knows only a limited region of his field, has difficulty in talking to his colleagues, is very sensitive about jurisdictional lines being adhered to, is forever "sharpening tools" whose use is indefinitely postponed, blithely ignores relevant factors outside of his field when he makes policy recommendations, and is suspicious of all work which does not fit into an already labelled niche.

Yet it does not seem likely that the kind of "cooperative research" stimulated by the late war is going to remove these effects of specialization and build a unified science of man. More frequently it multiplies them. In fact, some of these projects have grown so large and bureaucratic that their directors are required to be experts, not in the subject being investigated but in administration.

I do not despise cooperation, but I believe we should take a less mechanical and external view of its role in the integration of the social sciences. We should have a clearer conception of the needs and ends of cooperation in the social sciences. We should also be prepared to face the prospect that any single act of cooperation may transform us and all the familiar landmarks into the bargain. We cannot insist in advance on terms of cooperation which would leave us and our specialities completely unchanged. Finally we must realize that some of the greatest of integrations in the sciences —those of a Newton, a Darwin, an Einstein, a Marx, or a Freud— were achieved without benefit of expensive research teams financed by benevolent foundations. Although growing out of the work of others, they were nevertheless products of lonely struggles of individual minds with their subject matter and their social and professional environments.

Instead, then, of trying to solve the problem of integration in the social sciences by exhortations to cooperative behavior, I should like to examine the reasons why integration is necessary in different areas of social science education and research and to appraise some of the ongoing efforts at integration.

There are three areas in the social sciences where integrative tendencies are important: basic theoretical research, action research, and general education. In each of these areas special problems exist which can be resolved only by greater integration. Let me begin with basic theoretical research.

Systematic theory does not yet have the accepted status in the social sciences that it has in the natural sciences. For this condition there are indeed many reasons. Some of these are connected with the greater personal involvement of the social scientist in his subject matter than the natural scientist. The social scientist, for example, cannot easily experiment on himself or his society; must overcome the influence of bias; must disengage himself from the immediate practical context of his work; must find some way to deal objectively with human feelings, motives, and attitudes; and must take account of the ever present value judgments made by both himself and his subject matter.

But in addition to this factor of personal involvement which, by the way is not an insurmountable obstacle, there is the failure to appreciate the value of integrating theories and concepts in the development of knowledge. The rapid accumulation of empirical data for its own sake and the conflicting "schools" of thought in economics, psychology, and sociology, and anthropology are both symptoms of this failure.

A close examination of the history of science will show, I believe, that the great landmarks come when a Galileo or a Darwin succeeds in showing the connections between a wide variety of facts through a few powerful concepts and principles, or when a Newton or a Sewall Wright carries this process farther by synthesizing apparently conflicting theories. In the social sciences we have several landmarks of the former kind in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and in Freud's theory of the unconscious, to mention only two. Successful syntheses of conflicting theories are far more difficult to find. although there are many efforts (e. g., Parson's *Structure of Social Action*, Kardiner's

Psychological Frontiers of Society, Hull's *Principles of Behavior*). Frequently what purports to be a synthesis turns out under criticism to be only a mosaic collection of incompatible pieces. It is not merely a question of synthesizing all social science theories into one comprehensive theory. In mathematics and in physical theory synthetic developments tend to occur in several different directions and at several different degrees of generality. The one unified theory remains a remote and alluring goal. There is no reason to suppose that the edifice of theoretical social science can all be built from one mold in a single operation.

Actual methods for theoretical integration in the social sciences cannot be described in simple definite formulae. It is much easier for scientists to recognize a powerfully integrative theory than to construct one. We can of course prescribe careful observation and reflection, dialectical comparison of similarities and differences, axiomatic systematization, and the like. But in the end these are only springboards for the imaginative leaps of a creative mind.

Practical integration

Attempts have been made to distinguish basic theoretical research from action research in terms of peculiarities of method and content. But there is nothing, I believe, in the methods and content of action research that could not also be found in basic research. The differences spring mainly from the pressure for definite results within severely limited time conditions. There is, however, an important distinction in the primary aims of the two kinds of research. Basic research aims at the development of a compendious and consistent system of general propositions which is verified by "reality," whereas action research aims to develop such knowledge as might be directly relevant for the solution of problems of social action and social policy. The type of theoretical integration we have been discussing may or may not be

important for action research depending on its capacity to serve practical ends.

When we try to apply the social sciences to the solution of practical problems, the shortcomings of the specialist's approach are obvious. The practical administrator or public servant is hardly in a position to take intelligent and wise action when he knows only the "economic," or only the "political," or only the "psychological" aspects of a problem which confronts him. Nor does it help him much to say that he should know *all* the relevant aspects of the problem. There certainly is not the time under the pressures for practical action and decision to stop and master the social sciences. He may of course get help, as many administrators and public servants do, from "expert" advisers. But where these experts are themselves specialists, they are neither willing or able to put together the separate pieces in a form usable for decisions about public policy.

What is needed in order to make the social sciences more relevant to social problems is a greater concern for organizing available knowledge and for tracing its bearing on matters of public policy in the training of social scientists and public servants and in the writing of social science works. Myrdal's *American Dilemma* indicates the scope and possibilities of the kind of responsibility social scientists must discharge if their work is to have social relevance. Myrdal gathered and organized the existing knowledge and popular beliefs on the "Negro Problem," filled in gaps with new research, constructed a comprehensive and theoretical interpretation taking account of the framework of moral values within which the problem is defined by both Negroes and Whites, and suggested some strategic policies for dealing with the problem.

It would be impossible to classify Myrdal's end product in terms of any of the departmental social sciences, and yet it takes something from all of them and from ethics and law as well. Moreover it is presented in a form which is intelligible and useful to the citizen and to the public servant. If more social scientists were to devote themselves to this type of "action research," they would make a major contribution to public educa-

tion and policy. And they would do this without necessarily sacrificing the interests of "basic research," for these two kinds of research are not incompatible. In fact, action research may have a good deal to contribute to basic research, as in Myrdal's clarification of the role of values in the social sciences and in his development of the "principle of cumulative causation."

Educational integration

In the field of general education at the college level the need for an integrated approach to the social sciences has been strongly felt for some years, and several different ways have been devised to meet the need. Most prevalent among these are the distribution system which requires students to distribute a limited number of credits in the field of the social sciences, and the development of social science "survey" and "orientation" courses which are being increasingly required of college freshmen or sophomores. Both of these devices try to deal with the fact that many students may not register for any social science courses in their college career, and that most of them do not have time in their schedules to register for an elementary course in each of the major social science fields.

At best these devices are poor makeshifts. The required quota of social science courses in the distribution system hardly constitute a balanced introduction to the social sciences, and the attempts to gain balance and coverage in the survey courses almost always result in superficiality.

A basic flaw in these and in many other attempts to include the social sciences in programs of general education is their starting point. They all assume —as a kind of axiom of academic justice— that all students ought to have *some* social science and argue only about what part it should be. Instead of discussing the really fundamental question — "What can the social sciences contribute to what every liberally educated person needs to know?", they start from the purely professional

question: "What does everybody need to know about the social sciences?"

To ask the first question is to grapple with the basic aims of general education; to raise the second is to precipitate a quarrel between different social science departments. A college social science program constructed on the basis of the second discussion will at best be but a delicately poised compromise between the conflicting pressures of different departments and will shift with the changes in access to administrative influence of varying groups of specialists. A social science program, on the other hand, which is explicitly constructed within the framework of a liberal education curriculum stands a good chance of being integrated and coherent and of making a major contribution to developing the humanity and citizenship of college students.

At the College of the University of Chicago we have developed a three-year sequence of general courses in the social sciences, the organizing principles for which are derived from the philosophy of liberal education to which the College is committed. These principles are that: (1) every student should have an understanding of the major political deliberations, decisions, and actions of the society to which he belongs, (2) every student should know something of the outstanding attempts by social scientists to give universal significance to human experience and human society, and (3) every student should develop a capacity to deliberate rationally about matters of public policy.

The first and third principles derive from the College's commitment to develop intelligent citizens of a free society, the second from its commitment to develop intelligent human beings. As a citizen, the student is a member of a state with traditions, ideas, a record of crises successfully and unsuccessfully met, and a future full of new choices to make. Because the past is operative in the present through oral and written tradition, a knowledge of this tradition sharpens understanding of the present. Another reason for teaching the student this tradition is that basic political problems have a way of recurring so that a close study of how these have been attacked in the past prepares

the student to meet them in the future with more of the past's wisdom and with less of its stupidities.

In a democratic state it is expected that ordinary citizens and public officials will rest their decisions on knowledge rather than on superstition and passion. We can prepare students to approximate this ideal by training them in habits of rational deliberations about public affairs. This cannot be done by the ordinary "current events" and "social problems" type of discussions. In these, the desire to be up to date, to be on the "right" side of a burning controversy, to act rather than to think, plunge the student prematurely into a vicarious public life in which his only guide posts are his own prejudices, as modified by the press and the propaganda to which he happens to get exposed.

We have found that students are more effectively trained to think about issues of public policy when they are asked to analyze carefully prepared specimen cases of policy formation. These specimens, which are drawn from both past and present public controversy, are so constructed as to include significant original arguments on at least two sides of an issue: (1) social science knowledge relevant to an understanding of the conditions and consequences of the policies in question and (2) philosophic analyses of the ultimate values involved.

When a student has dissected several such specimens he may not have learned to give a ready answer to every question of the day, but he will have begun to learn, we believe, about the complexities of public issues, to what extent general principles for policy formation can be based on scientific knowledge and moral ideals, and to what extent such principles must be compromised by such strategic considerations as the pressure for action, the incompleteness and uncertainties of evidence and the imperiousness of self-interest. He will, in short, have started to become an intelligent citizen.

Intelligent citizenship, however, is not the only aim of a liberal education. As a human being the student is also entitled to see himself, his society, and his world *sub specie aeternitatis*, i. e., as items in a universe subject to universal laws and conditions. Here too the social sciences have something to contribute.

There are many outstanding works in the social sciences which add to our knowledge of human nature, its relations to society and culture, and the processes of change underlying the integration and disintegration of both individuals and cultures. From a study of these works the student may learn wherein he and his society differ from other individuals and societies and wherein they all share in a common humanity. As he compares and contrasts these differing interpretations he will also gain some insight into the slow and precarious process whereby valid knowledge is fished from the deep unknown.

A program in the social sciences which gives a student an understanding of the major political experience of his country, trains him to think independently and wisely about public matters, and inspires him to approach human affairs with something of the detachment of the scientist and philosopher, will have made no small contribution to the student's liberal education. To such a program all of the social sciences are obviously relevant along with law and political and moral philosophy. The actual organization of such a program and the disposal of the many problems concerning sequence, coverage, personnel, etc., is a matter of detail which can be easily worked out once the basic aims are clear and agreed upon.*

Thus far I have emphasized the differences in the needs and methods for integrating the social sciences in three different contexts — basic research, solution of practical problems, and general education. But there are also carryovers from one context to another. The mode of integration achieved at one level is bound to help and influence what can be done at other levels. As basic research and action research in the social sciences produce works like Myrdal's *American Dilemma,* the problem of finding suitable materials for general courses in the social sciences is infinitely easier. Conversely, the type of integration aimed at by general education has something to contribute to the research social scientist, for he is both temporally and morally

* For a more detailed description of the college social sciences program, see Milton Singer, "The social sciences program in the College of the University of Chicago," *The Journal of General Education,* 1948, Vol. II, No. 3.

a citizen and human being before he is a specialist. It is imperative therefore that before becoming a specialist he acquire wise and rational standards of judgment and conduct. And he can best acquire these standards by completing his general education before undertaking his professional education as a specialist.