



Perspective

Science and Social Conservatism

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ESPECIALLY DURING THE PAST CENTURY AND A HALF science has contributed to social change and to the improvement of the lot of many of the peoples of the globe. Pure science, technology, and modern medicine all have continuing social implications of great importance. Political and economic stability is needed to allow the further development of these benefits and their wider distribution throughout the world.

Can science and education help in establishing such a steady and conservative economic and political life? The answer is "Yes." To do so, however, more study than at present must be given to human genetics. Scientific psychology also must actively investigate the limitations and special characteristics of human mental life which are inborn and which do not result primarily from environmental conditioning or cultural learning.

Some economic and political revolutionaries and reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries assumed that they knew all about the basic make-up of human nature. They said that man is born good but corrupted by a bad society. Some even thought that by upsetting established economic and political institutions a golden age could be established in one generation. They held that men and women need not themselves try to be good and to avoid evil because a Utopian society would do all this for them in a painless way. Some of the assumptions made by those who popularized this dream have never been tested by modern

science. These unproved guesses about human nature, nevertheless, underlie much of the theorizing and of the dangerous programs of modern Fascism and Communism. A full scientific study of human genetics and of the importance of heredity in determining the limitations and the inborn characteristics of man's mental life is thus a great need of our age if we are to develop a sound social philosophy and maintain our democratic freedoms.

Better education in science, social science, and especially in the humanities is important in this present age of atomic development and of dangerous international tensions. A proper study of the best wisdom of the past as given in religion and in the humanities is thus now needed in a unique way. By such education each new generation can learn about the value scales that have proved to be adequate in the long past of human living. Such scales can then be applied to modern problems which analysis will often show are old human questions decked out in new clothes.

Thus man, in many ways an ancient mammal with fixed brain capacity, can learn how to maintain a conservative, democratic, law-based social order which will nevertheless allow each individual to achieve and enjoy the fullest personal freedom of which he is capable.

(Abstract of the 14th annual Phi Beta Kappa address, delivered before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boston, Dec. 30, 1953)