

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL THOUGHT

The first-mentioned type is connected in one way or another with social planning. The concept of social planning, however, is extensively misunderstood. Some of its opponents have interpreted it to mean a type of thinking that is designed to establish socialism or communism, or fascism. This interpretation, however, often has no foundation. Some of the friends of social planning have done their cause harm by being unwilling to think deeply first and plan afterward. Some have been guided chiefly by wishful thinking. In its science social planning is the proposing of carefully thought-out procedures by expert and practical students of community life in behalf of the development of human communities, large or small.

The second-mentioned type of social thinking may be in reality anti-social thinking. It usually starts from individualistic thinking and emerges in schemes that work to the aim of the few but to the disadvantage of the many. When its harmful effects are discovered by the larger group who are involved it is sooner or later repudiated.

The third-mentioned phase of social thinking seeks out the processes underlying both pro-social and anti-social thinking. It penetrates to the nature of social processes and undertakes to formulate social laws. It gives analyses that are fundamental to any program of social improvement. Unfortunately, unscrupulous persons may appropriate its findings in the direction of social manipulation. However, as larger and larger numbers of persons grow versed in scientific social thinking, the more difficult will the anti-social uses of propaganda become.

In recent decades scientific social thinking has made commanding strides. A definitely technical or sociological vocabulary has been developing. A number of useful social thought concepts have been defined and some agreement regarding the meanings of these concepts has been achieved. In this book the account of basic social thought of outstanding persons here and there naturally shades into a description of the sociological type of social thinking.

Social thought is abstract. It is complementary to practical thought about social matters, and at times contrasts sharply with popular thinking. Practical thinking rarely goes deep.

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL THOUGHT 5

It asks few basic questions, raises few underlying doubts, and perceives few far-reaching connections. On the other hand, abstract thinking seeks causal explanations, classifies concrete facts, penetrates into relationships, and leads to well-balanced procedures. Practical thinking is characteristic of every normal person, but abstract reasoning is uncommon. The ability to do abstract thinking, to grasp the deeper meanings of phenomena, and to penetrate the mysteries of life is rare. Practical thinking, based on a few experiences, constitutes the major sector of the thought life of every person, nearly all of his thinking time.

Here and there in human history, however, we find persons who have been freed or who have freed themselves from the daily struggle for a living, from the race to make money, or from the useless engagements of lifelong loafing, and have joined the company of scholars, past and present, seeking primarily to know the truth, the truth which makes men and women free — free to develop constructive personalities in a vast, changing complex of human living. When scholars have had leisure to think in abstract terms, to analyze and to sympathize, to evolve creative generalizations, their minds have ventured along one or more of five intellectual pathways.

FIVE LINES OF HUMAN THOUGHT

(1) Man has given considerable attention to his relation to the universe. Primitive man conceived of a personal universe, peopled with spirits. Throughout human history man has been a religious being, trying to solve the problems of a universe ruled by spirits or gods or by one Supreme God. This type of thinking has produced polytheisms, monotheisms, and theocracies. It has formulated theological creeds and resulted in bitter ecclesiastical controversies. It has created fears, hopes, faiths, social ideals, and sacrificial living.

(2) Irrespective of religious needs, man has endeavored to think out his relations to the whole universe, animate and inanimate. He has philosophized. He has tried to reduce to a few far-reaching concepts this baffling, intangible as well as tangible, universal environment. He has searched for reliable grounds for explaining his relationship to the universe.