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THE CONTRIBUTION OF  
SOCIOLOGY TO SOCIAL WORK

BY

R. M. MACIVER

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THE FORBES LECTURES  
OF  
THE NEW YORK SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



# THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIOLOGY TO SOCIAL WORK

BY

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY PORTER LEE . . . . .	vii
I. SOCIAL SCIENCE AND THE ART OF SOCIAL WORK . . . . .	I
II. SOCIOLOGY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL AMELIORATION . . . . .	22
III. THE CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL MALADJUST- MENT . . . . .	41
IV. THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION TO THE SOCIAL WORKER . . . . .	60
V. WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIOLOGY . . . . .	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	101
INDEX . . . . .	107



## INTRODUCTION

From the beginning it has been recognized that social work has had more in common with sociology than with any other social science. The relationship between the two has been discussed from time to time but Professor MacIver has given us the clearest statement we have yet had of the precise points at which the relationship becomes apparent and the practical nature of the service which sociology as a science may render to social work as an art. Social work is finding its place as a function of organized community life, a function which has been changing gradually with changes in our social setting. Social workers who have been reaching out for reinforcement to the social sciences and to the experiences of other professional groups will find in these discussions by Professor MacIver valuable leads for their own study and, despite the brevity of the course, much practical illustration of the specific bearing of sociology upon their professional field.

The relationship of science to art is not a new conception but again Professor MacIver has given us an unusually clear statement of what this relationship involves. We may read into his conception that the scientist may provide working materials and tests of validity but it remains for the artist to adapt these materials to his own purposes and objectives. Social workers on the whole have been less active in this proc-

ess of adaptation but they are likely to become more so as a result of Professor MacIver's analysis of the process involved. His discussion relates solely to the relationship of sociology to social work. His approach to the subject, however, makes his suggestions readily applicable to the process of adapting the subject matter of other social sciences to the requirements of social work.

In his illustrations of practical problems Professor MacIver has restricted himself almost entirely to social case work. What he has to say, however, regarding the contribution of sociology is quite as applicable to situations arising in other fields of social work. Regardless of their special interests social workers in every field will find Professor MacIver's discussions a refreshing stimulus to their thinking.

PORTER R. LEE

## I

# SOCIAL SCIENCE AND THE ART OF SOCIAL WORK

The relation of sociology to social work is that of a science to an art. This is the primary condition which determines and limits the contribution which one can make to the other. If we fail to recognize the significant difference between any science and any art we shall cherish false hopes and refuse true aids, whether as scientists or as artists. And this misapprehension I seem to find reflected in certain of the opinions concerning sociology expressed by social workers. There are some who think of it as lacking interest in their problems. There are many who feel that it offers nothing of definite value to their work.<sup>1</sup> There are others who began by looking to it for help and have ended with a sense of disappointment. Repeatedly have I been asked by social workers just what solution sociology offers to some particular problem of social welfare in which they were interested, and have been compelled to reply that sociology provides no ready answer, no solution for it. Such engineers are apt to feel that sociology has failed them miserably. I am well enough aware of the deficiencies of sociology. I am conscious of the vast stretches of social territory which it has most imperfectly explored or not explored at all. But I insist that even

<sup>1</sup>Cf. T. D. Eliot, "Sociology as a Prevocational Subject: the Verdict of Sixty Social Workers," in the *American Journal of Sociology*, XXIX.

were it to attain its own never wholly attainable ideal, it would still not be able to provide that specific guidance which the social worker requires.

For an art is something more than, something different from, the application of a science to specific situations. The difference is vital. It is not merely that the art has to draw material from several, perhaps many, sciences. Its function, its motivation, its goal, is different. An art manipulates, controls, and changes the materials with which it deals; a science seeks only to understand them. An art individualizes, a science generalizes. An art lives in its concrete embodiments, whether it be sculptured stone or the changed conduct of human beings. A science lives in abstract relationships which it discovers irradiating the concrete world. Each has its proper task to perform, and while each needs the other, neither can ever perform the task of the other. Sociology has itself sometimes failed, because of its nearness to human needs, to discern the difference between a science and a practical art, seeking to be both at once. If it now insists on the difference it is not on that account less serviceable, but rather more serviceable, to the social worker. This I shall seek to show as we proceed. Sociology, even in its present stage of development, has important contributions to offer, and it can offer these just because it is learning the nature of its own quite different task.

The difference between a science and a practical art needs especial emphasis when the art in question introduces not aesthetic nor merely economic but ethical valuations. Social work must find its own standards of

value. It must determine, without aid and without hindrance from science, what changes in social conditions are in themselves worth while. Science can suggest ways and means by which these changes may be brought about. It may be able to answer the question, How should this objective be reached? It can never answer the essential preliminary question, Should this objective itself be sought? All it can hope to do is to reveal the means to the objective, the difficulties which must be surmounted in order to attain it. An art, in short, must have its own dynamic, its own source of inspiration. On the other hand a dynamic, an enthusiasm, dissipates itself in vain unless it discovers the means to the goal it seeks, and here science returns to offer its alliance. Without its aid an art never advances beyond mere empiricism, and an enthusiasm is never transformed into a disciplined philosophy. Social work needs this aid, and social science must at length supply it.

Social work can never call on social science to justify its aims. The justification of these lies not in the logic of science but in the hearts of men. But it can help to clarify these aims. It can prevent our ideals from distorting our facts. There is nothing so unscrupulous as an ideal which is undisciplined by science. I say by science, not by knowledge. Our ideals feed on the knowledge that suits them. They seize on the facts that are appropriate to them and give them priority over other facts. If we are prohibitionists we find great comfort in "facts"—if we are anti-prohibitionists we find great comfort in "facts," sometimes in the same "facts."! If we believe or disbelieve in censorship we

appeal equally to "facts." If we have any cure for any social ill we can find "facts" to confirm its value. Bias dogs every step of those who would improve our society. Bias pursues the social scientist as well, but in so far as he is true to his name he recognizes it as an enemy and guards himself against it. His first battle and his last victory is over bias. And victory is all the more difficult and precarious because it does not mean the repudiation of ideals, it does not turn the human being into the cold calculator. Such a victory would be a hollow one, though some of our social scientists appear to advance it. What science seeks above all is understanding, and we cannot enter into social situations if we leave our emotions outside. We cannot understand the meaning of poverty and unemployment unless our hearts also are enlisted in the process. Unless we sympathize we do not know. In social studies, whatever may be true in other fields, science must seek to make our emotions its ally, but an ally which needs always to be watched or else it will join the enemy. Science must prescribe the conditions of the alliance.

The training in social science has therefore a peculiar value for the social worker. It helps us to clear our eyes, to see things steadily and whole, to interpret situations *as though* we lacked the emotions which make us want to interpret them, to record the attitudes of others as though we sought nothing further than to learn wherein they resemble and differ from other factors, to trace the sequences of cause and effect as though we cared not a whit whether they confirm our expectations or hopes or fears. This difficult enterprise proclaims an-



other ideal which must be reconciled with the ideals of social service, with our social valuations. If we fail to do so, then we either harden into impervious dogmatisms or else we go ahead with illusive hopes which some day will be shattered against the walls of the real world.

An art requires an emotional attitude, and on that account is sometimes set in contrast to a science. It is assumed that science is cold and calculating, that it not only eschews emotion but tends to dry it up. So people sometimes fear that as social work becomes controlled by science, its emotional inspiration will be lost. But the antithesis here suggested is a false one. Science as such is no enemy of our emotions, though our emotions often stand in the way of scientific exploration and application. Science has nothing to say about the ends of life but only about the relation between means and ends. Our blind urges beat against the obstacles of facts—science shows us the way round or the way through. So with our unilluminated tentatives to relieve social distress. We face, let us say, the vast evil of unemployment. We offer palliatives, collecting funds and dispensing charity. So far the sheer emotion to help our fellows will carry us. But if we stop there our emotion tends to exhaust itself in discouragement. For our measures do not reach the sources of the evil. The stream of unemployment swells or shrinks, but not because of what we have done. No prospect of betterment comes to encourage us unless we appeal to science. We are like doctors giving relief to a patient whom they cannot cure. It is a service worth while in itself but

how much more stimulating that service becomes if we know that meanwhile science is attacking the linkage of cause and effect from which the evil springs. Hope is joined to pity, and thus reinforced our emotion receives new sustenance and new direction. Relating means to end we bring our emotion into accord with the needs which inspired it. In fact our emotion is thus integrated into a philosophy of living. And the intermediary in this process is science.

Constantly the mature social worker faces the depressing question: What after all are we doing? We patch a little here and there, we provide temporary relief, we make temporary adjustments, we direct to the appropriate institutions those who need their services. But the great forces that create these needs lie beyond us. The general situation is unchanged by our efforts. The conditions, social and economic, hereditary and institutional, from which destitution and maladjustment spring, are untouched by us. We deal with the unemployed but not with unemployment. We deal with consequences and not with causes, and the consequences are eternal so long as the causes endure. We are the stretcher bearers and the nurses of an eternal war. We treat the casualties and the war goes on. Such reflections come very naturally and very appropriately to the thoughtful social worker. We may reply that, measured in terms of what *any* individual can do, the social worker achieves more in effective personal service than most men and women, that a sense of proportion is necessary here as elsewhere, that even to ameliorate is an achievement which in terms of the

energies expended gives an unusually gratifying return. If one person can improve the conditions of life for those who need it most, that is no insignificant contribution. And this answer might suffice except that the *advocatus diaboli* whispers back: "Yes, but you are not only doing nothing to remove the causes of maladjustment and destitution, you are actually helping to perpetuate them. By looking after the casualties you prevent people from realizing the need for changing the system of which they are the result. If the source of the evil lies in the economic and institutional order, you are helping to confirm that order. If the source lies in human nature, you are interfering with the biological processes which eliminate the unfit—you are encouraging the unfit and aiding their unfit progeny to survive and multiply. However you take it, the attempt to deal with the symptoms is pernicious. Only those who get down to causes can better society."

Now this whisper of the *advocatus diaboli* has enough truth in it to be very disturbing, even though we feel and know that it is not wholly truth. And the only answer to it must be found in the intellectual preparation of the social worker. The social worker must in short be socially educated, must acquire as a student of economics and sociology a background of intellectual convictions. So fortified, he or she can advocate further goals while still doing the day's work. The day's work remains to be done no matter what systems or what philosophies seem good in our eyes. But it gets more meaning and new direction when we can look beyond it. In every complex society, no matter how it is or-

dered, there will be maladjustments and tensions which the skilled social worker can alleviate. Just as there is no necessary opposition, but rather a great opportunity of coöperation, between preventive and therapeutic medicine, so there is no necessary conflict between social work and social philosophy. But each has to be seen in relation to the other. The social worker who has no background of social philosophy is at the mercy of a thousand discouragements. Without a guiding star our ship wanders vainly and reaches no port.

How then shall the social worker acquire an adequate social philosophy, an illuminated outlook on the welter of social problems with which he or she has to deal? For after all everyone absorbs some kind of social philosophy—it is part of the business of living to acquire one. But our undisciplined social philosophies do not suffice. Like other philosophies they need the discipline of science. And here, in the first place, is where sociology may well come to the aid of the social worker. A science does not create a philosophy, but it corrects, safeguards, and purifies our philosophy. Nor does experience suffice to create a philosophy; it gives the material which our philosophy must interpret and must not contradict. | Sociology thus comes midway between social philosophy and social experience, and all three are requisite for the social worker. | The social worker stands face to face with human needs, with human beings whose social conditions call for his services. The desire to aid, the instinctive response out of which social work has grown, is the elemental dynamic, but by itself it is blind. Only when it develops into a

philosophy, a broad envisagement of human potentialities and of the means to achieve them, does it become rational.v

I conclude that the social worker has a progressive task if he is not to become or remain a mere technician and empiric. He must see his function in the light of the available science and in the same light he must develop his social philosophy. Now there are many sciences which the social worker must call to his aid, psychology, psychiatry, biology, medical science, economics, law, and government. But I am claiming here this particular service for sociology, that in a peculiar degree it provides the basis for the development of that social philosophy which must underlie the art of social work, which must integrate the thinking of the social worker, which must control the direction and illuminate the goal of his activity. If it is not able to provide this service, sociology itself is at fault. For sociology is the science of social relationships, and social work is an art designed to relieve or remove the definite ailments and maladjustments that beset individuals in specific social situations.

I shall return to the definition of social work in a later lecture. Here, by way of introduction, I would merely distinguish between the problems of a science and of an art, lest we fail to appreciate the kind of contribution which sociology is qualified to make. For an art always takes one step beyond a science, a step which science itself can neither affirm or deny. The distinction applies whether we are referring to sociology in general or to its applied forms. A science legitimately

studies the practical questions which come within its field. They are part of its subject matter. The study of crime, delinquency, prison methods, family disorganization, social conflicts, poverty, child labor, recreation, and so forth, is a proper and indeed necessary task of the social sciences. Various arts, including that of the legislator as well as that of the social worker, can draw from these materials. But the science does not itself prescribe practice or reform. So far as prescription goes, science never goes beyond an *if-then*. It says, "this is how these phenomena are related, this is how these factors are determined, these are the circumstances under which the gang develops, these are the situations in which delinquency is most frequently present. Therefore if you desire to change these conditions, these are the means that must be considered." But social work, being an art, takes the plunge. It takes the decisive step of willing to change the conditions. It enters boldly into the sphere of values. And that, in short, is why science is never enough, why the social worker must have a philosophy as well."

I have now indicated the two main types of contribution which the social worker ought to expect from sociology, and which he will receive in greater measure as that difficult science advances. In the first place, he can gain an orientation to his task, a greater comprehension of social potentialities, a broader knowledge of the social conditions which extend far beyond the immediate case or the near group or the institution while penetrating within it, and thus some safeguard against illusive hopes and immature enthusiasms. In a word, it will

discipline and thus render more steadfast the philosophy of life in the strength of which he girds himself for his task. In the second place, he can gain more specific aid from the studies made in the field of his own interest. That these studies are undertaken from a different point of view, that their object is simply to discern the relationship of the phenomena involved in the complex situation, provides the very condition which makes them serviceable to the social worker. A science must be in this sense disinterested if it is to guide aright the practical interests which seek its aid.

Often the social worker expects the wrong kind of aid from social science because he fails to appreciate the true relation of a science to a practical art. (A science is concerned with the world as it is, an art expresses itself in an endeavor to change something in the world, to add something to it, even to remake it.) The scientist stands, in a sense, above his world; the artist is immersed in it. The social worker has to be a part of everything he knows; must participate in the relationships in which he is interested. The social worker is thus often impatient of the social scientist, but sometimes for the wrong reasons. He asks: What are all those researches worth, those theoretical disquisitions, even those more concrete studies of social life in city or country, those investigations into changing forms of the family and so forth, if they do not solve my problems? We might reply that the biologist or even the physiologist rarely solves the problems of the medical practitioner, but nevertheless medicine has conquered new kingdoms because biology has furnished it with

new weapons. Nor is it unreasonable to claim that social work has followed many a blind lead because social science was not at hand to illuminate the tangled thickets in which it worked. The history of the relief of poverty, for example, is a tale of mistaken principles and misguided applications. Poverty was seen as the will of God or as the punishment of sin or as the inevitable working of necessary economic laws or as the natural state of an inferior order of beings. Social science has reached this stage at least, that these principles now ring hollow, while the methods of relief which accompanied them are seen to have been incompetent, sometimes, like a quack remedy, making worse the condition of those whom they purported to cure.

The social worker is immersed in practical problems which demand immediate solution. What shall be done about the X family now that Mrs. X has broken down from overwork and the care of too many children, while Mr. X never seems able to hold a job? What can be done about the adolescent girl in the Y family who wants to leave home because her widowed mother is too strict with her? What aid can be rendered to the Z parents who, themselves eminently respectable and apparently normal, have produced a progeny exhibiting various physical and mental abnormalities and who are quite incapable of dealing with the recurrent crises thereby created? These are questions which no scientific treatise can directly answer, and they are grossly simplified forms of the myriad different questions which in all their concreteness the social worker must face. In the midst of such engrossments the social worker will



probably look in vain for direct help from sociology. The immediate answers must always come from his (or her) native skill and acquired experience. In this respect social work differs from no other art. Science is no ready reckoner. It never offers immediate solutions to the problems of living. It never responds to our last-minute appeals. But the mind that is disciplined by training in the relevant sciences will be prepared to see these problems in a different perspective, will appreciate more clearly the limits and possibilities of practical control, will more adequately distinguish symptoms from underlying conditions, will more effectively discern the factors in the situation which are most amenable to treatment.

Let us suppose, for example, that the social worker is engaged in the field of family case work. Is it of no significance for the task that she—for at this point I must use the feminine pronoun—should realize the changes which urban life and its concomitants are creating in the family, that she should see the family in the light of the forces which break up its old solidarity, of the insecurities and detachments which an industrial civilization has brought with it? Is it of no significance that she should understand the causes of the declining birth rate and the slower impact of these forces on the families of the very poor? Is it of no significance that she should appreciate the different family mores of different national groups, as they come into conflict in the process of accommodation to a new environment? Against the background of this knowledge, which sociology can in some measure provide, she can see the

meaning of things in a new way. Facing a world full of maladjustments and conflicts, she can understand the better why they arise. They are no less serious because so understood, but being understood, even the mishaps and tragedies of this world cease to be the chance phenomena of the blind process of social life. They too become part of a nexus of cause and effect, in the apprehension of which the social worker comes not only to define her own function and responsibility, but also to see her relation to those larger controlling agencies which are at work within the social and economic system.

Here again the distinction between a science and an art enables us to discern the contribution which sociology already makes in part and as it advances will make more fully to the field of the social worker. In all practical work we are interested in certain aspects of a situation, these being determined by our desire to control it. In social work we are generally interested in a localized situation, individual "cases," individual families, specific community problems. But these situations represent the impact of forces not generated within the area of the social worker's interest. Each situation is a focus in which heredity and environment have long been operative, in which national and class mores affect personal responses, in which political and economic factors working on a far broader scale precipitate personal disturbances, in which a changing civilization incarnates one of its myriad maladjustments. In short, we must transcend, both in space and in time, the limits of the case if we are to grapple effectively with its problems. Sociology seeks to comprehend the broad sweep of these

tidal forces, and it seeks also to comprehend the interplay between them. The latter endeavor, which is in this country at least the more advanced of the two, may be illustrated by the community studies of recent years, studies of rural communities, such as those of Brunner and Kolb and Zimmerman and Galpin; and studies of urban communities, such as the illuminating series of investigations which have the city of Chicago for their center. If social therapeutics is broadly the function of the social worker, it must be achieved on the basis of social diagnosis. Diagnosis is the scientific prologue of practice; it is the place where art and science join hands. Social diagnosis is a task demanding high qualifications, calling for the resources of knowledge and method which can be placed at the disposal of the social worker. Unless he learns that every situation with which he deals is an eddy where economic and political and educational and other civilizational forces, complicated often by racial and religious issues, meet and swirl within the lives of particular human beings, he is unqualified for his task.

The point I am here making—the importance of a background of science for any art worth the name—would be so obvious as scarcely to need mention were it not for the survival in the field of social work of two traditional assumptions. Social work is frequently referred to as welfare work, and there is an assumption abroad that everyone knows not only what welfare means but also how welfare may be attained. Concerning nothing is the undisciplined human being more dogmatic than this, that he knows what is good not only

for himself but for all other people. From this point of view neither science nor art is necessary—intuition suffices. And this assumption is the companion of another, that social work is ministering to the poor and therefore all that is necessary is a good heart and a purse to draw upon. This carry-over from the old conception of charity still affects the public recognition of social work. Now it remains true that the social worker does serve mainly the poorer classes of the community and that poverty complicates nearly every problem with which he deals. There are exceptions to this rule, particularly in the field of recreation and to a growing extent in that of psychiatric social service. But the presence of acute poverty dominates the field of the social worker. He is in fact called upon to provide many of those services for the poor which the well-to-do obtain from the members of other professions, and this fact aids the general impression regarding the rule-of-thumb character of social work. But it has to be realized that the treatment of poverty is no simple matter, even within the limits of the individual case, but one demanding discernment and experience. It has to be realized also that ministering to poverty and ministering to the poor are by no means the same things, and that within the latter service may be developed specialized skills such as the other professions do not directly supply and such as are capable of being extended to community-wide applications. The social worker has to deal with misunderstandings, conflicts, maladjustments which have themselves no necessary relation to poverty, though poverty opens the doors beyond which they lie.

Poverty opens the doors to the social worker but the association of his work with poverty has impeded the fulfilment of his social function in many respects. The social worker has to deal with many problems to which poverty is incidental. It is not only the poor who exhibit problems of maladjustment, who have wayward or defective children, who cannot conduct themselves on a self-maintaining basis, who quarrel with their husbands or wives. Poverty aggravates these conditions, and the treatment of poverty itself remains an important problem of the social worker. But unless the methods and the techniques of the social worker, when faced with the practical difficulties of social relationships, are applicable on any income level, they are merely makeshifts, and the art he claims to exercise remains rudimentary. If the skill of the social worker, in dealing with the various problems of personality, does not surmount the level of poverty, if it has no bearings on the needs of the rest of the community, then social service is simply economic service and can claim no further recognition. Social workers generally refuse to define their function in these narrow terms, but it is necessary for the sake of their art that they explicitly distinguish and define the other services which they render. This is a point to which I shall return in a later lecture.

In another way the inevitable association of social work with poverty has impeded its development. There is an old saying that "who drives fat oxen should himself be fat." Society seems to apply the converse, substituting "lean" for "fat," to the social worker.

“Who serves the poverty-stricken should himself be poor.” Now it is not a question of how much, on some absolute standard, the services of the social worker are worth. I do not know how we can reckon in this modern age how much anyone is worth. It is in fact no estimation of their value to society which determines that social workers are less well paid than elementary school teachers. Again I do not know any criterion in terms of which either of these groups, both rendering essential services to society, *should* be paid higher or lower rates than the other. In my judgment, however, social workers are paid outrageously low salaries. I say that the salary rate of the social worker—the median annual salary according to the study made by the Russell Sage Foundation was \$1,517 in 1925—is outrageously low, not because I have any way of knowing what these services are “worth,” but because it expresses a scale very far below the professional level, because it represents a low standard of living, because it discourages many qualified persons from entering the field, and because it reflects and stimulates a low social estimation of the qualifications necessary for the tasks of social work. We may and should abjure those pecuniary standards of personal estimation which are rife in our society. We may be grateful that many are found who resist those standards and are ready to serve with fine devotion a community which does not appreciate their services. But these facts do not break the vicious circle which binds social estimation and professional status. For until social workers are better paid they will not attain a professional rank adequate to their function, and until

they achieve this status in the eyes of the community, they will not in general be better paid. In my judgment the way to break this circle is through the insistence, by social agencies public and private, on high standards of training. For this will necessitate higher salaries and thus be reflected in social esteem. Not for the sake of social esteem, but because without it the social worker cannot win either the prestige or the responsibility which is necessary for the larger types of social achievement. It is a very interesting indication of the opportunities which social work provides that in any list of the outstanding women of this country there would likely be included more than one social worker, and one social worker would probably head the list. But nobly as these women have done honor to their profession, its general level of estimation still needs to be greatly enhanced.

It may be added that social work depends to a peculiar degree on the support and interest of the public which directly or indirectly pays for it. Until the social workers achieve and are recognized as having a definite professional status the public generally, and private donors in particular, will decide what services shall be well endowed and what services shall be scantied, regardless of the views of social workers themselves. But in so far as their standing is enhanced, they will be able to gain the direction of their calling, as the established professions do.

Let me, in conclusion, briefly refer to the conditions which today are creating a special need for the fuller conversion of social work into a scientifically based art

and the consequent incorporation of social workers into a definite profession. One is the separation of the major body of social workers from their historical dependence on religious organizations and therewith the gradual loss of a predetermined social philosophy which could inspire and direct their work. Along with this change may be mentioned the decline in the cities at least of authoritative ethical conceptions which assume that men have the right to prescribe for the moral errors of their less righteous brethren. In short, the social worker is not an "uplifter" any more, or when he is, he is no longer tolerated as before. He must, in the eyes of those whom he would serve, find new grounds to justify his existence, and these grounds are more professional in character. Second, there is the increasing assumption by the state of the duty of relieving destitution. With the extreme evidences of destitution all around us today we may feel that this process is still rudimentary, and without doubt it is less advanced in the United States than in most other civilized countries. But the historical movement in this direction cannot be denied, and I believe that changing social conditions in the United States, including particularly the restriction of immigration, will make for its advancement here. As this occurs, the function of the social worker undergoes a change. He is no longer simply a charity-provider. Now those who came bearing food and coal to the necessitous carried this social justification in their hands. But those who bring less tangible gifts, those who give guidance in the solving of the perplexing questions of social relationships, must seek a very dif-



ferent justification. They must justify themselves by their skill, and their skill must rest on knowledge. As Mary Richmond put it, those they serve are now their clients.

So the social worker, no longer the zealous missionary of a faith and less than before the mere dispenser of charity, must more and more rally to his aid the special qualifications that mark him out as a professional worker, entitled by his training as well as by his experience to perform services which others are less fitted to perform. The old ground is being cut from under his feet, as charity passes into public aid. But he has learned that charity covered a multitude of problems, and these problems are now coming into the forefront of his task. It is a more delicate, a more hazardous task than before. It needs the support of science as it never did before, particularly of the social sciences. And if sociology is, as it claims to be, the science of human relationships, it has an intimate significance for the social worker. That this is true I shall seek to show in the lectures which follow.

## II

### SOCIOLOGY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL AMELIORATION

It is an essential article of the creed of the social worker that through wisely directed aid to individuals and groups he not only benefits those so aided, but also promotes the greater well-being of society in general. Unless he held to this creed, the hope and the inspiration of his work would vanish. It is nevertheless a creed which is beset by dangers of many kinds. It is dangerous on the one hand to seek to impose on others our own ideas of what is good for them, to set ourselves up as moral arbiters of their lives though this is an attitude which perhaps grows less prevalent among social workers. It is dangerous on the other hand to accept uncritically the ideas of those we would help as to what is good for them, since in their inertia and ignorance of social cause and effect they may wish to perpetuate the very conditions out of which their troubles spring. These dangers can be met only if social workers respect always the personality of their clients and limit themselves to services in respect of which, without taking sides on controversial moral issues, a clear nexus of social cause and effect can be established. That this is a difficult ideal to attain is obvious enough. The mere statement of it reinforces the truth that to be a social worker one must be a social scientist as well.

Beyond these dangers lie others which need to be met by those who accept a creed of social amelioration. There are doctrines of heredity and of race which discredit it. There are doctrines of natural selection which condemn it as well-meant but harmful meddling. There are doctrines of economic determinism which laugh at it. The social worker needs, in the face of these attacks, to find firm ground for his feet. I have said that sociology itself cannot provide the social worker with a faith, but it can clear a space in which he may with greater assurance apply his faith. It can show him both the limits beyond which he is in danger and some of the potentialities that lie within these limits. It can give him a ground on which he can meet the attacks of those who assail the utility of his vocation. I want therefore in this lecture to deal with some of these assaults on the principle on which social work is founded, the principle of social amelioration, and particularly to show how sociological studies enable the social worker to redefine his faith and to clarify his function.

One of the older attacks on the position of the social worker emanated from the teachings of Darwin. It presented the contrast between the drastic but beneficent ways of nature and the misguided sentimentalism of civilized man which refuses to allow nature take her course. We will not let the weak perish, we save the individual at the cost of the race. "With savages," said Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man*, "the weak in body and mind are soon eliminated; and those who survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to

check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment." Darwin refused to carry the doctrine of natural selection to its logical conclusion, that we should refrain from aiding those who cannot aid themselves. But many of his followers drew the moral, notably the school of Karl Pearson.

It may be claimed, however, that these writers do not appreciate the significance of the social environment. They speak as though natural selection must or should operate alike in society and in outer nature. They do not realize the profound difference which society makes, so that natural selection is never natural under social conditions. Society determines man's life from his birth, from even before his birth. Society is through and through an "interference" with nature. It is this fact which distinguishes man most definitely from the lower animals, and the further a civilization advances the remoter become the conditions under which natural selection can freely operate. There are dangers in this essentially human process but they must be met by social control, since a return to nature and to nature's conditions is an impossible and foolish dream. To live in society is to be interdependent on one's fellows, to be bound within a system of mutual aid. This system is man-made, and as such is full of defects. The business of the social worker is to deal with some of these defects as they manifest themselves in the lives of individuals. It is social man who makes the conditions, and

it is social man alone who can correct or control them. Nature did not make the economic system and is not responsible for its hazards. Nature did not make our subways and is not responsible for the new dangers of infection. The trouble with the natural selectionist is that he is dealing with an unreal world. If the unfit breed excessively it is because society provides the conditions, and society itself, in the light of our experience of good and evil, must change them. As I put it in my book *Community*, "nature solves no problem which man creates."

Sociology shows us how essentially men are bound up with one another. The natural selectionist, seeing the ravages of unemployment or of disease, may console himself that the fittest survive and leave the race stronger for the grim struggle. If so, he is thinking in an individualistic vacuum. The fear of unemployment dogs the lives of those who escape as well as of those who fall, the children suffer with their elders and are impaired for the struggle of life. The naturalistic conception of fitness loses meaning in a specialized society which throws one group out of work because the fashions have changed and another because oil and electricity are taking the place of coal. If we want to see nature settle in its own rough way the problem of fitness we must advocate a society which is neither socialistic nor capitalistic, for capitalism with its cushion of wealth for the children of the well-to-do interferes at least as much with the equal struggle as does socialism. But I have never heard of a natural selectionist who would follow his logic through.

The clinching argument against the natural selectionist comes from the study of population movements and changes. From many points of view the study of population throws light on the problems of social welfare, and I believe it should be included in the program of training for every social worker. But for our present purpose it suffices to point out that civilized society is reaching a phase in which the birth rate is nearly level with the death rate, both having fallen from the higher ranges characteristic of former generations, though the fall of the birth rate has been more steep than that of the death rate. Now this is a condition which reduces to a minimum the operation of anything that could be regarded as "natural selection." Natural selection operates on the excess of births over deaths, and where there is no excess it can have little efficacy. The higher we rise in the scale of living, from the lower animals to the primates, from the savage to civilized man, the smaller becomes the excess of reproduction over survival. This development seems as inevitable, as "natural" if you like, as anything else in the evolutionary process. The more social control, the less natural selection. And if there are dangers in the process, they too must be met, not by appealing vainly to forces which are antagonistic to our civilization, but by applying more purposively and more wisely the controls which are inherent in it.

When we have met the argument of the natural selectionist, another and perhaps more formidable antagonist confronts those who accept the principle of social amelioration. The social worker deals largely

with environmental factors, with home conditions, health conditions, opportunities for education, reform institutions, and so forth. So the hereditarian comes along, and says: "All these efforts are of little avail. The roots of the trouble lie elsewhere, not in the bad environments which you would change, but in the deficient heredity, in the defective stocks. You can't build a solid house on insecure foundations. The higher you build on these, the more precarious the structure. If you want to improve society, encourage the good stocks and discourage the bad ones, instead of doing the reverse, which is virtually what you are attempting. You want to improve the lot of the under-dog, but

The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Improve the environment as much as you will, but don't expect that thereby you are much improving the quality of those who made or found that environment. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, said an old proverb. Environment has little importance as an explanatory factor. It is an effect rather than a cause. You want to improve the conditions of the unfortunate. Be it so, but don't cherish a false optimism about the results. For heredity is responsible for the vastly greater part of the gross disparities in the lot of men which you are seeking to remove."

With a great semblance of scientific accuracy this school tells us that the contribution of heredity is "80 per cent." They tell us that the difference between the best and the worst home environments amounts to at

most some 20 per cent.<sup>1</sup> And the first point I would make is that no trained sociologist would be guilty of such statements. For they imply that we can isolate and assess in quantitative terms the influence of the social conditions under which we live. They thus regard society as a factor imposed as it were on heredity. When they offer us statistical results concerning the relative importance of heredity and environment they are making the illegitimate assumption that heredity can be known in itself whereas heredity is only a potentiality until it is revealed within and evoked by an environment. As soon as we realize that man is a creature of manifold potentialities and that society furnishes the conditions and the means in response to which one set of potentialities is favored and another discouraged, we shall learn the one-sidedness of exalting either heredity or the social environment to the depreciation of the other. The sociologist is more apt to exhibit the significance of the rôle played by society, and the biologist the rôle of heredity. Each plays an essential part, and it is mere one-sidedness to claim, as the behaviorists do, that heredity has little to do with the differences between men; or again, as the hereditarians do, that environment is utterly "dwarfed" by the importance of heredity. The attempts, for example, to account for national or group traits in terms of inborn characters are defeated by those sociological studies which show

<sup>1</sup>So Barbara S. Burks in *The Twenty-Seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*. Various other contributors to this work take a similar position, though others point out that the studies of nationality and race differences do not settle the question of heredity and environment or "provide any means for evaluating the contribution of nature and nurture."



how men accommodate themselves to different environments; how children, transferred in infancy from one social environment to another, take on the characteristic mores and attitudes of that in which they are brought up; how great social changes, such as those connected with modern industry and modern mechanization, have changed the faiths and purposes, the thoughts and manners, of the peoples subjected to these new conditions. They show that society is a more subtle, a more pervasive influence than we once believed. Who could attempt to explain the peculiar developments of American society who would neglect the influences arising from early Puritanism, from the receding frontier life, from the swift development of communications, from the economic opportunities of a suddenly developed continent, and so forth? Here we have peoples of every nationality subjected to a common environment, and here they develop characteristic common attitudes. North America is an eternal object lesson of the folly of explaining human attributes solely in terms of heredity. Something of this object—lesson the sociologists, from Ward to Veblen, from Veblen to the researchers of the Chicago school, have revealed.✓

But the hereditarians offer us facts to confirm their belief in the overwhelming importance of heredity. They tell us how from the ranks of unskilled labor only one person arises to the somewhat uncertain degree of eminence involved in inclusion in *Who's Who*, for every seventeen hundred whose fathers were members of the professions. They tell us how the lower economic and social ranks have correspondingly low I. Q.'s,

from which infallible test they conclude that their lot in life is ordained by their "mental age." And the curious truth is that even if we accept without demur the accuracy and fairness of their testing apparatus, their conclusions would be exactly as valid if they reversed the relation of cause and effect. If the son of an unskilled laborer has a probability of attaining distinction which is overwhelmingly small compared with that of the son of a lawyer or a clergyman, this fact does not tell us whether we should attribute the disparity to the difference in germ-plasm or to the difference in opportunity. Without further evidence the inference is just as good—and just as bad—one way as the other. One assiduous researcher has discovered the remarkable fact that royal families have been proportionately more prolific in providing geniuses than any other, and still more remarkably finds the explanation in the royal germ-cells.<sup>2</sup> How curious that social station should have little to do with it! How satisfactory that neither obstacles nor opportunities seriously interfere with the production of genius or even of business acumen, that the inequalities of man do not pervert the justice of nature! But certain reflections prevent me from accepting this comfortable doctrine. I imagine, for example, that in present-day Russia the relative probabilities are decidedly different from what they were in Czarist days. I imagine that, if there is a Russian *Who's Who*, the chances of a proletarian to attain the "eminence" of inclusion would be vastly greater than that of a bourgeois. This would not prove the intrinsic superiority of

<sup>2</sup>F. A. Woods, *Mental and Moral Heredity in Royalty*.

the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, but it would show that environment makes a not inconsiderable difference, and it would show the absurdity of our hereditarians who, whenever they find a contrast between the lives and fates of various social groups, are so apt to exclaim—"that goes back to the germ-cells." Since they can never see the germ-cells, this sweeping conclusion is an act of faith and not of science. And sociological studies give us reason to doubt the foundations of their faith.

At this point we may introduce what may be termed Exhibit A in the case of the hereditarian versus the social worker. I refer to the famous contrast of the Juke and the Edwards families. Look on this picture and on that, they say, and learn how little social work can do in the face of an adverse heredity. Behold the descendants of the unfortunate rascal Juke who was born in New York in 1720! A hundred and fifty years later the muster-roll of his descendants contained seven convicted murderers, one hundred and thirty criminals, three hundred and ten paupers and four hundred and forty physical defectives out of a total identified Juke posterity of twelve hundred persons. More than half the women members of the tribe were prostitutes. And when the count was carried on to 1915, six hundred of the Juke blood then living were found to be mentally defective. Behold on the other hand the descendants of Jonathan Edwards! Not a criminal in the list, but two hundred and ninety-five college graduates and many men eminent in the professions, in the service of the state, and in business.

With this and many other exhibits before us we are

asked to render a verdict in favor of heredity. But let us first hear the other side. Let us see what the advocate of social forces has to say to the advocate of germ-cells. He makes two arguments against what seems to him a one-sided verdict. He points out first that we have still failed in this case to settle the ancient riddle of the prepotency of heredity or environment. Did not the Jukes have an unfavorable environment from their birth, born in poorhouses and in slums and given no training to equip them for honest, if not honorable, livelihood. Scarcely any of the identified Jukes had ever learned a trade. Those Jukes who moved out of that environment did seem in large measure to have surmounted the doom of the Juke name. Did they move out because they had already done so in themselves, or did they succeed because they lived in a different environment? Again the riddle presents itself. And observe that this is the kind of riddle which occurs within society in a myriad forms. Are people poor because they are ignorant or are they ignorant because they are poor? Are people healthy because they are sober or are they sober because they are healthy? The sociologist is learning to answer such riddles by rejecting the assumption on which the alternatives are based. The factors are not cause and effect, but interactive. Each condition sustains the other with which it is associated.

The second argument challenges another assumption in the case against the Juke posterity. What is the relation between the Juke of the early eighteenth century and the Jukes of the twentieth? In what sense

are they the same family? That far-back Juke must have had literally tens of thousands of descendants, but in what sense descendants? The blood of many other strains has entered in. Families are continuous over many generations only in name. When nature decreed that reproduction shall result from the union of the sexes she undermined the claims that rest on the integrity of the stock. And when she further decreed that in the mechanism of reproduction one half of the germinal units or genes contributed by each parent shall be lost and the rest combined in the most diverse ways, she made possible those notable variations between parents and children which so often perplex the parents themselves. If in spite of these provisions of nature a family group in a large community still retains characteristic qualities through many generations, it would seem as if the common environment in which the group lives could not be kept out of the reckoning.<sup>3</sup>

It is not possible here to examine in detail the contribution of sociology to this vexed subject. It must suffice to point out that it reveals the complex interaction of social and biological factors. Numerous studies from the time of Le Play to the present have indicated that the social environment bites deep into the lives of men. The transference of a group from one social environment to another very different one may not affect at all the color of their eyes or of their hair, may have little influence on their stature or the shape of their heads, though there is some evidence that even these may be

<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of such cases see the articles by P. A. Witty and H. C. Lehmann in the *American Journal of Sociology* for 1928 and 1930.

modified by geographical conditions, but it does very appreciably affect their beliefs and their purposes, their attitudes and their incentives, their modes of life and their success or failure. It is as idle to minimize heredity as environment. The social worker must acquire a profound respect for heredity. But since environment is also an essential factor, he is justified in doing all he can to improve it. The very fact that the social environment is made by man and not by nature, that its inadequacies therefore reveal our lack of intelligent planning and purposeful coöperation, indicates the hopefulness of the quest to improve it. What man has made man can make better. It is easier on the whole and less hazardous to experiment with environment than with heredity.

These scientific attacks on the principle of social amelioration are supported by more popular ones. The average fairly successful man sometimes adopts a patronizing attitude towards the social worker. One reason is that he does not realize the real character of the task which the social worker performs. He thinks of the social worker as dealing with the misfits and cast-offs of life, and being an individualist he condemns the misfits and cast-offs because they have not shown the acumen and grit which he has himself so admirably displayed. If they are maladjusted that is their own fault. He implies, in accordance with an obscure metaphysical doctrine of free will, that they could have done much better—perhaps not so well as he, but still much better—if they had only wanted to do so, and if they have not wanted to do so it is again their fault.

Now this attitude contains some unreasoned assumptions which the study of society helps to remove. The social scientist learns that the way *not* to understand things is to look at them in the light of praise and blame. These may be at times useful spurs to endeavor. In their own place they have a significant if perhaps overrated function. But they hide from us the causes of the human phenomena to which they are applied. What would we think of a criminologist who spent his time blaming the criminal? If he did so he would see the object of his study in a mist of prejudice. He would be the less likely to appreciate the relation of crime to poverty, to balked desires, to poor home conditions, to lack of training, to the incitements of the society itself, to the treatment which society accords the incipient criminal. It is not a question as to whether blame is rightly bestowed on the criminal. My point is that it is the wrong attitude for the scientist. It may be the wrong attitude for social organizations as well. At least we do not seem to accomplish much by reprobating the criminal. If at the same time that we protect society against him we try to understand why he is what he is, we may get further. The average man is satisfied to blame those who have different morals or different manners from his own. It is a primitive reaction to difference, as any anthropologist can tell us. It is perhaps a necessary protection of the primitive mind against disintegrating changes, but the more we grow up intellectually and morally the less we need rely on it.

Again, the complacency of the average man towards the misfits ignores the unequal incidence of the hazards

and accidents of life. In the social race men do not start from scratch and they carry grossly unequal weights. The individualist attributes everything to unequal merits and demerits and nothing to unequal handicaps. He believes too easily in the providence which has been kind to himself. He is lacking both in social imagination and in an understanding of the social system. A vast tragedy such as the present unemployment situation may disturb his faith a little but in more normal times it is secure. Such a tragedy lifts a corner of the curtain behind which the other half lives, but it soon falls in place again. And then he returns to his comfortable belief that providence reigns, that it metes out to men their deserts, and that if you try too hard to supplement providence you are at the least destroying that quality which is the keystone of character and which explains his own success in life—initiative. Incidentally, he does not perceive that conditions of penury and neglect may be harmful to initiative or that they may divert initiative into anti-social channels, the ways of crime.

But we will assume for the moment the correctness of the dogmatic hypothesis, that those who lag behind or fail to adjust themselves are necessarily inferior in social qualities. We will assume that economic success is a measure of human fitness, closing our eyes to any opposing evidences. And then we ask the individualist how his conclusion follows from these premises. If people bring on their own heads, because they are what they are and neither better nor worse, the privations and sufferings which they endure—what follows? What



intelligible creed decrees that men shall be given what they deserve and that no help be rendered to the undeserving? What would we think of a doctor who refused to treat those who by carelessness or folly brought physical ailments on themselves? He is a medical man, not an abstract moralist. Neither is the social worker an abstract moralist when he deals with social ailments. As Bernard Shaw put it in the Preface to *Major Barbara*:

Now what does this Let Him Be Poor mean? It means let him be weak. Let him be ignorant. Let him become a nucleus of disease. Let him be a standing exhibition and example of ugliness and dirt. Let him have rickety children. Let him be cheap and let him drag his fellows down to his price by selling himself to do their work. Let his habitations turn our cities into poisonous congeries of slums. Let his daughters infect our young men with the diseases of the street and his sons revenge themselves by turning the nation's manhood into scrofula, cowardice, hypocrisy, political imbecility, and all the other fruits of oppression and malnutrition.

The social worker knows what truth there is in these scathing words, written in answer to the plea, Let nothing be done for "the undeserving."

In passing, it may be remarked that the attitude of the individualist is itself an expression of his social situation. It is in conformity with his training, his social status, his economic interest. Social science has always to struggle against doctrines derived not from objective study but from predisposition, from the will-to-believe. It is one of the most difficult struggles in the world, because the more we learn about ourselves the more we

perceive our profound dependence on the influences of our social environment. Complete victory is perhaps impossible, but at least we can struggle to be critical of the naïve philosophies to which our interests prompt us. The social scientist, to be worthy of the name, can never accept the inferences from any social philosophy until he has tried to reconcile them with such evidences as he can discover.

Having met the assaults of the individualist the social worker has still to face the assaults of the left-wing socialist. The latter maintains that the root of all social evil lies in the economic system. Social work is a mere makeshift, a sentimental support of an exploitative capitalism. When men receive economic justice, these methods will be discarded. Social reform is a mere tinkering with the economic mechanism. "Nine-tenths of the proposed reforms," says one of them, "are not only useless, but positively injurious to the exploited classes."<sup>4</sup> Social work is even more futile. It deals with the individual victims, as if the trouble lay with them, and by patching up some of the worst cases gives a moral aid to the order which breeds misery and poverty.

Now I am perfectly ready to admit that many, perhaps most, present problems of the social worker are generated by the economic mechanism. A society which has no safeguards against unemployment or its consequences, a society which permits or cannot prevent starvation wages, creates a myriad tasks for the social worker which a more successfully ordered society would

<sup>4</sup>Karl Kautsky, *The Erfurt Program*, Chap. IV.

avoid. But there are two points which the social worker can make in reply to those who condemn his function on this ground. In the first place the opposing argument simplifies the problem. Personal causes, personal failures or maladjustments, combine in many cases of poverty with social causes. Improve the system or revolutionize the system, this personal element will still remain. In the concrete situation the personal factor and the social factor always meet. In the second place, important as the economic factor is, it is by no means the only social factor to create the function of the social worker. I have read through many social case records and have been struck with the variety of social situations calling for treatment which they reveal. The ways in which men and women and children can be out of joint with their society are legion. Poverty complicates many of them, but its absence does not connote that mental fitness and social accommodation which is above the need for the social worker. There are accidents and misfortunes, clashes and disharmonies, inherited and acquired disabilities, which call for his art, which in any form of society will still require it. The more complex our society grows the more it presents difficult and delicate questions of personal adjustment. To aid men and women in finding their place, in realizing their potentialities, to rehabilitate them, to bring them into greater harmony with the conditions under which they must live—this function in its myriad forms demands the skill of the trained social worker.

So viewed, the task of the social worker may be thought of as one of adjusting to their social environ-

ment individuals who in themselves, without such aid, cannot surmount its difficulties or meet its demands. This is the concept of individual adjustment and maladjustment. As it bulks so largely in the philosophy of social work I shall in the next lecture turn to it and consider what contribution sociology makes to it.

### III

## THE CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL MALADJUSTMENT

I take it that social work is preeminently concerned with specific social situations and that it most frequently has to deal with the needs of individuals, either for the sake of these individuals themselves or for the sake of the individuals with whom they are nearly associated. The fact that a majority of social workers can be described as case workers confirms this view.<sup>1</sup> For case work, however we define it, establishes definite contacts with individuals. It is at the other extreme from the work of the legislator, the social planner or reformer. It deals with immediate and often urgent personal needs, and it is the immediacy or the urgency which brings the social worker to the scene. In short, there must be some definite tension or some obvious maladjustment before the social case worker can find an entrance or an opportunity. The social worker enters, like the physician or the nurse, because there is a defect, a breakdown, at least an inadequacy, on the part of individuals to meet the primary requirements for a decent life.

The principle generally invoked is that of the correction of individual maladjustment to an immediate situation, whether or not the responsibility for the maladjustment be assigned to the individual, to society

<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. H. Hurlin, *National Conference of Social Work*, 1926, p. 589.

itself, or to the mere accidents or hazards of life in a civilized community. Maladjustment is the generic principle in terms of which the task presented to the social worker is most frequently expressed. Our question today concerns the light which sociology can throw on the range and value of this working principle.

Before we proceed further we must examine the principle itself. It is often stated in what seem to me to be too broad terms. The well-known definition of social case work by Mary Richmond is an instance in point. She sets out the goal and the process of social case work, but without specifying the limitations under which the social worker proceeds. It is not enough to say that case work "consists of those processes which develop personality through adjustments consciously effected, individual by individual, between men and their social environment," because a thousand processes of this kind are everywhere in operation with which the social worker as such has nothing to do. "Processes which develop personality"—these are in various degrees all the processes of life. "Adjustments consciously effected, individual by individual, between men and their social environment"—is there any home, any institutional system, in which such conscious individual adjustments are not occurring all the time? In this definition the differentia is missing; we are given the genus but not the species. These everyday processes are not the specific concern of the social case worker. If social work is to develop a professional character there must be a more definite recognition both of the specific functions of the social worker, and the specific nature of the

various types of case which demand his aid, involving as they do some definite defect in respect of efficiency, of healthy living, or of self-maintenance. It is such considerations which the Milford Conference had in mind when its members redefined social case work as "dealing with the human being whose capacity to organize his own normal social activities may be impaired by one or more deviations from accepted standards of normal social life." Even this definition I find too unspecific. I would prefer to define in terms of minimum than of normal standards. Strictly speaking, in a complex heterogeneous society there are, can be, no norms of acting and of living in the name of which we should regulate our fellows. What are accepted standards of normal social life? Accepted by whom? Do we include ethical standards? Religious standards? Surely these must be ruled out if the social case worker is to have sure ground beneath his feet. Surely we must speak instead of minimum standards which can be objectively stated, standards of economic livelihood, health, efficiency, decency, standards concerning which there is no social controversy, so that the uncertainties in the situation are reduced to these: first, the readiness of the community to organize aid in their support; and second, the ability of the social worker to render that aid. In a word, the essential field of the social case worker is that of definite non-controversial maladjustments between the individual and the social situation.

It is dangerous to make too general claims, to maintain that the business of the social worker is to develop personality or to better human relations or to promote

social welfare. These are ideals, not vocations, and it is only as translated into the specific vocation of the social worker that the ideal becomes more than empty aspiration. It is dangerous—particularly dangerous, since the damning word “uplifter” ever lies ready to be cast at the social worker—to assume that it is his business to correct deviations from whatever norms there be, at least among these less fortunate who cannot protect themselves from social intrusion. The norms of a south Italian family of recent immigration differ from those of, shall we say, an Irish family. The social worker should assuredly know these national or local norms, not in order to correct deviations from them but because without such knowledge he cannot establish a *rapport* with the group and thus gain a position in which the more effectively to deal with the non-controversial social disabilities which, with the means and the knowledge at his command, are within the range of direct treatment.

Since this point seems crucial, let me illustrate it further. An analogy is often drawn between the profession of the medical man and that of the social worker. It is seen in the use of such expressions as “social diagnosis” and “social pathology.” “The analogy with medicine,” says Mr. Philip Klein in his critique of Mary Richmond’s *Social Diagnosis*, “is rooted in the implication that the same relationship exists between medical science and its constituent physical sciences as exists between social work and the social sciences, and the analogy is supported by the parallel between the task of the medical practitioner in the field of medicine and the



social worker in his field of activity.”<sup>2</sup> Now this analogy is very serviceable, as Mary Richmond has shown. The task of the social worker is therapeutic, like that of the practitioner, and as therapeutic medicine must be related to the increasingly significant function of preventive medicine, so must social work to the larger non-individualized program of social, and particularly of economic, reorganization.

And there is another implication here which helps to distinguish the modern field of social work from the old business of charity. The medical man does not patronize his client nor does he waste his emotions in pitying him nor does he spend his time upbraiding him as a “miserable sinner.” Praise and blame are often associated with an unscientific attitude, and they often interfere with the true business of the applied scientist, which is that of diagnosis and treatment. The analogy is therefore useful, but like other analogies it must not be pressed too far. On the norms of health all men are agreed; there are objective and easily read symptoms of ill-health. When these appear, all men are anxious to be rid of them, and most men are ready to summon the practitioner. But social health is a more debatable matter. The maladies of the body may be often difficult to cure and are sometimes difficult to diagnose but when maladies arise there is little dispute about their mere existence. But men are not agreed about social maladies. What one condemns another approves. In this arena of controversy the social

<sup>2</sup>Quoted from an analysis entitled, “Mary Richmond’s Formulation of a New Science,” in *Methods of Social Science*, edited by Stuart A. Rice.

worker should move with caution. Social health is interpreted differently according to the mores of the group, and the sociologist perceives that mores are relative, that contradictory mores abound and there are no objective standards of adjudging them. He learns to respect the mores of other groups than his own—which does not mean that he is himself indifferent but that he refrains from regarding the mere discrepancy between his own mores and those of other groups as sufficient evidence that the latter need treatment and correction.

There is another difference between medical and social therapeutics which reinforces the importance of the distinction just mentioned. The medical practitioner is generally called in at the solicitation of the ailing individual or his family, so that there is from the outset a readiness to coöperate with him. The social worker, except in cases where the relief of destitution is the issue, enters not infrequently in the name of the public welfare, insisting perhaps on responsibilities which the individual and the family do not themselves recognize. Behind him is the force of external social pressure, sometimes the power of the law. There are thus resistances to be overcome within the situation into which he enters. And it is therefore all the more important that the relativity of mores be admitted lest the social worker become a representative, in the eyes of those whom he or she would help, of moral tyranny. Moreover, we must not forget that under present conditions the social worker is mostly concerned with the lives of the poor, even though the defect to be remedied is not one of poverty. But poverty should not entail

the consequence that the poor may be subjected against their will to forms of social control which are rejected by the well-to-do. Society, in the person of the social worker, should not gratuitously interfere with, let us say, the wranglings of the poor husband and wife and certain other "deviations from accepted standards" when it claims no right to a similar interference in the case of the well-to-do. I confess that in my social Utopia the abolition of sheer poverty would be wholly the care of the state and not at all of voluntary agencies. There would be no longer any need to appeal on behalf of the "hundred neediest cases." There would be no need for charity organization societies to collect relief funds. This would still leave great tasks for the social worker, both inside and outside of public agencies. But the tasks would then be clarified. In this social Utopia the services of the social workers and the clinics of social agencies would be utilized, as are the services and clinics of the medical profession today, by all classes of the population. What myriads of homes there are in this country today in which the parents are baffled by "problem children" and how many of them would gladly resort to trained experts in family relationships if they knew where they could find them! Such an extension would have important reactions on the professional standards of the social worker. A beginning has been made in this direction in respect of those social services which are more closely related to the field of physical and mental health, particularly of psychiatric social work.

Meanwhile, and in preparation for this time, the ob-

jective of social work calls for more explicit definition. To claim that its particular appointed task is that of maintaining social norms, of treating deviations from these norms, of developing personality by individual treatment, of dealing with individual maladjustments and localized conflict situations, and so forth, is to make too broad and vague pretensions. There is no one set of social norms, whether by that ambiguous term we mean either the standards of social behavior which are generally accepted or those which are generally approved. There are on the other hand minimum requirements of a decent life, requirements on which all men of any social experience agree. When these requirements, or any one of them is lacking in a localized situation such as that of the individual home, and when the defect can be treated and in part or in whole remedied within this localized situation, there is the task and the sphere of the social worker. I am not suggesting that the aid of the social worker may not go beyond the reestablishment, so far as possible, of these minimum requirements, any more than that a doctor, called in for a particular ailment, may not in other respects give the patient the benefit of his knowledge and experience. I am not suggesting that the social worker cannot or should not help in the development of personality. What I am maintaining is that such further service does not define the vocation of the social worker and that without definition this vocation cannot adequately take its place as a recognized and accredited profession nor get rid of the doubts and confusions which in the past have demeaned the fairest words,

such as charity and philanthropy, which signify the service of man to man.

Some of the more recent definitions of social work recognize the necessity for this more explicit formulation. Thus Mr. Porter Lee, in his *Introduction to Vocational Aspects of Medical Social Work*, defines social case work as a "well-established form of expert service to human beings who have failed in the task of self-maintenance." Self-maintenance of course does not mean self-sufficiency, but the ability of the individual "to secure for himself or his family the combination of opportunities, services, and expert advice with whose assistance he can work out what will be for him an acceptable organization of existence." The stress on the idea of self-maintenance, with the corollary that the goal is a condition of living acceptable to and attainable by the individual, removes particularly the objection I have raised against the setting up of absolute norms. With that objective removed, we are free to state more freely the field of operation of the social worker. Primarily it is to treat and remedy, directly or by calling in outside aid, those disabilities or defects of individuals which stand in the way of the minimum non-controversial standards of well-being recognized within the community. But beyond that there are many services for which an individual or family may well solicit the aid of the social expert, voluntarily seeking or at least accepting guidance in respect of any one of the myriad difficulties which beset social relationships. A distinction should be made between these two types of service since they require different methods of treatment, and

since the second is more experimental and more tentative than the first. The two together, which we may characterize respectively as universal and optional functions of the social worker, constitute a field of operation demanding all the skill and intelligence which any human being can ever aspire to possess.

It is often said that to deal with the abnormal we should have clear conceptions of what is normal, to deal with maladjustments we must have standards of adjustment, to treat disease we must have principles of health. This seems a reasonable position, but the reasoning is perhaps too simple. The study of society shows that it cannot be followed too literally. A study of the comparative folkways and mores of different societies, such as Sumner and Keller have made, reveals the most diverse standards and codes existing side by side with no effective test by which to determine, within broad limits, their relative values as means to the ends of life.<sup>3</sup> Society, as Keller suggests in his *Societal Evolution*, creates a zone of indifference within which variations can successfully exist side by side without effective competition between them and within which no jealous God of natural selection sets up his tribunal. Within this zone the play of individual and group inclinations is given full scope. In the more complex societies this play of free variation acquires an increasing range, and where it exists there are no absolute standards or norms in the light of which one group can claim to prescribe social codes to another. This is the basis of the tolerance which a modern civilization de-

<sup>3</sup>Sumner and Keller, *The Science of Society*.

mands, and no one is truly civilized—in other words, an understanding member of this more complex world—who does not exhibit this tolerance towards others. We should therefore avoid the assumption that because these are definite maladjustments there is any one standard of adjustment. The standards of adjustment are absolute only in respect of those clearly defined and elemental needs of human personality the failure to satisfy which leads to consequences—either in respect of the individual or of those whom his conduct affects—which are universally admitted to be undesirable. The standards of adjustment are relative when the failure to meet them results in serious clashes and disharmonies within the particular group accepting these standards or between this group and another group.

The distinction between absolute and relative maladjustment, so defined, seems to me of considerable importance for the development of social work. Before I enlarge upon it however, I should like to make some further comments on the concept of maladjustment in general, so as to show that it must be qualified in various ways before it becomes serviceable to the social worker.

In the first place perfect social adjustment is impossible of achievement in a changing and complex society. In the second, even if it could be achieved, it does not express an idea which has any logical or ethical compulsion for the intelligent human being. Let me illustrate the former point from Mrs. Sheffield's study entitled *The Social Case History*. In this little book (page 214) she cites the following "case":

Mr. X married young and has a large family of children, gives his unbroken envelope each week to his wife, is insured in her favor, does regularly considerable marketing for her, and does it well, has taken liquor rarely, and never before his children, goes out evenings only occasionally, and then with his wife to chaperon the daughters; he has spent most of his working life with one firm, and after joining the union left it because he could get a better wage from these same employers than the maximum union requirement, and because the union wouldn't stand for the extremely long hours without overtime pay he puts up with; he nevertheless pays another man to take his place at work Sundays so that he may have a quiet day for church and for enjoying his family; he handles horses so well that they outlast those his fellow-workmen drive, and he is entrusted with the training of new horses. He attends church regularly with his wife and children, and put some of his earnings into a liberty bond only because his clergyman preached strongly such patriotic action.

Here we have a man who by all external signs finds himself completely adjusted within the family circle and at the same time has established a complete harmony between his sentiment for his family and his devotion to his church on the one hand and the business which employes him on the other. But he achieves this harmony only by sacrificing his solidarity with his fellow workers or at least with the union members, and there is a suggestion that he subordinates to his family interest his sense of citizenship. Now this illustrates the fact that in any complex society there are many claims on the loyalty of the individual and that these claims cannot be at all times reconciled. A perfect adjustment within one area often means a failure of adjustment in respect of some other social area, smaller or larger. The individual cited is perhaps exceptional,



in that his loyalty to one group is so complete that it drowns the sense of conflict between that loyalty and other claims of his society. It would in fact seem that he is not highly individualized, and that a lack of individualization is necessary for that complete subjective harmony, oblivious of discordant claims, which he has attained. A more highly individualized person would surely have interests of his own, and would surely not confine his evening excursions to occasions where he plays the rôle of chaperon to his daughter. The moral is that one can attain a perfect subjective adjustment only by sacrificing certain social interests or by failing altogether to appreciate certain social obligations.

This brings me to the second point. In any dynamic society perfect objective adjustment is impossible and perfect subjective adjustment is not an ideal. If we had no sense of maladjustment we would have the mental simplicity of cows. We would have no spur to effort. We would never conceive a world nearer to the heart's desire than that in which we live. The springs of energy would be uncoiled. And though in certain moods we may envy, with Walt Whitman, the placid animals which never "lie awake at night thinking about their sins," we know that without striving and restlessness in our breasts, without mobility and tension in the social order, the adventure of life would cease. The best we can hope to attain is a moving, changing equipoise in a world of struggle.

Setting aside the impossible ideal of perfect adjustment we must seek to mark off those maladjustments which are definitely injurious to human efficiency.

These would include all absolute maladjustments such as spring from physical or mental defects, such as cause the individual or group to be parasitic on others, or such as reveal the individual to be so irresponsible or so overbearing or so self-centered that he is a definite peril to the well-being of his group. These absolute maladjustments involve in one way or another an interference with the accepted minimum requirements of a decent life. Being so, there is little or no dispute that they fall within the proper sphere of the social worker. But it is otherwise when we turn to what I have called the relative maladjustments. Here it is necessary for the social worker to proceed more warily, and here is where social work should be clearly linked with sociology.

Within every area of social life—the family, the local group, the nation—these relative maladjustments are frequent. Often enough they result in conditions which invite the services of the social worker. But how is he to deal with them? They exhibit an amazing variety, they combine in complex ways. Here we can appeal again to the analogy of the physician. The latter would be helpless unless he learned the history and background of the case and unless he diagnosed the ailment as belonging to some particular type, no matter what individual features or complications it may reveal. Similarly the social worker should know the background of the group within which the maladjustment is found and should be able to distinguish and classify the specific type of maladjustment which is dominant in the situation. There is still a great lack of any adequate

working classification of social maladjustments, and the lack reveals the present weakness of the art of social work.

In both these directions the social worker may reasonably expect aid from sociology. To reveal the background of those particular situations in which acute maladjustments arise is clearly one of its tasks, and in some measure it is being fulfilled. I could spend all my time offering illustrations from social research, but let us confine ourselves to one field, that of the maladjustments which beset immigrant groups in the American environment. Studies of various groups and of their problems of adjustment have been and are being made, studies of specific national groups such as Thomas and Znaniecki gave in *The Polish Peasant*, studies of the immigrant background in general such as Park and Miller's *Old World Traits Transplanted*, studies of immigrants in an urban environment such as Konrad Bercovici's *Around the World in New York*, studies of the relations of the first and the second generation of immigrants such as Brunner's *Immigrant Farmers and Their Children*. These are merely a few titles from a literature of considerable wealth. With the knowledge which they provide the social worker can gain an insight into the living problems of the immigrant, can see the meaning of the old heritage which he brings into the new situation, can understand and appreciate that sense of status to which he often desperately clings, can fathom the perplexities which arise as the children are trained to social attitudes opposed to those of their fathers.

The sense of the background gives a new significance to the tasks of the social worker. What before appeared like human perversity or even stupidity is now recognized as often having its roots in deep human instincts. What before had seemed the mere chance and confusion of social disharmonies is now recognized as coming within the realm of social law. Conflict and maladjustment are seen in the light of their past and present conditions, and that kind of sympathy and understanding grows which illumines studies, like, for example, Lindeman and Mayers' *Community Conflict*.<sup>4</sup> We learn how attitudes are formed, how, for example, early training establishes loyalties and prejudices, social ideals and social stereotypes. We are in short prepared for that discovery of human nature which awaits us in our exploration. We are rendered in part immune to the shocks and disappointments and bafflements that lie therein, not because we are case-hardened but because we are socially educated.

Having acquired a sense of background the social worker must next identify the types represented by the maladjustments with which he has to deal. In this quest he can expect at present rather less help from sociology. As I shall seek to show in the last lecture, here is a task where social work and sociology must coöperate more fully. I have remarked that a science generalizes and an art individualizes, but these processes, though antithetical, are closely related. Every individual situation has type-elements, every general principle is discovered in concrete manifestations. The

<sup>4</sup>Publication of the *Inquiry*, New York.

classification of cases by social workers is still very haphazard. There are many difficulties in the way, the complicated and ever changeful interaction of diverse factors, the practical necessity of registering each case at short notice, the competing and unadjusted jurisdictions of different social agencies. Take for example such a category as "family disorganization"—what a multitude of dissimilar situations is brought under it! Take such a category as "delinquency"—what varying connotations it has, so that sometimes we seem driven to define it in terms of the accidental factor which brings the child into contact with the law! Take such a category as "the gang," varying from the generic sense of a free group of adventurous youngsters to the specialized sense of an organized group of adolescent law-breakers. The types and variations included under these and many other terms implying social maladjustment are greatly in need of classification. It is a long and difficult task, nor will it ever be accomplished unless more attention is devoted to it. Sociological studies are preparing the way. Towards the clarification of the terms just mentioned one might refer to the work of Mowrer, of Healy, of Shaw, and of Thrasher. But very much remains to be done, and much of it will be done only as the social worker joins with the social scientist on their common ground of social diagnosis.

I have left to the end the crucial question which the use of the concept of maladjustment always implies. If any two things are out of alignment or out of harmony, the desired adjustment involves a change in one or in the other or in both. If the individual is maladjusted

to his group or to his work or to his society in general, it still remains an open question which should be adjusted to which? Strictly speaking, the "mal" applies to the relationship only, not to the terms of the relationship. The desired readjustment may be primarily in the interest of the individual or it may be in the interest of the group itself. But always a standard of values is involved, and we cannot assume that the principle of value demands that the individual should be adjusted to the situation and never that the situation be adjusted to the individual. We can all think of cases in which this assumption would offend our standards of value. An individual may be the victim of his situation. An individual may be superior to his group, may be more sensitive, more cultured, more moralized. Most of the world's geniuses have been badly adjusted to their environment. Sometimes their criticism of society has been their outstanding contribution to society. If the goal were always the adjustment of individuals to their situation, this principle of conformity would rule out that incessant criticism looking towards a reconstruction of society which is the condition of any social advance.

When the sociologist speaks of adjustment and maladjustment his concept is different from that of the biologist who speaks of adaptation to environment. There are in fact three distinct concepts which should never be confused. There is in the first place a physico-chemical adaptation of life to environment which is universal and inexorable. Here no sense of values is involved. It is the sheer necessity of physical law.

It brings rickets to undernourished children and health to the well-nourished who enjoy fresh air and sunshine. It raises the death rate in February and March and lowers it in September. It is revealed in the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics and the stunted scrub of the desert. This physical adaptation is equally fulfilled in strength or weakness, health or disease, life or death. From the purely physical point of view there is no maladaptation. But the concept of adaptation has a different significance when we turn to the biological sciences. Here a standard is implied, though a simple one. It is that of ability to survive. The cactus and the lizard are adapted to the desert, the elephant to the jungle, the fish to the sea. If taken out of their respective environments these living things would be maladapted, they would be unable to survive. Observe that at this biological level we think mainly of the adaptation of life to environment rather than *vice versa*. But when we turn to social adaptation, which for distinction we name adjustment, the concept again changes. Now the standard becomes complex and variable. Now some degree of maladjustment is always present. For the standard is also an ideal. It is the never satisfied quest for such a relationship between man and his environment that within it his life may be as abundant as possible, in the light of his changing and growing ideas of welfare. And now the adjustment is definitely two-sided. Unlike the other animals he is stirred also by impulses to change himself. Of this double activity social evolution is the result. Social adjustment should be seen as an evolutionary process, and to this aspect of our subject we next turn.

## IV

### THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION TO THE SOCIAL WORKER

One important task of sociology is to discover and trace the trends of social movements. Some at least of these movements reveal an evolutionary character. In other words, they are inevitably bound up with the transition from a more simple to a more complex society. We cannot improve our means of communication, we cannot take advantage of scientific and technical advance, we cannot become industrialized and specialized and urbanized, we cannot extend our material prosperity, without changing the social system. These social changes are not haphazard, they exhibit a certain direction. In other words, social evolution is a reality. Social work is itself very largely a consequence of social evolution. It is an agency of the more complex types of society, brought into being by the needs corresponding to that complexity. It is therefore of import to the social worker that he should understand the conditions which have created his social function. His attitude to his function, his sense of its significance, are altered by such knowledge.

I said that social work is itself an evolutionary product. For social work, with its institutional basis, springs from the modern detachment of the individual and of the small family group from the sustaining services of the neighborhood or local community. The conditions



of a complex society have disintegrated the cohesive neighborhood, the larger family group, whose members were bound to one another by the ties of kinship and local attachment, members who supported one another in their need in the more coöperative life of a rural economy. The complex industrial economy is more competitive and more impersonal. The individual is thus thrown more on his own resources unless special provision is made to save him from mischance. The family is a small unit, no longer close-knit with the local community. And there are many people now in our larger cities who live as family-less individuals, who have not even a family to fall back upon in time of need. Moreover the competitive industrial economy brings an array of new hazards and new types of maladjustment unknown before. We may perhaps regard these hazards as the costs of "progress," but it would be foolish inertia to regard them as a price which the victims must of necessity pay. Ill-health throws a man out of his livelihood or accident deprives him of his capacity to work or unemployment comes upon him he knows not whence. These hazards belong to the economic system and they can be removed only as the system is improved. Meantime they call for corrective and remedial measures. Moreover we live in an institutionalized world, and these great impersonal institutions constitute a standardized system which by itself reckes little of individual misfits. It needs therefore, as no past system has needed, to be supplemented by individualized care and treatment. It needs institutions of another order, institutions whose task it is to remedy

the defects of other institutions. These are the institutions to which the social worker is attached, and these are the institutions which must most of all resist the danger of institutionalism, the danger of the mass rule and the mass treatment.

In these ever more intensive processes of a complex civilization the social worker finds his increasing function. It is a function of interpretation as well as of practical service. The course of social evolution both challenges and justifies the place of the social worker. For the needs of the new economy exist side by side with the attitudes of an older one. We are apt to meet the new needs animated by traditional sentiments which in themselves may be quite worthy but which misrepresent the nature of the service demanded. We are apt to respond in the spirit of neighborliness to conditions which have outgrown the neighborhood. The sentiment which helped the neighbor along is not adequate for the age of unemployment and industrial insecurity. There was a fine glow, no doubt, in that spontaneous neighborly aid, but let us face the fact that it was the expression of a kind of social solidarity which has lost much of its power. It was the simple undifferentiated sentiment of the close-knit group, but even if it had not been weakened by social change it would no longer suffice.

For we have reached an age in which amateurish, inexpert help may be as much an evil as a good. The advance of science brings with it the expert, the finer service, the more specialized treatment, which a former age could not provide. That age could not care aright

for the teeth of school children or the nourishment of the expectant mother, could not minister to a mind diseased or treat the victim of a neurosis. Perhaps there was less need of these services, certainly there was little supply of them. And with expert social service we must breed corresponding social attitudes. The old neighborliness idea may be in our urban communities as ineffective as the buggy in the machine age. Yet how many still think in the old terms, and how detrimental this thinking is to the development of the function and the status of the social worker! How many still think of relief work as something inspired by the old glow of philanthropy; as something adequately provided by casual generosity! They do not realize that they are no longer dealing with casual misfortunes but with the statistical results of a whole social system. They do not realize that, if their own attitudes belong to a past system, those whom they treat accordingly have had their attitudes moulded by bitter experience to the new one, so that, for example, the reverse of the glow of charity in the giver may be the glow of shame in the recipient.

This then is a first challenge of social evolution to the social worker. He has to make the world see that he belongs to a new social order, that he is himself a necessary part of it, that he is evolved by the same conditions which have brought into existence the factory, the automobile, the economic corporation, and the modern city. Understanding this truth he can acquire that philosophy of his social rôle which must lend alike dignity and expertness and inspiration to his particular task.

Here I turn to a second challenge which the new conditions make. The scale of social work has grown enormously. The sums expended on it, though impossible accurately to ascertain, reach vast figures. It is estimated that for the year 1926-27 the state of New York alone appropriated on various welfare activities, including hospitals, state prisons, reformatories, playgrounds and parks, around \$130,000,000, nearly half of the total amount being distributed by the Board of Child Welfare.<sup>1</sup> If we could add private giving to these public expenditures, the sum total would surprise most of us. In many European countries, with their nationalized systems of unemployment and sickness benefit, the sum is even larger in proportion to the wealth and income of these countries. This great expansion of social welfare expenditures arouses misgiving in some quarters. They think of it as unprofitable squandering of public money, as paternalistic and socialistic, as placing on government heavy burdens which should rest elsewhere. Here then are raised two questions of great significance to the social worker. First, on what grounds can we determine the obligation of government, municipal, county, state, or federal, in the provision of those welfare services of which the social worker is a part? Second, on what grounds can we assign the respective shares of private and of public agencies in meeting the needs of the present social order?

It is hardly to be expected that any conclusive answer can be given to these questions, but the study of social

<sup>1</sup>Sydnor H. Walker, *Social Work and the Training of Social Workers*, p. 51.

evolution can at least give us the proper orientation from which we ought to decide them, as best we can, for ourselves. As the needs of the new order have become more fully realized, there has been an increasing tendency towards the concentration and coördination of welfare agencies. There was a time when the local church and the parish administered relief. At that time it was practically no concern of the state at all. There was a time when the local guilds looked after their less fortunate brethren as an incident in their economic control. Gradually specialized agencies arose. Gradually, as the consequences of the labor of children and of women in factories, working excessive hours for a pittance, became apparent, the state became involved. But the theory was that while women and minors needed the protection of the state, men could fend for themselves and receive their due rewards under the equitable working of the law of competition. Gradually this theory broke down under the impact of facts, and the state undertook a wider responsibility. It became more apparent that the economic system was not a kind of perpetual day of judgment, dividing the sheep from the goats and assigning to each their deserts. It became more apparent that when new conditions destroyed old responsibilities and old solidarities a new and greater solidarity must be created. Under the new scheme of economic life no more than under the old did men live simply to themselves, did their failure to achieve a decent life or livelihood recoil upon themselves alone.

The new preoccupation of the state with the problem

of social welfare has involved a revolution in the very idea of the state. It transformed the state into a great, in truth the greatest, agency of society. These new duties were inconsistent with its old rôle as an exploitative instrument of a ruling class. It became less concerned with power and more with welfare. The change is still in process, and the old traditions survive beside the new functions. But the trend of events has led the state gradually to assume more far-reaching social services. New departments of health, new bureaus of social insurance, protection, and compensation arose besides old departments of war and of justice. Services which private agencies initiated, such as child welfare and public health nursing, became in part at least the business of the state. It does not follow that the state must swallow up all private agencies. But it raises the problem as to which services are best in private and which are best in public hands. And this is a problem on which the experience of the social worker should throw light.

A very recent instance reveals the profound division of opinion which still exists on this point. I refer to the conflict between the President, the House, and the Red Cross on the one hand and the Senate on the other regarding a federal appropriation for the relief of the states suffering from drought. It is not my part to discuss the merits of this particular controversy, but there are some aspects of it which are of peculiar interest to the philosophy of social work and which therefore may appropriately be considered here. The most remarkable aspect of the episode, and one which so far

as I am aware is unprecedented, was the repudiation by one of the greatest of social service agencies, the American Red Cross, of a proposed appropriation for relief in a crisis in which such relief was gravely needed. It is true that in the official statement issued January 29, 1931, by the Chairman of the Red Cross, the repudiation was made on the grounds that the bill was a general relief bill and not specially a drought relief bill and that this would involve the Red Cross in an extension of activities beyond its proper range. But the Central Committee of the Red Cross did not ask for such a modification of the bill as would limit it to their proper field of operation, they rejected it *in toto*, and the whole character of the dispute, as well as the subsequent compromise, showed that the issue was whether the Federal Government should on principle provide public funds for the free supply of food and other necessities to the victims of a national emergency. Nor was it merely a question as to whether such aid should derive from Federal or state funds, it was also a question as to whether the rendering of aid in this form should come from voluntary subscriptions or from the public resources.

Here then is a question of vital import to the social worker. Unfortunately it is obscured by question-begging words. It does not help us to call a policy, when we don't like it, "un-American." It suggests that the issue must be settled by tradition, when the important point is how we must adapt our traditions to the realities of social change. We do not decide engineering problems by saying that one method is American and another un-American. Not very long ago it could

have been said that mothers' pensions and maternity benefits and even workmen's compensation were "un-American," but we have now decided otherwise. Nor does it help to call public maintenance of the needy a "dole." The term is merely an insidious way of describing a system which should be examined on its merits and in the light of the alternatives. The word "dole" is associated with the word "charity," and has recently acquired the same unpleasant connotation in respect to the public distribution of aid to the needy which the term "charity" has long possessed in respect of private giving. It is employed to cast discredit on the great contributory state-organized systems of health and unemployment insurance now established in many European countries. No doubt these systems are liable to abuse, but no one who realizes the situation can deny that they have been the means of preventing widespread destitution, demoralization, and needless suffering. It may be that they have also stayed the surging despair which would have found vent in social revolution. The complacent ignorance with which comfortable people, themselves remote from the grinding of the economic wheels, speak of these measures offers a theme full of tragic irony. Why is it that so many upholders of capitalism realize so little the conditions which make possible the continuance of the system to which they are devoted? Why do they still think in terms of an individualism which the capitalistic system itself has destroyed? Why is it that they oppose, ostensibly on grounds of principle, public aid for hungry children when they demand public aid for infant industries?



Why is it they profess to believe that the poor will be corrupted by state aid, wisely administered, when they never fear that a similar fate will befall the well-to-do through the more magnificent subsidies to trade? Do they imagine that the economic system gives every man what he deserves? If so, they live in a world of thought which is dangerously unreal. The age of Calvin or of Benjamin Franklin, the age of Adam Smith and of Malthus, even the age of Darwin, has passed away beyond recall. Everything is changed except the thoughts of those who cannot or will not understand.

I am not at all suggesting that the state should take over the whole business of relief from private agencies, but I am insisting that we cannot dispose of the question of public aid by the reiteration of antiquated views regarding the sphere of the state—antiquated because they rest on premises which have been discarded in every other aspect of the nation's business. If we want to enjoy the blessings of sheer individualism we must abolish our educational system, our insurance system, our sanitation system, our preventive medicine, our whole economic system, and especially that part of it which under the protection of the state allows the more fortunate to enjoy, with no labor of their own, the accumulated wealth of the past. The real question is not whether the state should, on general principles, succor the needy, but how far it should go, on what terms, in what coöperation with other agencies, with what safeguards against abuse. It is a question of the best adaptation of means to ends, of technique rather than of principle.

To repeat, it does not follow that the states of Western civilization will take over the whole business of social welfare, though there may be reasons to think that the trend towards social legislation is not yet exhausted. There are limits to what the state can effectively do. There is the danger that the politician will control the service instead of the expert, that cheap appeals to popular sentiment will take the place of intelligent guidance, that in consequence public money will be wastefully expended. But these are dangers which beset every branch of public administration. They do not prevent the state from rendering great essential services of many other kinds. The experience of the state in administering workmen's compensation, medical aid, unemployment insurance, and so forth, is far from justifying the forebodings with which these services were inaugurated. The state has become the greatest of all insurance agencies. Where unified coordinated endeavor is required it has obvious advantages. It alone can establish and sustain that assurance against those dread hazards of our modern economic system which are the ironic consequence of our new modes of increasing the sum total of wealth. To establish that assurance imposes too unequal and too heavy a burden on private generosity. The system as a whole may reasonably be asked to bear its social costs, and only the intervention of the state can ensure that it will do so. The economic system has no central organ to correct its own defects, and therefore the state must undertake this task instead. Underlying the trend to social legislation there is this primary and surely obvious fact. I believe

therefore that this trend will advance further, that it will fulfill its present direction by assuming responsibility for all those hazards which are definitely hostile to a minimum standard of decent living established in the minds of the people and which obviously thwart the fulfillment of human personality. It is already doing so in various respects in different countries, and in certain of these respects the wealthiest country in the world lags far behind much poorer ones. In so far as the state assumes this responsibility, there will be not a less but a greater place for the social worker. And there will also be an important place for the private social agencies. For then they can more freely undertake the more experimental tasks, the less standardized services. They can concern themselves more with the finer ministration of expert aid to the maladjusted, to those who present social rather than purely economic problems. Such services will then no longer lay too heavy a burden on the private giver. They will provide him with an opportunity to reveal his public spirit in a more constructive way.

The conclusion then which I would derive from the trend of social legislation is that it is becoming the business of the state to assure those minimum standards of decency, health, and livelihood which are essential conditions of ordinary human well-being everywhere, and especially to make adequate provision against those definite hazards to that well-being which are inherent in the operation of the economic system. To assure these things is not necessarily to provide them out of state funds; it is to insist that in one way or another,

with whatever contributions on the part of the beneficiaries, these elementary conditions shall be established. Even were this task fully accomplished by the state the need for private institutions would exist. The state cannot afford to experiment as private associations can. The more exhilarating adventures in the advance of well-being will still remain. This too is in keeping with the process of social evolution. For that process has brought to birth a great multiplicity of free organizations, seeking in their individual ways the advantage of their members or, in their philanthropic forms, the well-being of others. In the furtherance of physical and mental health, of recreation, of personal adjustments in a myriad forms, there will then be room and to spare for the liberated activities of private agencies.

The increase of social organizations, public and private, not only creates new tasks for the social worker but helps to define his own peculiar function in the modern community. In a word, the growth of institutionalism needs to be supplemented by the growth of individualized treatment within the institution. To make this necessary correction, to humanize our institutions, is the function par excellence of the social worker. In my book *Community* I put forward the principle that socialization and individualization are the twofold complementary aspects of the process of social evolution. As civilization grows more complex it must organize itself to provide institutionally many services which under simpler conditions it provided through direct personal relationships. But these great personal institutions are in their first establishment unadapted to the

varying needs of the people they serve. They are apt to become inflexible, standardized, mechanical, remote, bureaucratic. The business of the social worker is to make institutions flexible, to keep them responsive to changing social situations on the one hand and to individual needs on the other. Without his aid social institutions would become our masters instead of our servants.

Let me illustrate from the history of poor relief. The early poor laws treated the poor as a simple problem. They were either sturdy beggars who must be made to work or they were incapables who must be shut up in almshouses. So states enacted compulsory labor for the one class and built almshouses for the other. Private charity, the lady bountiful, provided for more casual needs. When compulsory labor proved out of harmony with changing economic conditions, the state went in for various forms of "outdoor relief," but the almshouse or poorhouse became its mainstay in dealing with the problem of destitution. Into this refuge were herded with little discrimination the most unlike groups, the aged, the feeble-minded, the afflicted, the orphan. Their different needs and different potentialities were buried under the standardized treatment accorded them, often under an administration selected without regard for the special training and qualification required. Their records and life-histories went unstudied. They were simply the pauper class, and the community outside was inclined to attribute their position mainly to their own shiftlessness or depravity. In the words of Tennyson's tough-minded

farmer, "the poor in a lump is bad." Slowly the human cost, the waste, of this indiscriminate treatment has come to be realized. We have learned that the poor are not a homogeneous class, we are learning that many varieties of remedial and restorative treatment are necessary—and this knowledge has grown with the advance of social work.

Many other examples could be offered of the slow responsiveness of institutions to personal differences. The gradual process of prison reform might be cited, and although in contrast with the monstrous inhumanity of earlier prisons our own may seem on the whole models of enlightenment, yet in contrast with the possibilities of individualized treatment envisaged by criminologists and psychiatrists, they have still a vast way to travel. The judicial method which sentences offenders is still very ill-adapted to meet the variety of human situations with which it must deal. As one psychiatrist has put it, the judge is like an apothecary who has only three drugs at his disposal to correct all manner of human ailments. He dispenses only fines, imprisonment, or death, and how inadequate these measures are everyone who has intelligently observed the succession of cases which come before the courts must know. It is true that the judge has considerable discretion in meting out these penalties, but without the assistance of the case worker he cannot penetrate adequately to the human problems, so varied and so intricate, which present themselves before him under the guise of some crime or misdemeanor.

And so it is under every aspect of our institutionalized

life. So it is in the factory and in the school. The great institutional mechanism grows, and becomes more complicated. Its greater wheels, like those of physical mechanisms, must move in accord with general principles, formal rules. But these formal rules cannot deal with the endlessly varied problems of individual adjustment; they should not form a bed of Procrustes to which the individual must at any cost be fitted. The task of individualization calls therefore increasingly for a special class of institutional workers. Their business is to apply, to interpret, to supplement, to modify the rules in accordance with individual needs. To this class of workers the social worker mainly belongs. His concern is the misfits of the individual to the requirements of the social order and of the social order to the needs of the individual. He deals with the concrete situations where the social machinery is inadequate, where it breaks down, where it creates friction and conflict, where it crushes the individual within its meshes. He learns the human costs, the wastages, of the system. He learns about human beings and their needs in a direct way which is not possible for the legislator or the reformer as such. He can, if adequately trained, teach us more about humanity than the moralist or the dramatist. In the files of every Social Service Exchange lie social data which might be made most illuminating. In the records of agencies such as the Family Welfare Society are stores of information which might be brought to bear on the greater problems of modern society. Thus, working always from the individual situation, the social worker can provide us with the data for the con-

stant rebuilding of the social order. He can reveal to us the dynamic character of our institutions. He can show us their working as they affect the lives of those for whom they work least well. He thus provides us with the most effective and the best substantiated criticism of our social institutions. In a modern society, just because it is an elaborate, vast, and overpowering mechanism, this realistic criticism is peculiarly needed. The social worker, perhaps more than any other, is in a position to provide us with the data on which this criticism ought to be based. For what it demands above all else is the harmony of individuals and their institutions. The process of social evolution destroys old harmonies and makes new ones necessary. It compels us to redefine social justice and to seek it in new ways. Here again, in its most crucial form, is the challenge of social evolution to the social worker. And therefore I plead that a knowledge of sociology should go hand in hand with the specific training of the social worker for his task, if he is to see its magnitude and fulfill its function.

Moreover, for the fulfillment of this function the social worker must himself evolve. In an age of specialization he cannot remain unspecialized. The days of the family or district visitor are past, the days of the expert in social service have arrived. It is true that experts may be limited and narrow-visioned, people who see things from one angle only, people who know more and more about less and less. But this is only in so far as they are not expert enough. The true expert brings far-reaching knowledge to the focus of a particu-



lar task. If Tennyson spoke truly about the "flower in a crannied wall," that to know it all is to know "what God and man is," it is no less true that the knowledge of all that is involved in a social situation, the understanding of all the play of personalities that it contains, of all the hidden forces that have brought it into being, is a knowledge transcending human capacity. If the social service expert grows narrow, the fault lies not in the field of his work but in him and in his training. If the lack of expert knowledge were a sign of broadmindedness, the objection would have some basis, but experience does not seem to support this correlation.

The social worker has to become increasingly a specialist in his or her chosen field, just because social institutions have themselves become specialized. One can no longer go round dispensing indiscriminate social service. A worker is attached to a particular agency which has its particular functions. General training must be supplemented by special training. The Vocational Bureau of the American Association of Social Workers classifies social work occupations under nine main heads with some thirty subdivisions. Some of these heads may not belong to social work in a strict interpretation of that term, but the central fields of case work and group work, together with administration and organization, have certainly developed a number of distinctive specialisms. These specialisms depend partly on the relation of the social worker to particular institutions, such as the hospital, clinic, and court; partly on differences between the groups they serve, as between the young child and the adolescent, the boy and the girl.

This process of specialization is, in my judgment, one to be welcomed, provided the common foundations on which these specialisms can be effectively developed are rendered secure, provided we do not as specialists blind ourselves to the common humanity which exhibits these varieties of interest and of need. It is only by specializing that the social worker can gain further entry into the organizations of the modern world; if he can prove his expertness there is scarcely any organization in which he may not find a place and a function. For all large institutions need the individualization which the social worker, under that name or any other, can effect. To fulfill that service he or she has a rôle to play in the home, in the school, in the factory, in the court, in the hospital, in the insurance society, in numerous departments of government, even in the college.

One aspect, then, of the evolution of the social worker himself has been the significant way in which, from being a mere distributor of casual charity or a fussy moralist or a mere consoler of those suffering in body, mind, or estate, he has become, or at least is becoming, an ever more integrated part of the social system. Both his general function and his specific function are being defined, even as they are growing, as a result of the process of social evolution. His general function, if my argument holds, is to temper social institutions to individual needs, I do not claim that only the social worker performs this service, but I do claim that this is the general service which he performs. Where these institutions fail to meet the variant needs of individuals or where individuals are themselves by reason of some deficiency unable to maintain

themselves with the institutional order, the social worker has his task assigned. His specific function is to contribute this service with reference to some particular aspect of human or institutional inadequacy, usually as attached to an organization established to that end.

Perhaps nothing has done more to specialize the function of the social worker than the growth of social legislation. The establishment of public health services, of mothers' pensions, of workmen's compensation, of child labor laws, and in some states, of health insurance, unemployment insurance, and old-age pensions, involves the setting up of social standards which can be maintained only with the aid of the social worker. If this legislation is to achieve its ends, the trained worker must see that its provisions are adapted to the endlessly different situations of the beneficiaries. Moreover, since these standards are defined by law, the task of the social worker loses much of its old ambiguity. His mission becomes as definite as the law itself, though no law can prescribe the methods by which the mission is to be fulfilled. No one can tell better than the social worker how such laws succeed in practice. No one should be better qualified than the social worker to offer constructive criticism of these laws, as well as to rebut the destructive criticism of those who have never entered the homes and never penetrated the lives of those who live in the shadows of life.

In this lecture I have tried to show: first, that social evolution has created the social worker; second, that in creating him it offers him constantly new challenges. In the degree in which he meets these challenges he becomes himself an agent in furthering and directing this

process. But this he can never achieve if he is merely the master of a few techniques. His work calls for breadth of perception and of imagination. He must endeavor to see his place in this whole process. He carries on a task which by all the popular criteria of estimation is still not valued at its worth. He himself is too often unprepared for the higher demands that it makes, not adequately trained or adequately selected. I have dwelt on the magnitude of his function, because until it is realized more generally he cannot gain the status necessary for its performance. The old ideas still linger in the public mind though the old order has passed. Even in the minds of many social workers it still lingers, in the minds of those, for example, who think that apprenticeship is an all-sufficient training for the work they have to perform. Do they not know that in every other sphere of worthwhile endeavor—except perhaps, and unfortunately, politics—the day when apprenticeship sufficed is past? Important, even necessary as it was and is, it provides only the foreground of the social worker's training. Behind it must lie the discipline of the social sciences, and behind that again, like the far hills in a picture, the attained philosophy of life. But the picture, background and foreground, presents a unity. And if the life of the social worker is to be a unity also, it must contain all three. For those who doubt it I would say, in closing, that if they study what has been happening to our society, if they study this strange seeming-blind process of evolution of which the evolution of social work is a part, they cannot but emerge with a new and widened perspective of the rôle which today belongs to the social worker.

## V

### WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIOLOGY

In the preceding lectures I have sought to show how sociology is, and may more fully become, an ally of social work. In this lecture I want to suggest that the alliance need not be a one-sided affair, that social work, in so far as it finds a scientific basis, is itself in a position to make contributions to sociology. The divorce of sociology from social work has impaired the services which the latter can render in its own field; the application of the two will be of benefit to sociology as well. To secure these reciprocal benefits each must preserve its distinctiveness of function. A science and an art have different goals. But a science is infertile if it has no relation to the world of practice and an art is trivial or perverse unless it is rooted in the fields of knowledge. The two set forth with different purposes, but these different purposes must bring them to the common ground of knowledge. And to the extension of this common ground both can contribute.

There are at least three ways in which social work can coöperate with sociology in the extension of our knowledge of society. There are in fact three aspects of social understanding which in a peculiar way depend on the kind of experience which social work provides. In the first place, the social worker can help to classify the types of social situation. In order to deal effectively

with the varieties of social problems, these problems themselves and the social settings in which they occur must be classified. This is always part of the task of practical diagnosis as well as of theoretical interpretation. It is therefore equally of interest to the sociologist as to the social worker. The problem that baffles them both is the complexity and variety of social situations. So many factors enter into every concrete situation, and they enter in in such diverse and changing measures. The social worker has the advantage of being in direct contact with many concrete situations and of being familiar with the same situation in its changes over a period of time. From this experience should come fruits of social knowledge.

In the second place, for the reason just mentioned, the social worker can help us to study the processes of group life. If his task is one of social adjustment he must follow each situation through. He must be able to see the process in operation, to appreciate its difficulties and discern the manner and the degree in which they are surmounted. One of the hardest and one of the most essential tasks of sociology is to understand the cohesive and the disruptive forces that make and mar social harmonies, to understand them not merely in their results but also in their operation. They can be seen most intimately in the near group, the primary group that is the unit of every social structure. Sociologists have done comparatively little to study it. They lack the opportunity to do so which the social worker possesses. Large-scale investigations do not bring us close to it. Statistical information cannot yield this

knowledge. Some sociologists, like Cooley, have realized its importance, but it is only those who are in a position to use the case method, or at least to observe social situations closely, who can open out for us its possibilities. It is significant that those who have recently advanced the study of group process are writers who have been themselves associated with social work in one way or another. I might illustrate by reference to the various studies made by Lindeman, Professor Sheffield, and Lasker, or to the recently published volume of Grace Coyle's, entitled *The Social Process in Organized Groups*. These studies suggest the potentialities of this largely unexplored field.

In the third place the social worker can throw light on social causation. It is sometimes said that the sociologist, unlike other scientists, cannot engage in experiments. But that is what the social worker does all the time. It is true he cannot experiment freely in any direction, he is limited by his aims and he is also limited by the mores of the community, but within these limits he does, and must, experiment. His task is to relieve needs, to correct defects, to supplement inadequacies, to rehabilitate, to prevent impending evils. Every step on the road is an experiment. To learn why one treatment succeeds and another fails, to observe the factors that aid or resist treatment, to discover the various precipitants of social crisis on the one hand and the key-processes involved in readjustment on the other, this quest is at once essential to his art and to the science of social relationships. Practical necessity compels the social worker to seek an answer to the questions of

causation. - What in the case before us precipitates the condition we desire to improve or remove? What elements in it are most amenable to control? What methods of treatment appear most efficacious and why? When is the direct appeal to motivation, when the change of external conditions or of social environment most favorable?

Such then are the three ways in which the social worker, fully alive to and equipped for his function, may be expected to contribute to sociology. But this reciprocity of service is still in truth very rudimentary. For its development three corresponding conditions are requisite. They are conditions which are required for the fuller establishment of social work as expert professional service. They need, in other words, to be pursued for the sake of social work itself, but in attaining them the social worker will be entering into fuller coöperation with the sociologist.

First, as regards classification. The records and statistics of social work problems and treatments are still in the majority of instances very far from satisfactory. As a writer in the recent book, *Trends in American Sociology*, puts it:

If you study the problems of social work with the hope of finding an organized system of bookkeeping or of treatment in which the various liabilities in a case are matched by assets of the social agency, you are bound to be disappointed. . . . In some cases, the content of treatment is simple and effective. But in the treatment of a complex problem, when many factors are involved and treatment must be devised for a complicated situation, it is usually true that either the same type of simple expedients is followed, or nothing is attempted. . . . There has been no system of record-keeping



which would permit comparison of different cases or furnish an adequate check on the value of treatment.<sup>1</sup>

The reports of agencies classify their cases and their treatments in a pragmatic and often seemingly haphazard manner. While there are some exceptions to this rule, they generally list their problems under a few broad heterogeneous categories, and the fifty-seven varieties which are placed under them too often constitute a jumble including mere symptoms of trouble such as irregular school attendance, general economic factors such as unemployment or inadequate wages, precipitants of crisis such as desertion, physical disabilities such as bad tonsils or bad teeth, mental disabilities such as neurosis, temperamental factors such as laziness, technological factors such as bad housekeeping, moral factors such as neglect or sexual immorality, with a hold-all of "miscellaneous" for cases which cannot be docketed under any of these rubrics. Such listings cannot squarely reveal the real nature of many of the problems of the social worker. An adequate classification would refer to total situations in which various disturbing factors combine, indicating by specific descriptive terms the characteristic types which these totalities present. It would have names not only for the individual factors involved but for the complexes in which they occur. For after all the social worker is not dealing simply with desertion and poverty and ill-health and unemployment and neglect—he is dealing with the social maladjustments which these conditions create or precipitate or complicate.

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.*, chap. VIII, "Sociology and Social Work," by Harold A. Phelps.

The difficulties of social classification are great indeed. The way in which factors interact is baffling. Different classifications are necessary according to the purposes of the social agency. Classifications in this field cannot be hard-and-fast, and they can never be made fool-proof. They may be excellent for one purpose and useless for another. But unless they are achieved social work cannot progress in clarity and definition. This fact is realized by various leaders in the field of social work, and promising endeavors are being made. The work of Mary Richmond prepared the way. The work of Gordon Hamilton in her *Medical Social Terminology* has greatly helped to distinguish the factors and situations involved in medical social service. The work of Mrs. Sheffield is being devoted to the identification of type-situations, such as that which she designates "the family as a cushioned retreat for the man," in the embarrassingly prolific region of family problems.

Classification, it should be noted, is no mere formal, or as it is sometimes called "taxonomic," exercise. It is necessary at every stage of science or art, and it is peculiarly necessary when we are dealing with the varied and changeful context of social relationships, where the interplay of many factors is so perplexing. It is as necessary for the case worker recording a case as for the director of an organization drawing up an annual report. It is as necessary when we are trying to find the apt terms to describe the aspects of a family problem as when we are seeking to determine the appropriate institution to which a case should be referred.

In passing, it may be remarked that the lack of clear designations deprives many case records of much of their potential value. Not infrequently the writers of these records are content to use the indefinite language of ethical subjectivity—terms like “good” and “bad,” “superior” and “inferior,” “moral” and “immoral.” The preparation of case records is or should be a fine art. It demands high powers of observation and these powers can be adequately developed and utilized only if an appropriate descriptive vocabulary, clearly understood by social workers everywhere, is available.

I turn to the second contribution to sociology which social workers can make increasingly as their own art develops, the revelation of social processes. The condition which I would suggest as specially requisite here is the more adequate distinction of social from economic problems. I have pointed out that the peculiar if necessary association of social work with poverty has been a hindrance to the development of solutions for many of those maladjustments which the social worker finds among the poor but which do not owe their existence to poverty. The urgent problems of poverty naturally and properly take first place in many situations, but after all the solution of poverty is, in sheer principle, one of the simplest things in the world. To cure poverty all you need is a purse. I know that this statement sounds sufficiently ironic in these days of destitution. I know that in truth the relief of poverty is often a heart-breaking problem for the social worker. My meaning is, that for the relief of poverty itself what is necessary is not the arduous and continuous

process of constructive thinking but the no less arduous search for the mere material means to relieve it. When the discovery of means, the placement in a job, the supply of the necessities of life, does not suffice, then there is another problem present besides that of poverty. And my argument is that the difficulty of finding adequate means on the one hand and the tendency to be satisfied with the apportionment of these means on the other are too apt to divert the social worker from that wrestling with social maladjustments which his function increasingly demands. The problem of poverty, easy of solution in principle, but hard enough in application, masks the underlying problems of a definitely social nature. They must be distinguished clearly if the social worker is to be liberated to attend to the more interesting and more specialized tasks of social readjustment.

Let me select one out of the numerous aspects of social process which the social worker can help us to study. In dealing with problem children it is often important to appreciate the place of the child in respect of seniority or juniority among his brothers and sisters.<sup>2</sup> The oldest is apt to be favored in certain ways, and sometimes the youngest also. One boy in a family of girls and one girl in a family of boys is also apt to be the object of special attention. If again the oldest boy is very successful at school or has advantages of physical strength or character, this fact, if injudiciously exploited in the family circle by the parents, may create attitudes of dominance on the part of the favored child and resistances or inferiority attitudes on the part

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Blanche C. Weill, *The Behavior of Young Children of the Same Family*.

of the other children. Thus definite maladjustments may arise. Here we have an instance of a seemingly not uncommon family process. If the social worker is accustomed to look for the interplay of social factors, and to undertake that "long-term intensive care of difficult cases" on which Mary Richmond laid stress, he may well be expected to throw light on this and many other phases of family life.

This example shows that the study of social process is also a study of social causation. In the last resort, what we want to discover, whether as social scientists or as social workers, is the causes of things, the dependence of one phenomenon on another, and that greater interdependence of them all which constitutes at each moment the changing social equilibrium. But to learn the causes of things we must never limit our vision to the near group and the processes that occur within it. The group is a focus in which forces from near and far come together. The social worker, being always engaged in making experiments, can advance the far too neglected study of social causation. But here too there is a condition attached if the social worker is to be an effective ally of the sociologist. It is that he be actively interested, not simply in the provision of immediate aid in the crises and emergencies which call for him, but also in the discovery and control of the underlying conditions which bring these crises and emergencies into being. In other words, he must not rest content with the mere techniques of relief, with the simple expedients of first aid, but must be ever seeking to probe behind the immediate manifestations to the slow-

working fundamental conditions. He must see that there is no insulation of any one factor from the rest, of one individual from his group or his environment, of the case or the near group from the larger social unity. He must particularly guard against the assumption that because his particular interest is properly localized to definite situations the conditions which precipitate his problem or the remedial measures which are needed for its solution must be similarly localized.

The fulfillment of these conditions which I have described would bring the social worker much nearer to the social scientist. They are based on the general principle that what you need to know for research into a situation you need to know also for the treatment of its practical problems. No doubt there will be a difference of emphasis on this and that aspect according as our interest is theoretical or practical, according as we are seeking to understand or to control. But since to control you must also understand, the interest of the social worker must to a large extent coincide with that of the social scientist. The natural tendency of the practitioner, as distinct from that of the scientist, is to limit attention to those factors in a situation which seem amenable to control. Yet we must know how things are bound together before we can introduce effective methods of controlling any of them, for in adding a new control factor or in changing any of the present ones we are changing the relation of all the conditions to one another. We cannot add a new element and expect the others to remain as before. We want, for example, to check crime, and we pass an act increasing the penalties of law-breaking.

We want to check drunkenness and we pass a prohibition law. In other words, we deal with the factor most easily amenable to control. But the simple, drastic way is not always the successful way. Increased penalties may not check crime. They may make the criminal more reckless or more desperate. They may affect the attitude of juries. If we are to succeed, whether as legislators or as social workers, we have often to take the longer and the harder road. The fact that one condition seems amenable to control is not enough, unless we realize how that condition is bound up with all the rest. ✓ We cannot cure evils unless we get down to their roots.

The leaders of social work are realizing this truth and in doing so are finding common ground with the social scientists. ✓ This is seen in the strong tendency of social agencies to devote more energy to preparatory researches. I need not detail the manifold developments in this direction, the research activities of private social agencies, of coördinating organizations such as certain Community Chests, of bodies interested in legislation such as the State Charities Aid Association, of groups generally interested in social work such as the Federal Council of Churches, of foundations such as the Russell Sage, the Milbank Memorial, and the Rockefeller, and of the numerous bureaus and departments of social welfare that have become part of Federal, state, and municipal administration. In its last annual report the Charity Organization Society of New York City places research as one of its three major interests. The devotion to research is in fact unprece-

dented. It has grown up suddenly and it is still in many respects immature, too narrowly dedicated to the discovery of facts apart from relationships and causal connections, too apt not to see the wood for the trees, too unimaginatively meticulous. But that is another story, and there is no doubt that research is already having a very important influence on social work, and especially on its leadership. We are far removed from the conditions prevalent even a generation or two ago, when social work lay apart from the camps of science.

Of the various services to sociology which the social worker in this new orientation may render I rate most highly the light which he can throw on questions of social causation. The reason may be that in contemporary sociology I find these fundamental questions too often ignored, and that I cannot see how the social worker can fulfill his function unless he faces them squarely. Unless he can discover how his prescriptions work he gets nowhere. To discover this he must probe the secrets of the relation of heredity and environment; he must learn what conditions are too broad-based to be controlled within the limits of his area and what conditions are too deep-rooted to yield to the means within his power; he must seek to discern symptoms from fundamentals; he must relate personal to institutional factors; he must see how in the intricate complex of conditions every change that he introduces reacts upon a whole situation. Glimpses of these casual connections come to him as he carries on his incessant experimentation. Together they form the insight which the skilled and experienced worker acquires. Often that insight



has remained inarticulate, unexpressed. The new orientation towards social science requires that it be tested with deliberate intent to confirm its validity, and then translated into terms which others can follow.

The question of social causation is so crucial for the social worker that it should determine his whole approach. From this point of view there are four aspects at least presented by every situation. Ranging from the broadest to the most localized they are as follows:

First, there are the basic social and economic factors which cannot be left out of the picture of the situation, because in some way and in some degree they always obtrude into it. If for example there is an economic problem it may be generated or at least accentuated by the sweep of economic forces in respect of which the individual is often powerless. A depression or a strike, inadequate wage rates or unhealthy working conditions create troubles and maladjustments within the family. The competitive stress of our society and the competitive modes of living which are their concomitants bring tensions within the small group. Again, the antipathies of racial, national, or class elements within the community have repercussions on the lives of individuals and of families. If it is harder for the members of one group than of another to obtain jobs or to get promotion or social estimation this is apt to reflect itself in the crises of individual situations. Sometimes, too, political and religious differences complicate the problems of the social worker. It is important that he should recognize these broad-based conditions, since they cannot be remedied within the concrete case. All that the

social worker can do within his own special field is to mitigate or alleviate their effects. The causes lie beyond and must be attacked in the grander arena to which they belong.

Second, there is the background of the particular group represented by the individual case. Every group develops its own attitudes, its own customs, its own ways of doing and of thinking. The suggestions, the appeals, which can be brought to bear upon them in their needs, must take into account their particular mores. Methods which would be effective with one group will merely alienate another. Particularly when dealing with immigrant groups is it necessary to know this furniture of their minds; to know it and to respect it. If it is important to know the standards of living it is also important to know the modes of living. Group standards of living are obvious, group modes of living are somewhat harder to discover, and still more hidden are the attitudes that determine the modes of living. We must get beyond the visible situation to what one social worker has called "the invisible environment of the immigrant."<sup>3</sup> For his present objective the social worker must regard this invisible environment as the predetermined condition to which his work must be adapted. In the immediate situation with which he deals the mores of the group must be accepted, for these mores may be as inflexible, as rock-bound as the earth itself. They change, of course, but they change through slow processes of accommodation which take

<sup>3</sup>Mary Hurlbutt, "The Invisible Environment of the Immigrant," *Family*, October, 1923.

place as imperceptibly as the growth of a tree. The social worker does only mischief if he seeks to interfere with these slow-moving changes.

Third, there is the play of personalities within the specific group, the family or household or institutional group where the problem of maladjustment occurs. Whether the problem centers in a single individual or embraces a group itself, there is nearly always involved, unless we are dealing with homeless men, a series of social contacts. To understand the needs of the situation these contacts must be fathomed. We should not think of a man's relationship to his associates as if they were something apart from the man himself. They are the intimate conditions of his life. It is in these relationships that he finds himself. Unlike the group mores, these personal relationships are very sensitive to immediate changes in the social environment, in external conditions, and in the hazards and conjunctions of life. For every member of any group they have to be continuously restated throughout these incessant changes, and many maladjustments occur because in a time of weakness or mischance the individual has not the strength to maintain this moving equilibrium on which the assurance of one's personality depends.

The problem is revealed nowhere so sharply as in family life. The attitudes of its members to one another must be forever readjusted to the changing conditions within it and without it. Husband and wife must change with the changing days and years. If one changes and the other remains stationary, difference and discord ensue. New needs are not met and old expec-

tations are disappointed. Even more rapid is the readjustment involved in the relation of parents and children as the latter insist on growing up in ways so disturbing to the acquired attitudes of the former. The family then is a moving system of relationships, a delicately and constantly changing balance. And so is every circle to which a human being belongs. Consequently the chances that things will get out of joint are numerous, and often enough the disturbance means an unbalancing of one or more of the personalities involved, sufficiently acute to call for the services of the social worker. Even where the condition precipitating the maladjustment arises outside of the interplay of personalities it is bound to affect their relationships to one another, and sometimes adversely. Perhaps in nothing does the social worker need more skill and insight than in the endeavor to comprehend the frequent disequilibrium of these near social relationships and to bring to bear such influences as will aid in the restoration of an equilibrium. It does not follow that the approach to an equilibrium is always a direct one. Sometimes an environmental change, a suitable gesture, a little training in housekeeping or in cooking, may be the best avenue to the inner situation. The interplay of personalities has also its physical background, and this too cannot be neglected.

Fourth, there are the immediate precipitants of the crisis or acute maladjustment. In a broad scientific reference there is of course no one cause of any occurrence, there is a multitude of factors all of which conspire to bring the occurrence into being. But in a social situation

we can for practical purposes single out one or more factors as precipitants. It is only in so far as this is possible that control is possible. For by precipitants we mean factors normally extraneous to the situation, factors which erupt within it or break into it from without, and therefore factors to which for the purpose of control or of correction, special attention may be devoted. Sometimes the precipitant of trouble comes wholly from without the group situation, as when an economic depression or an industrial accident destroys the livelihood of the family. Sometimes it arises within the immediate situation, as when a quarrel or clash of temperaments creates a crisis or when there is a breakdown of mental or physical health. These factors are relatively isolable, in that we can distinguish the part they play in creating specific troubles, but they are often simply the end-result of a long process. They deserve special attention, but it is only rarely that they can be independently treated. The texture of social life is too closely knit to allow the complete separation of elements within it. Sometimes, it is true, it is necessary for the social worker to perform the equivalent of a surgical operation, taking the maladjusted individual wholly out of his previous social environment, either because he needs treatment which demands a special institutional setting or because the situation is such, as sometimes in the case of neglected children, that the only possible adjustment to it would be injurious. But we should realize that after all these expedients are as drastic as surgical operations, and should be undertaken with at least as great a sense of necessity, for they detach the individual from the living context of his society.

The four aspects I have mentioned, the general social background, the particular social background, the play of personalities, and the precipitants of crisis, merge in the picture presented by any social situation. Obviously they admit of endlessly varying complications. As one reads social case records one has almost a sense of chaos, so varied is the conjunction of aspects. And one feels how inadequate any existing techniques—and for that matter any set of mere techniques—must be in dealing with them. How can techniques suffice when we have not defined the situations to which they must be applied? One feels how much needs to be done in order to distinguish type-situations in the welter of incidents, and how far on this road the social worker has still to travel. A vast work of clarification and of classification is necessary to prepare the way. One is impressed with the need of continuous study of social situations before there can be any assurance regarding methods of adjustment. No doubt many social workers gain an insight which gives them a kind of unconscious skill in dealing with personality adjustments, but in no developed art do we depend on native ability and experience alone. The field of appropriate knowledge must be surveyed and cultivated. I have sought in the previous lectures to show how sociology can aid, but here I have come to the region where sociology has still very little to offer. An art can draw from the sciences but there is a sense in which it must build up a science of its own. As social work does so, particularly in this sphere of the adjustments and maladjustments of personalities within the processes of the near group, it

will at the same time make its most important contribution to sociology.

Let me add in conclusion that in these lectures I have been dealing rather with the contribution of sociology than with that of sociologists to social work. I have sought to emphasize not individual contributions but the general aid which this growing, but still very adolescent, science can render. It is true that sociology as well as social work is still groping towards its objectives. It is only beginning to realize how vast and difficult is the task which it essays. But it has at least the persistence and the vitality of youth, if also the tendency to go astray. If it follows wrong trails it discovers its error at length, and starts anew. If indeed it is truth we seek then we cannot help discovering in time our errors in the search, for only truth is throughout consistent with itself. And these loyal tentatives have brought already some rewards. The darkness that hides from us the meaning of the things most near to us, the social life in which we move and have our being, has here and there been shot through with light. Cautiously but courageously, as should all seekers after truth, the social scientist carries forward his tiny lamp of understanding. Whatever illumination he can gain has significance also for the social worker. Whatever light the latter can throw on the darker regions of social maladjustment is a reciprocal gain for the sociologist. Though the one seeks first to discover the order within society and the other to adjust that order to human needs, alike through the discovery of truth, of the same truth, they must advance towards their respective goals.





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## INDEX





## INDEX

- Adjustment, social, 51 ff., 59, 95. *See* Maladjustment
- Art, nature of, 2 ff., and emotion, 5, and science, 14 ff.
- Bercovici, K., 55
- Brunner, E. de S., 15, 55
- Burks, Barbara S., 28
- Causation, social, 83, 89 ff., 91 ff.
- Charity, 16, 62
- Charity Organization Society, 91
- Civilization and social work, 62 ff.
- Classification of social work problems, 84, 86, 98
- Community*, 25, 72
- Competition, working of, 65
- Cooley, C. H., 83
- Coyle, Grace, 83
- Darwinism, 23 ff.
- Delinquency, 57
- Diagnosis, social, 15, 44
- "Dole," the, 68
- Economic system, new scheme of, 65; hazards of, 70
- Edwards family, 31
- Eliot, T. D., 1
- Environment, and heredity, 27 ff.; adaptation to, 58-59
- Experiment, social, 83
- Evolution, social, 60 ff.
- "Facts," use and abuse of, 3-4
- Family, continuity of, 32; and individual, 60 ff.; and problem children, 88; readjustments within, 95
- Family case work, 13
- Family disorganization, 57
- Federal Council of Churches, 91
- Gang, the, 57
- Galpin, C. J., 15
- Group process, 83, 95
- Hamilton, Gordon, 86
- Healy, W., 57
- Heredity and environment, 27 ff.
- Hoover, President, 66
- Hurlbutt, Mary, 94
- Hurlin, R. H., 41*n*.
- Immigrant groups, 55
- Individual and family, 60 ff.
- Individualism, 69
- Individualization, 53, 75
- Industrial hazard, 61
- Inquiry, The, 56*n*.
- Institutions, impersonal quality of, 61 ff., 74 ff.
- Juke family, 31 ff.
- Keller, A. G., 50
- Klein, Philip, 44
- Kolb, J. H., 15
- Lasker, Bruno, 83

- Lee, Porter R., 49  
 Lehmann, H. C., 33*n*.  
 Lindeman, E. C., 56, 83  
 Maladjustment, 51 ff., 57 ff., 95 ff.  
 Mayers, Helen, 56  
 Medicine, analogy with social work, 11, 41, 44 ff., 97  
 Miller, H. A., 55  
 Minimum standards, 48, 71, 79  
 Milbank Memorial Foundation, 91  
 Mowrer, E. R., 57  
 Neighborliness, 62  
 Norms, social, 44, 48 ff.  
 Park, R. E., 55  
 Pearson, Karl, 24  
 Phelps, Harold A., 85  
 Poor relief, 73  
 Poverty, 12, and social work, 16 ff., 46 ff., 87  
 Private and public agencies, 64, 69  
 Public, the, and social work, 19  
 Red Cross, The, 66-67  
 Research, social, 91-92  
 Richmond, Mary, 44, 45, 86, 89  
 Rockefeller Foundation, 91  
 Russell Sage Foundation, 18, 91  
 Salaries, of social workers, 18  
 Selection, natural, 25-26  
 Self-maintenance, 49  
 Science, and art, 2 ff., 14 ff.  
 Shaw, Bernard, 37  
 Shaw, C. R., 57  
 Sheffield, Ada, E., 51, 86  
 Sheffield, Arthur D., 83  
 Social causation, 83, 89 ff., 91 ff.  
 Social diagnosis, 15, 44  
 Social legislation, 70 ff., 79  
 Social philosophy and social worker, 8, 63, 80  
 Social process, 82, 87  
 Social situation, types of, 82  
 Social work, as art, 2 ff.; and poverty, 16, 46, 87; as profession, 20; task of, 39, 76, 89; definition of, 48 ff.; as evolutionary product, 60 ff.; and specialization, 62 ff.; 76 ff.; scale of, 64  
 Sociology, 14, 25, 50, 55, 81, 82  
 State, the, and social work, 64 ff.  
 State Charities Aid Association, 91  
 Sumner, W. G., 50  
 Thomas, W. I., 55  
 Thrasher, F. M., 57  
 Unemployment, 5, 25, 62  
 Walker, Sydnor H., 64  
 Weill, Blanche C., 88  
 Whitman, Walt, 53  
 Witty, P. A., 33*n*.  
*Who's Who*, 29  
 Woods, F. A., 30  
 Zimmerman, C. C., 15  
 Znaniecki, F., 55

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