

The Social Scientist, along with the other eggheads, has been invited out of his classroom, the library, the professional meeting, the government cafeteria, and the other places he customarily flees far from the madding crowd, to apply his special art to issues in the public domain. It is a challenge to respond, to bid for the personal satisfaction that goes with knowing something you do can affect public policy and it offers an opportunity to participate in major decisions. But it does not come without its price.

It will strain one's humility; it will strip away the defenses our scholarly colleagues normally allow us—the technical terms unintelligible to the uninitiated; the refuge and subterfuge of qualifying footnotes; the escape hatches of the plea for more and bigger samples; and that ultimate safety valve, the interim report. After all, if further research on the subject is not going on, it should be! To be sure one can cling to these demurrers but time and Congress will not wait and the unresolved questions will get bigger and harder or even different. Worst of all we may amass more data only to find as have others before us that many a beautiful theory will be inhibited by the facts.

So what else is new? And anyway what does all that have to do with the subject of the morning? Well, there is always the unwritten rule guaranteeing a speaker the right to a bit of high-flown rhetoric. But there is a less tenuous connection. I contend first that research should be purposive; that the techniques selected must be suited to these ends; and above all that we must deliberately and knowingly distinguish between the fact and the fancy—the data used and the arbitrary interpretations assigned to them. If you recall I did say we were going to apply our art to public issues. Now let us begin.

My assigned topic is poverty. Unlike some other statistics, those relating to poverty are not primary but secondary. That is, they are derived from statistics obtained for other reasons. No one yet has proposed determining who is poor by the simple expedient of going out and asking the direct question, though it might well turn out to be a chastening exercise. Instead we derive our counts by applying analytical techniques, seasoned in liberal measure with statistical inference, and diluted with a healthy helping of divination. To quote the Commissioner of Labor Statistics, Dr. Ross, "for some questions prayer is more relevant than calculation." Perhaps more than any other socio-economic indicator poverty, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder. But is this really a bad thing.

Over the years economists and statisticians, particularly those in government employ, have given much thought to the appropriate role of research. Is it and should it be basic or applied, pure or so to speak, impure. Does the social scientist overstep his mark when he makes judgments; should he even if requested make recommendations; or does he serve best when he merely arrays the facts? (The word is "array" rather than "present" because not even for the sake of discussion do I concede data really can be untainted by the values of the investigator.)

Today, to be sure, in an era of problem-solving and model-building, with every investigator entitled to his own computer, such soul-searching could seem a little passe. But whatever the possibilities for socio-economic research in general, with poverty numbers one can only be more subjective or less subjective; one cannot be nonsubjective. Ultimately in making his decisions the analyst will, in choosing standards, have to resort to the unalterable dictum my father used when I questioned his pronouncements: "Why? Because I say so, that's why!"

Like any other level-of-living index poverty can exist only in a frame of reference. It must be localized in place and in time. Indeed, beyond the physiologic exigencies of food, water, and warmth—and here in the U.S. we are well beyond them—it can have little meaning without contrast, without someone to notice. To be poor implies to be without those things or those opportunities considered essential in a given society, or more bluntly to be deprived of those goods and services and pleasures which others around you take for granted as a right. Incidentally, in today's one-world those others may be citizens of other countries as well as one's own. These days when it is in fashion to talk about the invisible poor, let us remember that if they be invisible to us, we and what we enjoy are very visible to them.

Does this mean then that inequality per se is equated with poverty? Obviously not. The Lorenz curve with its isometric norm is a little outmoded. In a non-egalitarian money economy built on a work ethic, with wages set not by need but by ability and application, there will always be some who have less than others. This in itself need not disturb us. It is when having less turns into having far too little and when, moreover, the burden of such privation con-