

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION GROUPS

among workers. There was need for honest introspection. While we talked of common purposes we still had problems of divisiveness. It was constantly re-emphasized that practitioners at all levels had to recognize that their professional interests reached beyond agency walls and that there was a need to develop a better understanding of Jewish values on all levels of practice. Such understanding could not spring from occasional casual excursions into theory, but from the continuing sharing of experience and ideas by practitioners from all disciplines and a gradual appreciation of the objectives of the variety of services in the total pattern of our community.

How was this to be achieved? Several of the round tables pointed to the central community organization. The federation or welfare fund or the community council is the instrument of the community which should assume in increasing measure the responsibility for nurturing such a climate of mutual understanding. The central organization should seek out the areas of common interest and should provide the common meeting grounds for agency people. Some went beyond this in expressing their conviction about the responsibility of the central agency for in-service training of workers in this whole field of Jewish values, and in other problems confronting our communities in the field of Jewish communal services.

Several communities reported interesting experiences in inter-agency relationships under the aegis of the central organization, such as, annual professional institutes, periodic meetings of agency executives, staff institutes. But all were in agreement that these represented only the beginning, and that well developed programs of inter-agency relationships should be high on the agenda of central organizations. With an effective beginning made in this field among

professionals, the idea and the pattern could be extended to include lay leadership.

In Summary

In summary, then, these were considered to be essential aspects of our common purposes as practitioners in Jewish communal service.

1. Our recognition of our dual role in commitment
 - (a) to our own agencies' objectives and services;
 - (b) to the objectives and services of the total Jewish community.
2. Our commitment to Jewish group survival.
3. Our recognition of the inter-relationship not only among the services in the same field, but among all services provided by Jewish community.
4. Our concern with the welfare standards of the total community and our responsibility
 - (a) to be creative pathfinders rather than providers of residual services;
 - (b) to concern ourselves with the advancement of standards of services both in the public as well as voluntary fields.
5. Our commitment as professionals to
 - (a) further and seek out lines of communication among ourselves;
 - (b) give impetus to bringing lay leadership together for studying our common purposes.

In recognizing these common purposes, we underscored the interrelationship of our services, as well as our own interdependence. As professionals, we accepted the responsibility for considering the problems and priorities of the total community without in the least diminishing our commitments to work for the highest standards in our particular field.

We recognized that we were still at the beginning and that the forward movement that we hoped to achieve in working out the implications of our common purposes depended upon the investment in time and study that we were ready to make in the months and years ahead.

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE *

by CHARLES MILLER

*Federation of Jewish Agencies
Philadelphia, Pa.*

WHILE it is always timely to discuss so basic a problem as the philosophy of Jewish communal service, we live in a period when the question becomes an increasingly immediate one. Events are profoundly affecting the nature and scope of Jewish services. A number of recent conference papers have cogently discussed these developments and their implications. They have pointed to the impact of public funds, the growth of suburbia, the pressure in some areas toward non-sectarian services, and the decline in certain fields of service.

An interesting aspect of these discussions is the absence of a philosophy or rationale which attempts to deal with the issues from the point of view of the Jewish communal worker. We do not have a generally agreed upon point of view which relates itself to forces affecting our agencies and services. For the most part we are concerned with technical problems, and tend to be impatient with purely philosophical considerations which may seem somewhat removed from the job at hand.

Perhaps another reason for our lack of relatedness to the subject is the nature of the material, as can be seen by a

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Pittsburgh, Pa., May 29, 1959.

reading of conference papers on philosophy and rationale presented during the last 20 years. The content is in a board, undefined area, with no agreed upon starting point or frame of reference. The subject provides ample room for the expression of a personal philosophy often unrelated to current professional experience. What does emerge is the conclusion that no one has yet suggested a philosophy which is rooted in professional practice and in the sociological and psychological realities of the American Jewish scene.

These considerations do not relieve us as a professional group of a very real responsibility to develop a viewpoint in relation to changes and developments which ultimately spell life or death for our agencies and services. Those of us who are particularly concerned with community organization and social planning know that this is no academic matter. Not a day passes that does not involve us in basic questions involving philosophy and rationale. What should be our position in relation to Community Chest and other non-sectarian developments? How do you help the Jewish community decide priorities of service? Should a child treatment center be Jewish or non-sectarian? Is responsibility for the long-term patient a sectarian or a public responsibility? My concern

with rationale therefore stems from the realities of professional practice.

I must make it clear at the outset that this paper does not present definitive conclusions on the problem of rationale. Its purpose is to develop some further thinking, in the hope that continuing discussions will ultimately enable us to arrive at a philosophy which makes sense for us as a sectarian professional group.

In order to establish a frame of reference, I think it will be helpful to summarize the viewpoints on philosophy which have been articulated to date. My own analysis leads to the conclusion that these viewpoints can be grouped under two major approaches, which for want of other available designations, I will refer to as the "Positivist" and the "Pragmatic."

The Positivist Viewpoint

The "positivist" in Jewish life may be a social worker, a Jewish teacher, a rabbi, or any Jewish person interested in Jewish communal activity. When he discusses the philosophy and rationale of Jewish communal service, he begins with a clear and relatively uncomplicated set of feelings and attitudes. He feels strongly about the survival of Jewish life, particularly in its cultural and religious aspects. He has deeply rooted attachments, emotionally and intellectually, to a totality of Jewishness which is expressed in a history, a religion and a culture; in institutions, organizations and values. He believes in and works for the survival, enrichment and growth of this totality as an end in itself. He judges the value and contribution of a particular Jewish activity in relation to its contribution to this objective.

One expression of this point of view was stated by Dr. Saul Hofstein in 1948.¹

¹ Saul Hofstein, "The Jewish Heritage and the Social Agency," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, 1948, pp. 259-267.

He suggested that the Jewish social agency must define what its role should be in the development of Jewish communal life, and must incorporate its Jewish nature and purpose into its agency policy and functioning.

The positivist view was more fully expressed by Dr. Judah Shapiro to the 1956 Conference.² The viewpoint is based upon the following propositions:

- (1) The traditional concept of Jewish community was the greatest single distinguishing characteristic of Judaism. It was democratically structured, and involved a commitment to a concept of "total community," including secular, religious, non-religious, conformist and non-conformist elements. A Jew validly remained a Jew as long as he identified with this totality, regardless of which section of the totality he accepted for his particular way of life.
- (2) Jewish social work does not adhere to this traditional concept. It strives to assist the individual in relation to his personal problems, without commitments to the institution and the community. Jewish social work therefore does not create or foster community. Jewish social services can be called that "only when they serve the Jewish client in the context of his Jewishness and on behalf of a Jewish community." It is therefore a basic question "Whether or not Jewish funds should be applied to existing services that no longer serve a clientele within a Jewish context."

Dr. Shapiro believes that the Jewish community concept of the past is still relevant to the American Jewish community of today. What we need is a return to the past by undertaking a broad commitment to the totality of Jewish community, and a democratic reorganization which insures the inclusion of all elements in Jewish life.

Before indicating why I believe this viewpoint cannot serve as an adequate

² Judah J. Shapiro, "The Jewish Community and The Synagogue in Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, 1956, pp. 25-35.

rationale for Jewish communal service, I should like to express my complete identification with the basic objective of Jewish survival and development. For the Jewish communal worker this is axiomatic. But agreement on this objective does not necessarily imply a commitment to any specific ideology or organizational form. More important, it is difficult to see how we can establish the essential prerequisite for the traditional community and its "unique context." This prerequisite is an attitude and emotional involvement which arose in an entirely different historical environment. The American scene involved different forces, which in turn created American Jewish values and patterns of organization which were valid for American Jewish life. What, then, is the validity for insisting upon values and organizational forms which do not arise naturally from Jewish life as it has developed in this country?

This demonstrates the essential limitation of the positivist viewpoint. It sees the facts and the problems but does not realistically face and accept them. It does not deal with the American scene as it is and has developed, but insists on evaluating it in relation to criteria which are no longer relevant. It constantly injects goals which are meaningful to a few, but are not accepted by the many.

It is the purpose of this discussion to indicate that there may be another approach to the question of rationale for Jewish communal service, which is positive in relation to Jewish life, but which defines positivism somewhat differently; which is rooted in experience and reality; which takes into consideration the unique character of American Jewish communal life; which assumes that the American Jewish community is developing its own concept of community and way of life as an inevitable sociological reality; and that this is the only logical and realistic framework within which we can develop

an honest and meaningful philosophy of Jewish communal service. A necessary corollary of these assumptions is that any attempt to develop a philosophy which is based on objectives which do not stem from the living experience of the American Jewish people is doomed to frustration and failure.

The Pragmatic Viewpoint

The second viewpoint to which I refer might be described as the "pragmatic viewpoint." Although widely held, it is rarely expressed as a set of clear objectives and principles. It accepts the fact that there are historical reasons for the present nature of the American Jewish community and its community agencies. It agrees that there have been and are religious, cultural and other factors which have created our present patterns of organization and service. After expressing this agreement with the positivist, the viewpoint adds a number of elements which characterize the profession of American social work. It accepts the right of individuals and groups to determine their individual and group destinies. It defines the role of the professional as an enabling one, as rendering skilled service within a framework of defined agency function. It views individuals, groups and communities as dynamic entities, living in interpersonal and social interaction through which they will develop the kind of personal, social and community life which is right for them.

This viewpoint tends to distrust any philosophy which proposes a set of guiding principles which does not arise naturally from the policy-making individuals and groups, and which may not be relevant and meaningful for them. It disagrees with the practitioner who accepts the right of individuals to determine their own destinies, but who applies different principles when he talks about

the community as a whole; the practitioner for whom the community takes on the character of an entity without people in it, so that he becomes free to propose objectives and philosophies regardless of the wishes and attitudes of the people concerned.

The pragmatist may sometimes deny that his own values become involved in community decisions and policies. More often he honestly grants that this does happen but adds that this is part of his responsibility for professional leadership. He does not think of his contributions as having the effect of injecting a philosophy, but rather as opinions which help the processes of community organization and planning. He considers himself a hard-headed realist, with little time for the luxury of purely theoretical discussion.

It is for these reasons that the pragmatist, and he is in the great majority among Jewish community organization practitioners, rarely expresses an organized approach to the problem of rationale. He is reluctant to suggest solutions to basic philosophical problems. He tends to accept what happens as an expression of forces over which he has little or no control. He is acutely aware of what is happening, and often raises pertinent questions of philosophy and principle, but rarely feels he has the final answers. An unusually clear presentation of this viewpoint is found in a brilliant paper by Isidore Sobeloff³ presented at the 1956 Conference. Among the questions raised by Mr. Sobeloff are such basic ones as: "Shall we fight for continued support of sectarian agencies in the metropolitan suburbs while community chests are proposing parallel services under general auspices?" This is part of the more general point made

³ Isidore Sobeloff, "The Changing Jewish Community—An Appraisal, *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, 1956, pp. 11-21.

by Mr. Sobeloff that there is an increasing challenge to the philosophical basis of sectarian services. While the challenge is clearly set forth, no discussion is offered of the nature of the philosophical basis of Jewish social work which is being challenged, nor are any suggestions made as to whether or how the challenge might be met. I do not say this in criticism, since it was not the purpose of Mr. Sobeloff's paper to offer answers to philosophical questions. I simply wish to stress that the pragmatic approach in Jewish communal work does not usually develop sorely needed answers to basic philosophical questions.

At the same time, I think it is important to point out a certain ingenuous feature of the pragmatic approach. As a practitioner in Jewish community organization who is largely identified with the pragmatic viewpoint, I do not believe we can deny the existence and influence of our own attitudes and values. While it is true that we generally avoid overt expressions of philosophy as such, we nevertheless consistently express attitudes and opinions which do stem from a philosophy, whether we are consciously aware of this or not. Nor is the matter simplified by the assertion that we do not take positions on certain key questions. In one way or another, overtly or subtly, we do take positions. The failure to take a position may stem not only from sound practice, but also from a philosophy which has in fact taken a position, and which expresses itself in acts of omission as well as commission.

In any case, it is unreal to assume that the community organization professional does not significantly influence the thinking, policies, and decisions of the community. To say that others determine policy does not deny his important share of responsibility in policy formulation.

If this is true, we cannot escape responsibility for our professional actions. If we do in fact influence basic com-

munity decisions, which in the last analysis depend upon philosophical assumptions regarding the role and responsibility of the organized Jewish community, then we have an obligation to help the community clarify what these assumptions are or should be. We can do this constructively only if we, as a professional group, are ready to discuss and ultimately agree upon a rationale which integrates our sectarian and professional objectives.

An Intergrated Viewpoint

In offering some ideas for developing a rationale for Jewish communal service, I am suggesting nothing which is particularly new or original. The ideas have been expressed by others from time to time, usually in relation to special fields or problems. To some extent, what is being suggested is an attempted integration of the positivist and pragmatic viewpoints.

It is possible to consider a third viewpoint based on the following elements:

(1) *The Institutional Character of the American Jewish Community*

A great deal has been written and said about the "institutional" character of American Jewish life. Many Jews have tended to express their identification with Jewish life through organizations, agencies, and campaigns rather than through the deeper religious and cultural identification of former eras and other geographic areas.

It is interesting to note that when this phenomenon has been discussed, usually by the positivist, it has been viewed with alarm. For the most part, it has been evaluated not in terms of its positive achievements, but in terms of its failure to maintain certain traditional aspects of Jewish life.

It is a fair assumption that the institutional character of American Jewish

community life is precisely what has made possible the continuing identification of American Jews with the concept of community; that our organized communities as they developed were the American expression of the historic Jewish concept of community; that they have made possible an amazing degree of unity and action which would not otherwise have been possible; that if they are not democratically organized in a political sense, they are often broadly representative in relation to ideological and organizational groupings; that they have made possible the significant development of Jewish education and many Jewish cultural endeavors; that they have saved the remnants of our people and helped make possible the creation of the State of Israel; and that they are a fundamental expression of Jewish participation in American civic life.

If one thinks about what would have happened to Jewish life and identification in this country if our community institutions had not provided the degree of identification they did, one begins to appreciate their true significance. To the assimilationist, of course, there is no problem at all. But those interested in the survival of Jewish life must inevitably feel a sense of profound thankfulness.

One may be distressed because a particular feature of Jewish life has not been maintained, but this can only be seen as an understandable expression of personal regret. It cannot serve as an indictment of a sociological phenomenon which takes place in spite of the wishes and preferences of individuals and groups.

(2) *Social Service as a Community Dynamic*

If we ask ourselves the question, "What single factor has created a basis and program for the American Jewish

community?" the answer is community service, service which has been rendered through our Federations, Welfare Funds, Community Councils, and their agencies.

Community service is the one area which has been able to unite the widest segment of the Jewish community, and this is true whether the service was to be rendered locally or overseas. It has been a dynamic which transcended ideology, religious preference and organizational affiliation. While many elements in Jewish life offered an opportunity for identification, only community service offered the opportunity for an identification with total community. It is our community agencies and campaigns which created common interests and objectives and which enabled us to work together as Jews, with Jews, and for Jews.

The concept and objective of survival has meaning only if we are concerned about Jews as people. To be concerned about Jewish needs in broad terms without including the needs of Jewish people is to separate ourselves from the living experience of our people, and is to make the concept of community meaningless and sterile. In 1953 this was ably expressed in a statement prepared by Harold Silver and Callman Rawley, entitled "Jewish Family Services as a Communal Expression of Jewish Needs." The following is a quotation from this statement:

"It is what the agency as a Jewish agency and the worker as a Jewish worker together stand for to the client—a symbol of Jewish values; of belonging to the Jewish community; of Jewish identity; of whatever may be specific or may be thought by the client to be specific to Jewish family life; of wholehearted understanding and identification with Jewish problems, and of deep interest in helping clients who need this help to find a satisfactory place for themselves in the world of Jewish values and institutions—all this is built into the agency atmosphere and has the effect, in differing degree of course for different clients, and for different agen-

cies, of holding the client to Jewish values, Jewish identity, and the Jewish community, and of stabilizing him within this orbit. In this sense we are one of the conserving forces for Jewish survival."

If we understand and accept this view, we will be less defensive about the presence or absence in our agencies of specific Jewish content. Such content may or may not be relevant to the best professional practice. If it is, it should be included, and an agency is justifiably subject to criticism if it does not then include it. But the important point is that the presence of specific content is secondary to the institutional character of the agency which justifies its existence.

(3) *The Jewish Agency as an Expression of Civic Responsibility*

There is a tendency in some Jewish quarters, particularly since the overwhelming impact of the great campaigns for overseas purposes, to overlook or minimize one of the most characteristic elements in American Jewish life; namely, the way in which our Federations and agencies have been a major expression of Jewish acceptance of American civic responsibility. Their services have provided one of the most effective mechanisms in the achievement of Jewish integration into the American milieu. They have been a major channel for cooperation with the non-Jewish community and for the development of mutual understanding and respect through common participation. They have helped to develop a sense of belonging and contributing to the general welfare which no other vehicle could possibly have achieved.

Sometimes the Jewish stake in the American civic scene is dismissed with casual or even contemptuous references to "public relations." I have heard responsible leaders, both lay and professional, make amused references to "the promises to Peter Stuyvesant." These

attitudes indicate a regrettable misconception about the profound significance of an aspect of American life which the Jewish community has incorporated and made its own. It is in this country that the concept and practice of voluntary services has reached its highest peak, and has become an intrinsic feature of American culture. It is this drive to give service in the American sense which merged with historic Jewish traditions and institutions of service to create the agencies and communities we have today.

(4) *Some Implications*

From the point of view of these considerations, the implications for a valid rationale for Jewish social work become clearer. Our communities and agencies, organized around the basic purpose of services, have provided a significant vehicle for Jewish identification and community action. Jewish service agencies are community institutions which have validity because they are symbols and instruments of community identity, purpose and survival. They are a major expression of the American Jewish way of community life.

To avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, it must be emphasized that I have in no way suggested any limitation on the scope of community responsibility for any area of activity or service. It is taken for granted that Jewish communities will support and develop such cultural, religious and educational endeavors as they deem valid and necessary. There are many who feel that areas other than social service are more vital to Jewish identification and survival. What is dangerous to survival is any philosophy of mutual exclusiveness which is ready to minimize or eliminate any essential elements in the life of the American Jewish community.

If we honestly believe in the survival of Jewish life in this country, and if we agree that our communities and agencies

are essential to survival, then we have a responsibility to develop, accept, and defend a philosophy which insures this objective. With such a philosophy as part of our professional equipment, we are in a better position to defend unequivocally the validity of Jewish community services.

Such a positive approach cannot be taken to imply a separatism or a lessening of the constructive integration with the general social work milieu which has characterized American Jewish social work. With other sectarian and minority groups, we have readily accepted such developments as the primary responsibility of the public agency for financial assistance, for tuberculosis care, and for hospital care of the mentally ill. In many areas we have assumed the validity of non-sectarian services. Each Jewish community has always had, and will continue to have, the problem of deciding what services should or should not be supported by it. It is quite possible that the expansion of public services and other major influences will continue to effect our services in many ways. It may be that developments may stimulate a greater community interest in and support of services with a larger Jewish cultural component.

In other words, the existence of a general philosophy does not relieve us of any of the day-to-day problems and social planning responsibilities. It cannot necessarily be a defense for a specific agency or service which may have outlived its usefulness. Nor does it determine which particular field, agency, or service has greater or lesser validity. These decisions can only be made by the policy-making groups in each community and agency, in relation to their own views, preferences, and financial ability.

At the same time, a positive philosophy does provide guides for action in relation to basic policy problems. An example of such a problem is the extension of Jewish

services into suburban areas in the face of pressure from Chests for non-sectarian services in these areas. Without meaning to oversimplify the problem in any particular community, to me the answer, at least in principle, is quite clear. Within our framework of cultural pluralism, the Jewish community has the right and obligation to serve its members. We are interested in creating services needed by our people, services which also function as symbols of community identity. This principle is not changed by occasional shifts in population, nor is it crucially affected by the availability of non-sectarian services. If a particular Community Chest or non-sectarian agency questions this right, and if our policy-making groups seek help from us on this problem, it is our responsibility to interpret our viewpoint. But how can we interpret a viewpoint unless we have one?

Conclusion

It was not the purpose of this paper to present a definitive philosophy. It was

rather to elaborate those elements which are real and meaningful in American Jewish communal life and which must be taken into consideration in developing a rationale for Jewish communal service.

I am aware that a number of these elements have been so obvious that they have been taken for granted. Perhaps it is their very obviousness which has made it difficult for us to fully appreciate their tremendous importance. While we have understood and accepted them, it has not occurred to us to present them in detailed and organized form as a basis for a rounded philosophy.

The integration of professional and sectarian aspects of Jewish communal service is no simple task, nor does any one individual have the final answers. But as with all other problems which we have as Jewish communal workers, we have a responsibility continually to clarify, evaluate, and crystallize our basic assumptions and objectives, in the hope that we may ultimately arrive at a consensus which represents our thinking as a professional group.

COMMENT

by HAROLD SILVER

*Jewish Family and Children's Service,
Detroit, Mich.*

FOR clarity of analysis and cogency of argument, Charles Miller's paper ranks with the best ever presented on this subject. Let me urge you to read it carefully, for as I have found, its impress on you grows stronger as you read and reread it.

As I review in my memory the discussions over the past 30 years on the subject of what we variously called Jewish content, rationale, or philosophy of Jewish social work, I can distinguish three periods characterized by differing emphases. In the first period there was a straight-out, pointed debate between those who had an intellectual and emotional commitment to Jewish survival and those who were indifferent, antagonistic, or uncomfortable about it. The emphasis in this period was not on the realities and the problems of Jewish social work in America, but on the broad question of survival vs. assimilation which has figured in Jewish history and public debate since the French Revolution. The applications to social work were deductive and didactic. Frequently, the assimilationist position took the form of questions, as: "Show me, I'm from Missouri," or "What's Jewish

about medical care, or casework?" but these questions usually stemmed from a set of attitudes, conscious and unconscious, which denied the validity of Jewish values, or from sheer ignorance about their very existence.

I doubt if the discussions during this period succeeded in changing the ideas of a single person. They barely could have because, as I said, they were not based on current problems but were manifestations of this same division in the entire Jewish community or of the individual background and emotional sets of the debaters. If, then, our judgment on the outcome is that by and large the survivalists won out, it is because events of earth shaking importance have completely invalidated assimilation as an idea or a movement (though not as a force) in Jewish life.

The second period is the one which Mr. Miller so ably describes in his paper. The positivists are the direct inheritors of the survivalists of the early era. Judah Shapiro and Samuel C. Kohs, among others, are the exponents of this point of view. The pragmatists, on the other hand, represent a significant departure from the assimilationist position. They do not deny, as the assimilationists did, the presence and continuing validity of Jewish religious and cultural factors and are prepared to allow them

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Pittsburgh, Pa., June 1, 1959.