

The technical man or the economist fails because he overlooks *cards* and *values*.

THE TECHNICAL MAN AND THE POLICY MAKER

Technical competence in government, as elsewhere, is naturally desirable. But is it desirable that it be the chief end of government?

The technical man isolates one particular field or activity, in order to concentrate upon the procedure within it. In order for his work to proceed, he must assume the worth of the end to which his work is addressed; in order to get on to his own question, "How?," he must assume that the end he is serving has an assured place in a hierarchy of values that he does not himself examine. As a cobbler cannot continually be asking himself whether shoes as such are a good, so an economist cannot continually ask himself whether "productivity" or "satisfaction" or "economic growth" is a good; he must take that for granted and get on with his job.

Where the end is simple and noncontroversial, such a

technical approach raises no problems. But in social policy the ends to be served admit of no such description; it is of the essence of politics that their meanings shift, that values conflict, and that men differ about them. The ends of politics, moreover, are not neatly separable from the "means" the technical man thinks he deals with exclusively; usually he bootlegs in some assumptions about ends in his work on the means. One might argue that political leadership, which must interpret the situation and fit together these several and conflicting ends, is pre-eminently the activity that cannot properly be reduced to sheer technique.

But the technical man will tend to regard all "generalities," good ones and bad ones, as airy, empty, and misleading; he will tend to think that the "declaration" of the "objective" is "easy," while only the attainment is really

difficult, requiring "hard thought." He characteristically will want to deal with problems only case by case, to treat each case "on its own merits," without much regard for — indeed with some resistance to — a general concept. Most of all, the technician will dismiss consideration of ends, principles, and purposes. These are already agreed upon, or are impossible to deal with, or are somebody else's job, or anyway something not to talk about; let's talk instead, he will say, about "ways and means," about how to do it, about "sophisticated solutions."

Policy on taxes and spending and interest rates involves, along with much economic fact, a whole nest of inexact judgments — really, ethical judgments — about

values and interests. Though these judgments may be complicated and require advanced economic knowledge and do not sort out neatly under existing political labels, still they are not merely "technical"; they are not just "administrative" or "executive." If we could just get enough moral juice back into the word, we could say that they are, exactly, "political." "Politics," or "policy," would appear to be the point at which technical considerations (how does the thing work) and ethical considerations (what is good) meet, and neither part of the mix should be left unexamined.

The political leader's job is to articulate an interpretation of these larger than technical choices. — *William D. Miller* from *The Reporter*.