

Spring 1934

Depression Stew, The

Louis A. Schwartz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Louis A. Schwartz, *Depression Stew, The*, 24 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 1066 (1933-1934)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

“THE DEPRESSION STEW”¹

LOUIS A. SCHWARTZ²

I have deliberately chosen as title for this somewhat “dietetic” presentation—“the depression stew”. It not only symbolizes and gives literal expression to the most zealous of the current treatment aspects, largely gustatory of the present crisis, but it figuratively carries the connotation of our present mental quandary regarding a suitable program toward the alleviation of present conditions. Indeed, when the analogy is carried further the convivial elements likewise suggested in the title point the way to at least one palliative remedy presumably followed by many. Of the Freudian significance of this play on words, we dare not venture an opinion. However, to social workers, any gesture toward even the questionable humor conveyed in these introductory remarks, is tenable and has some mental hygiene validity, when one is forced to introduce this subject. It will be our task to see that the cauldron is kept boiling, the reader’s to taste, so that an epicurean, though perhaps bilious feast may be enjoyed by all. If this analogy smacks too much of the oral erotic, at least the sadistic component may imply greater significance. Much of the material will be “hashed up” for the reader but will not be predigested. We hope he will ruminate well.

A leader of a symposium enjoys a certain immunity by the very nature of the problem. He is permitted a sort of poetic license. Not having certain information as yet regarding the medical, economic, and social phases, the leader can enjoy the privilege of starting the pot boiling, waiting for the last session for the crystallization of the ideas of the previous meeting.

Since the cause of present depression seems to lie in the economic sphere, the correction of this evil must necessarily be in the economic system. Since the condition is universal and affects everyone, the remedy must likewise be a universal goal appealing to all. For me to suggest a “cure-all” for these economic evils would be highly presumptuous to say the least. The number of causes suggested indicate the absence of one single factor and indicate a multiplicity

¹Address presented to Detroit Chapter of American Association of Social Workers, February 17, 1932.

²Director of Clinic for Juvenile Research, Unit of Institute of Human Relations, Yale University; Lecturer in Mental Hygiene and Child Guidance, University of Michigan.

of etiological conditions. Such causative factors for the depression, as the over-extension of the use of credit, going from the administration of the federal government down through the extensive state programs, financed by long term deferred payments, then going down through the extravagance of local governments, finally reaching the ordinary individual with his instalment plan of purchasing, have been suggested. Poor government planning resulting in the piling up of debts financed by long term bonds has undoubtedly played an important part. The use of a high percentage of federal income for the payment of wars, both past and present, has been mentioned. Another cause which has been advocated is the high protective tariff, resulting in the retaliation by the foreign nations in reducing commerce with the United States. National and personal greed have played leading roles. The placing of a high tariff on commodities impossible to reproduce in equal calibre and perfection, and representative of the cultural development expressed in the handicraft of nations through centuries of effort, has been unfortunate. Such importations as wood carvings, watch making, laces, silks, etc., have been reduced resulting in a wave of nationalism in the affected countries erecting further unsurmountable barriers. The feeling of nationalism has permeated into local communities resulting in mutual suspiciousness. The former cloak of self-righteousness adopted by many in government seems to have no intrinsic, protective value at present. Human values are constantly changing. It is this uncertainty which inspires fear in everyone. Witness the hypocrisy of the present disarmament conference. Well lamented is the disrespect for law and order based on the evils of prohibition. The inflation of the stock market, representing the folly of mankind trying to get something for nothing, has played a none too insignificant role. The lack of a sufficient control by the federal government of the stock market has permitted the exercise of excessive personal greed. Technological unemployment resulting from the mechanization of industry has been mentioned frequently as a causative factor. It will be our major premise, then, to admit that the present condition is due to economic evils. Therefore, the treatment aspects necessarily will be in the economic sphere.

Let us for a moment consider man himself. When man's present relationship to the world about him is considered dark clouds are overcast enhancing the world with a cynicism doing justice to Schopenhauer. Pessimism would be fatal were it not for the possibility of a great adaptability of the organism to the stress and strain

of the environment. Civilization itself means conflict, and when one stops,—progress ceases. The question is raised as to whether or not we are too much involved at the present time to see any available solution on the horizon. We are wisely admonished that the results of the depression will appear later after it has had sufficient time to operate. Man, is a social being with great powers of adaptation. He is subject to his inner strivings which demand expression. The instincts of self and race preservation affect his behavior. Security is a primary need both from the emotional and economic standpoints. Man requires a chance for development and an opportunity to utilize his creative ability. He seeks a niche for himself. Regardless of how humble his status, he craves recognition from his fellow man. He becomes a menace when his instincts have not been utilized in a socially acceptable manner. Mental hygiene stresses this socialization of these inner forces. These forces, of course, existed in good times as well. At present it is probably less possible to permit of substitutions of patterns of behavior which are socially acceptable. The treatment must necessarily be a communal one, since man is a social being and the problem is universal.

Being unemployed the question can be raised whether or not man really becomes more isolated thereby and that the intricate and subtle perhaps sympathetic ties which bind him more closely to others are in the nature of dependency situations. People at the present time have been totally unprepared to turn readily to other inner satisfactions. The competition along materialistic lines has resulted in a retardation of the use of the creative ability. It is important to give people a universal objective. Religion, in its broad implication and not referring to especially the formalistic, repressive, or dogmatic aspects, has its greatest opportunity at present. Freud states that religion is one of the greatest curtailing and sublimative mechanisms of the emotions. A religion which is not keeping pace with the cultural development of people may perish. As illustration, witness the disintegration of the church in Spain and in Russia. Prosperity has made people soft; they have not been tempered in the flames of adversity. If a piece of steel be tempered too quickly it becomes brittle; however, if tempered properly it gains great tensile strength. If tempered too frequently other valuable characteristics are lost. The World War hysteria has been a sensitizing protein in the emotional realm of mass psychology, prosperity the second devastating inoculation resulting in the depression which represents the anaphylactic shock. If there were some readily available general release

of the emotion, such as through a satisfactory religious experience, there would be less danger. A psychological smoke screen has been used throughout all time in some form or other as a release for the pent up emotions of people. As illustrations there have been pogroms in order to hide a repressive tyranny. The ready appeal to people's sympathy in the calamities of natural origin, such as earthquakes, has been another universal affective response. One can raise the question as to whether or not people in the mass can exert abstinence in the face of marked deprivation. It is interesting to comment on the tremendous stand of the Chinese against the onslaught of the Japs as soon as they became bound together in the common objective of self defense. In spite of their proverbial passivity they are aggressively united.

The projection upon the world of an individual's personal failures is too easy in these times. During the war it was possible to shrug one's shoulder and excuse gross license and immorality by the statement, "C'est la guerre". There is not the same philosophical shrugging of the shoulders at present, since no universal goal acts as the psychological smoke screen. The culture of some two or three decades ago stirred up personal responsibility and bound people together in a clan spirit. The advantage of being a member of a group of any type is the feeling of "belonging". The identification of the individual into homogeneous groups gives him some feeling of security. Several decades ago this was partially accomplished by the individual's interest and active participation in government, but not so at present.

One questions whether or not the rise of civilization is now followed by a decline and decadence, as prophesied by Oswald Spengler in his "Decline of the West". One necessarily must contrast the present culture of American life with the previous generation. It is true that standards are higher at present. However, the pioneers had a more optimistic outlook. They had a goal and ideals and they mobilized their energies to reach this goal. Formerly, new industries utilized the ingenuity of man, but then competition, rivalry, and overproduction resulted. We may ask parenthetically for discussion—Does the modern industrialism permit the expression of a sense of personal satisfaction and achievement? It is true that the mechanization of industry during good times accepted into its service only the dull and one without initiative or willingness to utilize creative ability. At present, however, any job is readily accepted by the individual. He is deprived of those ego satisfactions neces-

sary for development. What experience has mankind learned from passing through such a crisis before? Unfortunately, these lessons are not indelibly left in the minds of people to prevent their recurrence. The eugenic movement offered a great deal of hope when one became alarmed at the possibility of the deterioration of the race. It, however, has been found wanting. Recent work shows that children of psychotic parents do not necessarily develop psychosis anymore than children of normal parents when removed from the deleterious contacts. Approximately one-half of the psychotic patients showed behavior problems in childhood, while the other group showed a normal emotional development. In addition feeble-mindedness follows the Mendelian Law in which it is a recessive characteristic. This further complicates the picture. Therefore, we see that merely one cult or point of view cannot act as a universal panacea for all social ailments.

The prolongation of the dependency situation by modern education which emphasizes the length of time a child should be in school, the postponement of marriage, and the lack of opportunity for a choice of careers have been added factors in producing unrest. We admonish the individual to fly into reality yet there are few avenues of flight. There are few satisfying experiences now to tempt the introvert from emergence from his proverbial shell.

Another social phase of this problem is concerned with probation. Probation involves the obligation to rehabilitate the individual into the community by means of a job. Unfortunately this is impossible. Formerly the army and navy were advocated for wayward minors, but now this avenue is closed even though there had been great limitations to this suggestion. The problem is relatively acute in which one will have to determine whether or not agencies should go along blindly, merely feeding people and discarding those activities dealing with the maintenance of morale. Unfortunately, Dr. Arrow-smith cannot divide people into two groups for his research purposes, one as control and the other retaining those possibilities for keeping up of morale. There is some evidence from the Gestalt Psychology that the whole determines the part, and not the part the whole. What an individual will do will be determined largely by his inherent capacities, rather than by the strain of the environment itself.

Communal activities are important. For example, the development of stadia for the purpose of communal activities along athletic lines has been advocated and utilized with great success in Germany especially. This has been utilized as a substitute for the former

militarism. This is an illustration of how the community can use mass psychology in a satisfying manner.

Modern family life under present conditions not infrequently reverses the family situation. Sometimes the mother is pressed into domestic service outside of the home leaving the father to assume some of the mother's responsibility for the care of the children. Since the father has become more active in the home, his ability to assume these new responsibilities reveal latent forces not demonstrable in the ordinary satisfying vocational situation. Naturally new problems will result in terms of this dissatisfaction.

In a not too infrequent type of delinquency, the child who had been overly protected as the result of a parental rejection, has been branded by society as a delinquent. The parent feels he is vindicated in his neglect by social stigma. In other words, as society assumes more and more responsibility in the care of children in these trying times, the more willing the parents will be to cast off their parental obligations. As an example, one merely has to point out the willingness of parents to send their children to fire stations for food.

The Mental Hygiene Bulletin of January, 1932, Volume 10, Number 1, states that mental and nervous maladjustment are now more widespread than ever due to anxieties, insecurities, fears, mental stress and strain, which naturally spring from unemployment and economic stress. It goes on to state that depressions are more in evidence among the middle-aged, while alcoholics and dementia praecox cases predominate in the younger generation. "Patients are brought from private sanitoriums to public institutions because their relatives cannot afford to keep them there. Elderly people with mild mental disturbances can no longer be maintained in the smaller apartments into which people of all kinds are crowding. Young men and young women out of work and worried over finances tend to develop mental disturbances more readily and take to drugs or drink. The high grade feeble-minded who do the rough routine work of the world are out of jobs and are easily led into mischief. The psychopaths who ordinarily fly from job to job are taking more readily to crime than ever before." In addition the increased vulnerability of the nervous system to breakdown under long continued stress is well-known. Dr. W. Clarke of the American Social Hygiene Committee states that the increasing rate of prostitution is due to the fact that girls formerly promiscuous now demand money for their services. He feels that there will be more sequellae to venereal infection since people are appalled by the numbers of cases in clinics and

refuse treatment there. This indeed is one of our more severe problems, namely, to see to it that a person with an early syphilis is treated very carefully, intensively, and followed up over a long enough period of time. The possibility of closing schools early, the unrest among teachers, the lack of sufficient classes as in manual training, cooking, etc., the discontinuation of recreational facilities, summer camps, and finally the possibility of decreasing the allowance to foster mothers, are factors of gravest significance. Mental breakdown due to toxic exhaustion factors as the result of malnutrition and lack of medical supervision is to be kept in mind. The failure of the father to find personal satisfaction in work forces him into a home situation already surcharged with emotional tension. As a result, there are increasing problems in the immediate family life. The adolescent's failure to obtain satisfying vocational possibilities has given him increased leisure time and has filled him with unrest. The American people as a rule have not learned to utilize leisure time. It will be one of the lessons of the future to continue the education of the people so that with a shorter working week their time can be occupied in a pleasurable and constructive manner.

To reiterate, the problems at present are largely those involving lack of security; a condition of fear, as a result of the jeopardizing of a man's position; severe economic reversals; deprivation of those factors in daily life to which individuals have become accustomed. All behavior can be characterized in terms of aggression or submission. The aggressive instinct makes for the overcoming of obstacles and finds expression in competition. Submission, although a natural characteristic and a counterpart of aggression, may result in an inward turning of the instinctive urges causing tension, frustration, and breakdown. Unfortunately, there is no specific remedy which will be comparable and follow Koch's Law in the field of biology. In other words there is no specific panacea. Fear must be overcome; fear paralyzes the higher cortical activities and like alcohol allows free play of the emotions without conscious guidance. A concept to reiterate is the dogma that objectivity on the part of the worker is necessary. The least one can do under these trying times is to become a sympathetic listener. A plan whereby small groups of people can unite either along religious lines, or can become a homogeneous unit through similar interests is advisable, since by this method security is increased and interests are pooled. Much can be accomplished by the church in this activity. Communal interests even though the results be meagre are necessary. Whether these activi-

ties be in the form of recreation or concerned with education, they at least will permit of discussion and a more intimate contact with fellow beings. It will not be out of order to mention the grave need of increased psychiatric facilities for adults in the city of Detroit. There is great need at this time especially. Frequent contacts with members of agencies in the discussion of common problems is advisable. When an army is retreating it is important to gather the stragglers to make a unified front. In addition it is a good practice to reveal attitudes and to discuss problems jointly. Whether the future holds an altered economic system or not, at least human nature will continue and instinctive urges will be the same. Man's innate tendencies must adapt themselves to the environment. We hope, then, until such a change does take place that we will still have the necessary resources in the environment to utilize these fundamental urges.