

BEYOND IDEOLOGY

ONE of the commonplaces of present-day social and political discussion is the complaint that the social studies lag far behind the physical sciences in respect to the control which they have achieved over the objects that they study. The remedy proposed, at least by the social scientists, is more research; the Social Science Research Council has recently sponsored the estimate that research in the fields of its interest are two decades in arrears. The fact of the lag and the need for research may be conceded, but they are not quite the whole truth or perhaps the part of the truth that is most worth reflecting upon. We have seen demonstrated in the last twenty years the fact that human nature can be controlled and human motives played upon, within wide limits and with great success, by a skillful and also an unscrupulous use of propaganda. And while it may seem unduly complimentary to call the fascist propaganda agencies "scientific," it is at least true that they worked systematically for ends that were definitely foreseen and planned, and that they used whatever was known about the most effective ways to whip up the emotions, to induce a hysterical blindness to consequences, and to silence the censorship both of reason and moral scruple. This propaganda, it is true, was supplemented by terrorism and worked upon a society that was already demoralized. The fact remains that it was successful, and that it used quite methodically all the devices suggested by the psychological and psychiatric study of behavior and motivation. Its methods were those used everywhere, for less malign purposes, by advertising, and the psychology of advertising has been reputed to be a respectable subject of academic study for a generation. In spite of the lag there is already in existence a substantial body of knowledge that can be used, and habitually is used, to influence or control action, and this knowledge is in a broad sense scientific, even though it is far less accurate and dependable than natural science.