As a social scientist, I can profess no knowledge either of health or religion; both lie beyond the disciplines of law and economics within which I now work. On the other hand, the precise subject matter with which social scientists do work include necessary assumptions proceeding from both fields. If, seen from various bases, the projected lines converge, there is justification for hazarding an opinion that, at point of convergence, certain conclusions have validity. In this paper, I propose to work from certain familiar bodies of data in the hope that they may be analyzed, that projection of these analyses will converge, and that the results may shed some light on the problems of religion and of mental health.

"Health" may be defined as that state of mind and body in which a human being may comfortably carry on effective participation in the environment available to him. This involves a social assumption, because participation assumes human society as a part of environment.

"Religion" presents more difficulty. Even the word has disputed derivation. Drawing on the thought of Berthollet, I here take it as meaning the individual's acceptance, proceeding from an inner conviction, of the expectations and obligations of an assumed system of order in the universe. This is a double base, carrying forward the interpretations both of Cicero and of Lactantius—the former stressing social obligations, the latter individual inner emotional and intellectual experience. Within that definition, I assume, would be included the classic (and overwhelmingly prevailing) theist religions, and also those rationalist religions that occasionally emerge in history as, for example, the brief ascendancy of the Stoic philosophy during the Antonine age of Rome.
though (great as it was) it affected only a numerically small ruling class group.

Let us take as basis for examination three groups of recognized social phenomena. First, the phenomenon of “public consensus”; second, that of the “value system” employed in social planning; and, third, a more modern and untested hypothesis, that of the transcendental impetus that appears essential to the making and developing of a strong community or state. This latter is sometimes known as the “theory of the transcendental margin”—the force that makes the state of Utah different from the state of Nevada, or the country of Israel different from the country of Iraq.

Public consensus

We may begin with the phenomenon of the “public consensus.” It exists in any choate political or social unit, large or small. It is that body of inherited or transmitted habits of arriving at judgments, conclusions, and opinions followed by the great majority of members of the social unit. These habits began to accumulate in the undatable past; as a body, they continue to accumulate as history goes on and to grow with each era and each generation. There is, for example, a public consensus against murder, assault, and robbery. This is the reason why you can walk down the street with certainty that only one out of a hundred thousand people you meet will seek to assault you, though you are defenseless and an attacker can escape. Public consensus in favor of a peaceful society is the reason why most people live co-operatively with their neighbors, observe laws, and pay taxes, and why, as a rule, law enforcement is needed only to deal with a small margin of law breakers. It is the reason why, in peaceful countries, people accept government without rebellion and maintain political institutions. It is, in brief, the habit of “morality” conceived in its simplest sense—living according to the just customs (mores) of the group. William James observed that habit was the fly-wheel of society. The accumulated body of moral habit is the gyroscope fly-wheel maintaining public order in all developed society. As a social phenomenon it is, implicitly or explicitly, a premise of any theory of political science.

Analyzed (and there has been all too little analysis of it), this central premise shows that the “public consensus” both rests on a series of individual facts and exhibits a social fact. Obviously the public consensus is made up of the aggregate of common habits of countless individuals.