授课文本

The Quest for Convenience

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America is on a quest for convenience. We spend thousands and thousands of hours looking for the fastest and easiest ways to get our work done. Every aspect of our society has been reshaped by technological progress. However, by putting every ounce of energy into our convenience, we've left nothing to help our society grow. New conveniences intensify the relevance of values in society, but they demand those values be cast in modern terms. Our thirst for convenience is overpowering value growth in America and creating urgent problems that must be solved.

That Americans want convenience is no secret. In fact, we're made aware of it each and every day. Advertisements bombard us with the "user-friendly," the "high-tech," "wash-and-wear," and the "new and improved." The self-cleaning oven saves mom scrubbing time, while "Dawn" takes the grease out of her way. The "24 hour drive-thru" and the Instant Cash Machine also make life that "little bit easier." Convenience, it seems, is everywhere.

Nor can we ever get enough of it. How many times a day does the thought, "There's got to be a better way to do this," cross your mind? Everybody thinks it, and you can often safely bet that someone's already found that better way, for American history is a history of invention. The United States Patent Office is flooded by an average 325 new applications each day. When the Office was first established it took a few weeks to get a patent but it is now so deluged that even with the aid of large computers, the process takes 25 months or more. Inventors know America constantly wants a better way to do things. They know we're on a quest for convenience.

The technological changes wrought by this quest affect our values in important ways. A study on the subject conducted by Harvard University concluded, "technology has a direct impact on values by bringing about new opportunities." We can see the truth of this statement if we look around our country today. Convenience technologies have not only changed every aspect of the way we live, but also opened more avenues to more people than

ever before. Unfortunately, we are finding it difficult, if not impossible, to take advantage of them because our value system has not kept pace with technology.

I have already touched on the direct nature of the relationship between convenience and values. The fact that conveniences can't satisfy every human need is a simple way to demonstrate that they coexist. Technology takes us conveniently from New York to London in just three hours aboard a supersonic transport, but technology can't blend a good cup of coffee. It takes a human taste tester to find the perfect beans. And technology can whiz my SAT scores to the college of my choice, but it can't write the essay that will gain me admission. Values are just as necessary with convenience because people are just as necessary.

Given that convenience and values coexist, we should ask how they affect one another. It's obvious that the values we hold result in convenience. We cherish life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, all three of which are enhanced by conveniences. For instance, American democracy has been immeasurably strengthened by computers and television. The joining of these two tools has made it possible for every American to participate in the political process. This is just one way in which an important value can be enhanced by conveniences.

However, those same conveniences can upset the value system. The television that brings us into politics brings other pictures from around the world: hunger and racism in Africa, the arms race between superpowers, and bad news in one's hometown. Children, who do not fully understand values, grow up to these pictures on TV every day. They are not prepared to interpret what they see, and psychologists believe this may harm their personal value systems later. Convenience and values are tied together because they affect one another in important ways.

Unfortunately, America's value system has not kept pace with convenience, and this has created urgent problems while strangling value growth. Two examples symbolize America's "social slip." First, we've found it almost impossible to answer moral questions raised by new conveniences, questions like: who should get expensive new medical treatments, is television too violent, what are we to do with our nuclear arsenal? Baby Jane Doe is a case in point. Modern technology could have sustained her life if her parents chose to, but in making that decision they had no precedents to guide them, no established right or wrong. Moral and ethical dilemmas like this are becoming commonplace, because we've gotten so far ahead of ourselves that convenience can't stimulate our values fast enough.

A second example lies in the failure of institutions in urban America. Professor Richard Rosenbloom conducted a study on the subject in the sixties. He found that traditional institutions and values were incapable of coming to grips with the new problems of America's cities. The things he saw persist today: cities unable to deal with education, crime control and public welfare problems; businesses unable to bring their know-how to bear on urban projects; and economic and political interests getting in the way of housing for the

poor. We face problems today that twenty years ago were considered the fault of value decay. This says little of our social progress in that time.

I've explained that convenience and values are intimately related. But in America today these two forces are no longer working in tandem. The serious problems this is causing must move us to update our value system. For, if we do not, the danger of conveniences being used inappropriately, and potentially harmfully, becomes a certainty. Our exclusive focus on finding easier ways of living is responsible, because it's left basic social values neglected. The culprit, therefore, is not the quest for convenience itself, but rather the importance we have placed on it.

The point I'm making is best expressed by economist Robert Heilbroner: "Advances in technology must be compatible with an existing society." Conveniences are very important, but we've seen the problems and dangers of neglected value growth. We can solve our problem by putting a little less energy into easier lifestyles and a little more into updating our values. We know convenience and values stimulate one another. If we reorder our priorities to take advantage of this, we can have convenience and value growth at the same time. The quest for convenience can continue to better the lives of all Americans. We need only our values to temper it.

(1,100 words)