

# **Sociology and Ideology**

*Eliezer Ben-Rafael*

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## SOCIOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY

# SOCIOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY

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ELIEZER BEN-RAFAEL



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# Preface

This book discusses the old-new topic of the relations of sociology and ideology. A topic that already preoccupied the founders of the discipline but which is again at the forefront of sociological debates these days with the profusion of new approaches to social reality and social research. A topic, also, that is a subject of discussion throughout the international sociological community but which, as shown by all the following papers, takes on very different tunes against the background of different national sociological traditions. This volume brings together a series of articles that throw light on selected aspects of this intricate matter and suggests a number of perspectives on this basic question which pertains to the “sociology of sociology.”

**Boudon** opens this volume by setting sociology as a social science, opposite to cultural and cognitive relativism. The truth is, says Boudon, that the social sciences themselves have contributed a great deal to make credible cognitive and cultural relativism as basic ingredients of postmodernism. Cognitive relativism is grounded on the failure of demarking the line between science and non science and it is from the sources of this failure that it draws hyperbolic conclusions. Cultural relativism has been legitimated by hyperbolic conclusions extracted from core ideas drawn from Montaigne, Hume and Weber. The influence of relativism is due to the fact that it was introduced in a conjuncture where it was perceived by various audiences as “useful.” Once this deconstruction is carried out, relativism appears as less solidly grounded than it looks and as less credible than postmodernists notably believe.

**Arnason** enlightens this development by relating sociology to the complexity of its object, namely, society of which it is necessarily a critique. Arnason insists here that the view of the varieties of modernity and the different historical paths of societies is not easily compatible with critical intentions: a pluralistic and comparative approach calls for a value-neutral idea of modernity. The critical stance, he contends, did not translate into any comprehensive rethinking of modernity, but he sees the startpoint of “critical thought” in the very antinomies of modernity where societal



spheres are interdependent and at the same time bearers of rival totalizing logics and visions of the world. The twentieth century has revealed the plurality of interpretive, utopian and ideological constructs associated with each sphere, and the antagonisms between their respective visions of autonomy.

In his chapter, **Touraine** who starts from a quite similar standpoint, bluntly states that the problem of contemporary sociology is today society and what happens to it. The idea of society, he sustains, is helpful as far as we think that the different components of a collectivity share common aspects that are more important than those which oppose them to each other. Where categories fight each other, we hesitate to speak of society. The decomposition of this idea of society, has been set off by the fragmentation of the world in which that idea developed, and this decline is accelerated by the current predominance of the theme of globalization. These tendencies towards dissociation raise the question of the role of sociology.

This kind of outlook is not too far from what is widely labeled “critical sociology,” though it still remains bound to the original aspirations of sociology that were grounded in moral commitment, and which inspired much of the sociologists’ work over the years. **Smolicz and Secombe’s** work illustrates, at this point, contemporary research strongly marked by moral commitment. This research is inspired by Florian Znaniecki, a champion of the link between research and values, not only as throwing light on the motives of the researcher but also as an aspect of the social reality investigated. This startpoint leads the authors to analyze linguistic pluralism comparatively in two very different settings, Australia and Belarus. It is the authors’ contention that Znaniecki’s humanistic sociological approach helps developing insights and deepening understanding of the complex world of multilingual and multicultural settings.

Ideology, however, still raises a formidable problem for sociology when it becomes an ingredient of the research process itself. It is to this question that **Wieviorka** turns when he asks if sociology does control means to bring “ideology to reason.” He defines ideology as a general and “total” vision implying political beliefs. Its presence in sociology is clearly denoted as sociologists, whatever they say, are often depicted as “ideologists” by other sociologists. On the other hand, ideology, at the difference from sociology, is an integral part of action, and its formulation is the work of intellectuals. The revival of ideology since the 70’s – following the outburst of student protest and with it, feminist, regional, ecologist, anti-nuclear, anti-mundialization movements – has brought about new extremisms and hypercritical variants – parallelly to the spread and proliferation of cultural

identities and religious sects. It is in this context that sociology tends to become relativist. Sociology, it is however the author's conviction, may propose through what he calls "sociological intervention," patterns of partnership between researchers and subjects in the form of work of analysis that neutralize ideological viewpoints in the research process itself.

Pursuing further the interrogation of sociology about itself, **Wittrock** is preoccupied by the question of the relevance of sociology to its object. In a historical-sociological perspective, he proposes to widen the domain of its analyses. The modern use of the term "society" expresses the transition from a discourse of moral and political philosophy to a social-science discourse, and from an agential view of society to one that emphasizes the reality of structures. Social science itself reflects concerns about a new civilization and the rise of a "social question." Originally moved by an ameliorative orientation (mainly in Europe), it has conquered a scientific status by marking out its territory (mainly in the US). Though, Europe's deep crises of regime between the two world wars brought social scientists to engage in self-critical reflection. Hence, the institutionalization of sociology on a global scale came only after World War II, which did not halt for long the strengthening of the critical dimension of sociology in the following of the contestation of the 60's and 70's. It is the author's contention that sociology today is to invest itself in rethinking its intellectual heritage.

**Ben-Rafael and Sternberg's** chapter concludes this volume with an analysis of the problematic relations of sociology's ambition to constitute a scientific discipline, and the moral and value standpoints attached to it by sociologists and that have been, they too, a major ingredient of its formation. These relations may illustrate, the authors propose, the moral-commitment, the methodological, the engagement and the relativistic syndromes. Each national sociological tradition shares its own affinities to these different syndromes but sociology, as a whole, experiences a situation where what is at stake is not what school of sociology accounts better for given realities, but what sociology itself is.

Eliezer Ben-Rafael

# The Social Sciences and the Two Types of Relativism

RAYMOND BOUDON

## ABSTRACT

The social sciences have contributed a great deal to make credible two types of relativism: cognitive and cultural relativism. They constitute basic ingredients of postmodernism. Why are they held as credible? Doubtful ideas are often hyperbolic versions of true ideas. Cognitive relativism is grounded on the failure of the objective followed by the Vienna Circle and by Popper: identifying the demarcation line between science and non science and on the work of post-Popperian philosophers of science, as Kuhn. Cognitive relativism draws hyperbolic conclusions from these two sources. Cultural relativism has been legitimated by hyperbolic conclusions extracted notably from core ideas drawn from Montaigne, Hume and Max Weber. The influence of these hyperbolic conclusions is also due to the fact that they have been introduced in the market in a conjuncture where they have been perceived by various audiences as “useful” in Pareto’s sense. Once this deconstruction is made, the two forms of relativism appear as less solidly grounded than they look and as less credible than postmodernists notably believe.

## **Relativism: A Basic Thesis in Contemporary Social Sciences**

In the last thirty years, social sciences have much contributed making relativism credible, in its two main forms: cognitive and cultural. One can even assert that relativism represents one of the most basic theses of contemporary sociology and anthropology and they owe to this thesis a good part of their influence. Relativism is a basic dimension of postmodernism. Contemporary social sciences have played an important

role in the legitimization of relativism. Should we believe cognitive relativists when they assert that knowledge is a construction which cannot aim at being objective and that theories have necessarily the character of “interpretations,” always arbitrary to some extent? Should we believe normative relativists when they assert that norms and values are culture-dependent and cannot be objectively grounded? While relativism has always been, since Protagoras, a philosophical tradition among others, it seems to have become a dominant worldview in intellectual circles. Where does the influence of these two forms of relativism come from? Are they promised to the same future? Here are the questions I would like to explore. I will deal with cognitive relativism firstly and secondly with cultural relativism.

### **Cognitive Relativism**

Kuhn’s work (1962) has played an important role in the implantation of cognitive relativism. His main conclusion is that the history of sciences is much less linear than philosophers of science, until Popper included, had maintained. The detailed analysis of scientific discussions shows that they are less “rational” than philosophers of science have asserted. Scientists often endorse a theory on the basis of criteria which can be “rational,” but also aesthetical, philosophical or political. Such ideas appear as easily acceptable. One may even wonder today why such commonsense statements have been perceived as a revolution in the philosophy of science and that, as Bunge (1999) maintains, it has stimulated the development of a “new philosophy of science”: a new view on sciences which, after Kuhn became more and more radical. According to this view, science would be unable to produce any “objective” explanation of the phenomena it explores. Feyerabend (1975) went as far as to maintain that scientific theories would be “fairy tales.”

Why has this cognitive relativism become common knowledge in some circles? Why has it taken extreme forms? The starting point of this process derives from the fact that Kuhn had developed his views on science on the basis of careful historical monographs on various controversies, as the controversy on phlogiston theory in the 18th century. It is true that the arguments of the believers and non-believers in the theory are far from being exclusively rational. They are far from the principles described, say, by Popper’s “critical rationalism” (Popper 1968). It is true, moreover, that handbooks in the history or philosophy of science describe the scientific discussions of the past as rational.

Thus, it is understandable that, although his main thesis can easily appear as commonsense, Kuhn has given the impression that he proposes a revolution in the current views about science. The revolution he had

started rested on a robust core: the fact that, as historically well confirmed, the selection process of scientific theories is less rational than stated by classical history and philosophy of sciences.

### **From the Vienna Circle to Popper**

A second factor can be mentioned which contributes to explain Kuhn's influence as well as the radicalization of his ideas by his followers: the failures experienced by the philosophers of science. Kuhn appeared as revolutionary and solid not only because he developed a view of science contradictory with the classical view, but also because at the time when he exposes his theses, the philosophy of science appears as blocked in a deadlock.

The modern philosophy of science starts with the works produced by the Vienna Circle. The philosophers of the Vienna Circle raised notably one question: on the basis of which criteria can a scientific theory be distinguished from a non scientific one? Where can the demarcation line be drawn? The best known answer is Carnap's at one stage of his reflections: a scientific theory is a theory which, at least in principle, once it is made entirely explicit, turns out to be composed of a set of statements being mere assertions on uncontroversial states of the world: assertions of the type "this pen is black."

This answer has been criticized. Popper has proposed, as it is well known, another demarcation line between science and non-science: the falsification criterion. A theory is scientific, according to Popper, if it can be contradicted – falsified – by observational data. This criterion has been considered as acceptable in wide circles, though more in non philosophical than in philosophical circles. True: the phlogiston theory can be more easily contradicted than Leibniz' monadology. According to Popper, no theory can be qualified as true. The notion of verisimilitude should be substituted for the notion of truth. A theory is verisimilar when it has successfully passed all the empirical tests it has been exposed to and when it has no competitor. But competitors may appear; and the theory can fail before a new test.

In spite of its intellectual modesty, Popper's theory captures in an unsatisfactory fashion the distinction between a scientific and a non-scientific theory. For several reasons:

- Firstly: because many falsifiable statements will normally not be considered as scientific, as "the train is leaving at 8h47."
- Secondly: because theories are normally considered as scientific which cannot be falsified, like all these theories produced by economists which introduce the clause "other things equal" without proposing any means on the basis of which one could be sure that "other

things” are actually “equal.” For, if such a theory appears as not congruent with some data, the reason can be that the theory is false, but also that the “other things” are not “equal.”

- Thirdly: because some theories do not bear on actual phenomena, but have rather the status of meta-theories dealing with how to explain phenomena of a given class. Thus, the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution deals with the way evolutionary facts should be explained: as the effect of mutation and selection. Because of their very status, such theories cannot be falsified. An advice cannot properly be satisfied. Popper saw well that the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution was scientific though not falsifiable, but did not go as far as to recognise that neo-Darwinism was an element of a class of scientific theories which disqualified his falsification theory.
- Fourthly: as the so-called Duhem-Quine thesis states, it is not easier to be convinced that a theory is false than to be convinced that it is true. When a theory has been shown to be able to explain a number of phenomena and fails to explain a new phenomenon, it will normally *not* be rejected. The normal reaction of the concerned scientists will be to forge auxiliary assumptions in order to reconcile the theory with the new fact.

In summary, the intellectual conjuncture of the sixties is characterized on the one hand by the broad attention granted to Kuhn’s theory according to which the selection of scientific ideas is less rational than described by handbooks in the history and philosophy of science and, on the other hand, by a growing skepticism regarding the idea that it would be possible to draw a clear demarcation line between science and non-science.

### **Misusing the No Middle Term Principle**

When a number is odd, it cannot be even. The two terms are contradictory. By contrast, when a pen is not black, that does not mean that it is white. “Black” and “white” are contrary, not contradictory terms. A pen can also, say, be brown.

The “no middle term principle” is often misused in the sense that contrary terms are held as contradictory. This is the case here: either the selection of scientific ideas is rational or it is not. Either a clear demarcation line can be drawn between science and non-science or it cannot. If it cannot, then the distinction between science and non-science is an illusion. Hence some went as far as to conclude, as Feyerabend (1975) or Hübner (1985) that mythical are as valid as scientific explanations of the world. The misuse of the no middle term principle led from the acceptable views of Kuhn to radically relativistic views of science, as Feyerabend’s.

## Scheler's Floodgates and Pareto's Distinction between "Truth" and "Usefulness"

Another factor is responsible for the influence of cognitive relativism. Max Scheler has stated that, in some circumstances, an idea can go through virtual floodgates, while in others it cannot: other things equal, an idea will more likely be accepted if it is congruent with the *Zeitgeist* or with some collective interests. Pareto has indicated in the same vein that an idea can become accepted and influent not necessarily because it is "true," but because it is "useful." In other words, an idea can be accepted essentially because it serves cognitive and/or ideological interests.

This idea is relevant here. The relativistic view on science produced by the "new sociology of science" (Bunge 1999) is developed in an intellectual conjuncture when, in the US, the collusion between science, politics and the Pentagon becomes a fashionable topic. This collusion would imply that the real political power is not in the hands of the democratic institutions. Scheler's floodgates were at that time wide open to theories which, as Kuhn's or Feyerabend's, showed that the authority of scientists is less legitimate than it is generally considered. Kuhn himself was probably not clearly aware that his theory would be "useful" to those who were concerned with the anti-democratic bias in the structure of American power. He unwillingly took benefit from the convergence of his views with ideological interests.

The theories developed by the new sociology of science were not only "useful" in Pareto's sense; they looked moreover "true." It appeared as clear that no criteria able to draw a clear demarcation line between science and non-science could be found, and that the selection of scientific ideas was much less rational than claimed by handbooks. For all these reasons, cognitive relativism became a dominant philosophical view on science, notably among sociologists around the world.

Simple as it is, this script explains the growing radicalization of cognitive relativism from Kuhn to Feyerabend in America or Latour in France and its influence. From a viewpoint of the sociology of knowledge, this script has moreover the interest of identifying a typical mechanism. This mechanism explains the excessive credibility many other ideas or theories are granted, as I will try to show on the case of cultural relativism. This mechanism is characterized by the fact that it gets started with the help of objectively credible core ideas (as in the case of cognitive relativism the idea that handbooks give a too simple representation of the selection of scientific ideas); these core ideas are then hyperbolized thanks to devices currently used in ordinary knowledge, as the confusion between contrary and contradictory terms; moreover, the hyperboles will likely become

popular if, beside looking credible, they also appear as “useful” to some audiences: in this case, Scheler’s floodgates will be wide open before them.

### **The Decline of the New Sociology of Science**

The new sociology of science is no more as influential as it was. Why?

Durkheim (1979[1912], p. 624) has written in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that it often occurs that in a first stage an idea is accepted by most individuals because it is collectively accepted, while in a second stage it is collectively accepted only provided it can be held as objectively grounded: “we examine its claims to be objectively grounded before we believe in it.” The case of the “modern sociology of science” illustrates the importance of this idea. Cognitive relativism was in a first stage held as true because its main intuitions were collectively accepted, notably among the sociologists of science. In France for instance, not long ago, before Sokal and Bricmont (1997) drew anti-relativistic conclusions from Sokal’s hoax, it was difficult to have an article printed in a review dealing with the sociology of science if the article did not pay allegiance to cognitive relativism. Today, even in France, few people beside the sociologists of science themselves care about the “new sociology of science” and its relativistic stance. This change is probably due to the mechanism described by Durkheim. Sokal, Bricmont and others, as Bunge (1999), have shown that the claims of these “new sociologists of science” are ungrounded. Two arguments are essentially responsible for this disqualification.

- 1) As rightly stated by Kuhn, the selection process of scientific ideas is *in the short term* much less rational than handbook writers assume. But handbooks are right *in the long term*. Lavoisier’s theory of the composition of air is objectively more solidly grounded than Priestley’s phlogiston theory. But this certainty emerged *in the long term*. In the *short term*, Priestley’s arguments were credible. They were not yet definitely superseded by the objectively better arguments developed by Lavoisier. If the distinction between what happens in the short and in the long term is neglected, it becomes possible to ask whether the selection of scientific ideas is rational or not: under this condition, middle terms are excluded. By contrast, as soon as the distinction is maintained, the question as to whether the selection of scientific ideas is rational or not becomes meaningless, for the selection can be rational in the long term and include irrational elements in the short term.
- 2) The same argument can be developed as far as the question of the demarcation criteria between science and non-science is concerned. They were not found. But, as Kant has indicated, a statement or a theory can be held as true, in spite of the fact that there are



no general criteria of truth. There are no general criteria of truth, but we can judge that a theory is definitely more acceptable than another. Thus, Torricelli's theory of the phenomenon which later gave birth to the barometer is more acceptable than the theory of Aristotelian inspiration. It does not introduce the idea of the *horror vacui naturae*; it explains why the behavior of the "barometer" depends on the altitude at which it is located. Applied to the demarcation question, this remark says that we can be confident that a theory is better than another on the basis of robust reasons and hold it provisionally as true, even though there are no criteria of truth, or of falsity. Generalizing Kant's suggestion, one can state that the fact that there are no *general* criteria on the basis of which a theory would be considered as true or false, scientific or not, etc. does not exclude that we can be confident on the basis of *particular* criteria that it is true or false, scientific or not, etc. In other words, the fact that there are no demarcation criteria does not lead to the conclusion that the distinction between science and non-science is illegitimate. This analysis can be generalized: the fact that it is hard to provide general criteria describing the distinction, say, between classical and popular music does not imply that the distinction is illegitimate. Few people would accept this conclusion.

On the whole, the decline of the "new sociology of science" is probably an effect of the mechanism identified by Durkheim. We realize clearly now that the cognitive relativism it supports is ill-grounded. Sokal's hoax has accelerated the process. But it worked because the "new sociology of science" was unable to defend its claims against the arguments which had been opposed to it.

### **Cultural Relativism**

Cultural relativism should be distinguished from cognitive relativism from several points of view. Cognitive relativism is a collective belief in a narrow corporation: the "new sociologists of science." Their influence is presently restricted to very limited circles. Cultural relativism is by contrast much more influential. It has become an accepted idea very widespread among intellectuals. It is less influential in the general public.

In spite of these differences between the two forms of relativism, it is important to see that the two of them have a common feature. On this point, my diagnosis is different from Aya's (2001). In both cases, the ideas summarized by the labels "cognitive" and "cultural relativism" have become established under the effect of the general mechanism I have described in the case of the former. The components of this mechanism are: the existence of hard core ideas; the derivation of hyperbolic

conclusions from these core ideas; the hyperbolic conclusions are drawn with the help of some implicit *a priori* assumptions as the no middle term principle. These three components have the effect of making the hyperbolic conclusions credible. A fourth component works for the diffusion of these conclusions: it operates when the hyperbolic conclusions appear as “useful”: as congruent with collective material or symbolic interests.

I will start with the core ideas. Cultural relativism is grounded on three core ideas to which three great names can be associated: Montaigne, David Hume and Max Weber. They have much inspired modern analysts: philosophers as well as anthropologists, political scientists or sociologists.

### Montaigne

The well known American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1984) is the author of an influential article entitled “Anti-anti-relativism.” The article rests explicitly on a famous chapter of Montaigne’s *Essays*: the “*apologie de Raymond Sebond*.” “What is this truth which mountains border, that is lye to those beyond?” Montaigne writes in a time of religious conflicts. His objective in this chapter was plausibly above all of a political character: he wanted to suggest discretely that, as ethical truths are different from one culture (he says “nation,” which means approximately “culture” in our parlance) to another, there is no religious truth either. Hence, Protestants and Catholics have no ground to fight against one another. But Geertz is not interested in the historical context in which Montaigne wrote.

Geertz’ attention has probably been attracted by passages from Montaigne as the following. It states that, to Montaigne, culture is for men a second nature:

It is credible that there are natural laws (...); but as far as we are concerned, they are lost (...). A culture [*une nation*] considers an issue from a viewpoint (...); another culture by another viewpoint.

As he often does, Montaigne illustrates this general point by many examples, as the following:

Nothing is more horrible than to eat one’s father. The people that had this custom in the past regarded it though as witnessing their faithfulness and affection, as by so doing they tried to give their parents the most worthy and honourable grave, since they placed the body of their parents into themselves and as in their flesh (...). It is easy to imagine how cruel and abominable it would have been to people who had internalised this superstition to throw the spoil of their parents to the corruption of the earth, making it the food of animals and worms. (Montaigne 1948, II, XII, p. 289, my translation, RB)

According to Geertz, Montaigne should be read literally. He would have discovered in advance an essential truth, consolidated by modern

anthropology: the truth according to which there would be no normative truth, but only customs, varying from one culture to another. Any distinction between customs on the one hand and norms and values on the other would be illusory. The reasons mentioned by people as grounding their normative beliefs would be mere justifications or rationalizations (in the psychoanalytic sense), rather than the causes of these beliefs. The genuine causes of their moral feelings would lie on the side of cultural forces: people would internalize through socialization the collective beliefs characteristic of a given culture.

This core idea is treated as a kind of evidence by many anthropologists, as Lévy-Bruhl (1960[1922]), Granet (1990), Whorf (1969), Needham (1972) or today Geertz (1984) or Shweder (1991). Political scientists as Goldhagen (1997) or Huntington (1996) clearly endorse it. All of them and many others are convinced that the world is made of discontinuous cultures, that each culture is characterized by idiosyncratic systems of norms and values and that these norms and values are transferred into the head of individuals through socialization. The collective beliefs would unconditionally be the causes of individual beliefs.

In this vein, an article by Shweder (2000) evokes the case of an African anthropologist. She was raised in the US, went back to her country, Sierra Leone, after graduation and submitted herself willingly there to genital mutilation. In a communication to the American anthropological society, she stated that most Kono women draw from genital mutilation a feeling of enhanced power. This would also be true of men. From these facts, Shweder concludes that people consider a norm as positive or negative because they are exposed to cultural forces emanating from the cultural environment. These forces would be powerful enough as to make that a scholar educated in a given culture and going back to her original culture would experience genital mutilation as a pleasant experience. According to Shweder, she would not have submitted herself to genital mutilation in order to be accepted by her milieu. The cultural forces would have been strong enough to make her *wanted* genital mutilation and *experience* it as positive. Shweder goes even further. The negative medical effects of genital mutilation would have been greatly exaggerated, according to a study conducted by a Harvard anthropologist. This study would indicate, as Shweder suggests, that the negative feeling toward genital mutilation a Western observer normally experiences is the mere product of his own socialization: he has been educated in a culture where female genital mutilation is negatively perceived. Socialization would be the cause of his negative reaction.

Thus, Montaigne offers to cultural relativists a first core idea: the diversity of norms and values from one society to another would imply that

they are mere socio-cultural conventions that are transmitted to individuals through socialization.

### **David Hume**

The second core idea has had a more diffuse influence: the famous theorem we owe to David Hume (1972[1741]) according to which no system of assertive statements can lead to an imperative conclusion. The theorem is true, beyond any doubt. The view has been drawn from this theorem that descriptive and prescriptive statements were separated by a wide gap; it has been concluded that prescriptive statements would not be endorsed because they would be objectively grounded, since it followed apparently from Hume's theorem that they could not be.

This idea has had a considerable influence. Probably because he has taken Hume literally, the philosopher Ayer for instance has forged the hypothesis that normative statements would be implicit commands. They would be endorsed and expressed by a subject because he would feel that they lead to a desirable type of behavior. They look like assertive statements ("doing X is good"); but this assertion would derive from a desire: the wish that X is really done. The assertive form of the statement would be illusory. Pareto had developed earlier similar ideas: we say "X is good" while in most cases we should say "I feel that X is good and I feel so because I wish X or the outcomes of X." Ayer and Pareto assume that a prescriptive statement cannot be rationally grounded. So, they claim, prescriptive statements are irrationally grounded: they are the expression of a desire, even though they are rationalized and expressed in an assertive fashion. My guess is that, without the authority of Hume's theorem, Ayer and Pareto would not have accepted and presented such views. For their theory is complicated. It rests moreover on the ponderous assumption that the subject is by essence blind with regard to his own reasons and motivations.

I shall spend some more time on anthropologists than on philosophers as Ayer. Many anthropologists can, as the ones I have already evoked, be ranked under the umbrella of "culturalism," in the broad sense of this term. According to culturalism in this broad sense, the social subjects would endorse normative statements under the effect of socialization; they would accept them passively; they would normally give them a meaning which they do not have. The role of the anthropologist or sociologist would be to disentangle the true causes of the normative beliefs of the social subjects, causes which the subjects themselves are not aware of.

The anthropologists who accept Montaigne's core idea may possibly have been more or less indirectly impressed by Hume's core idea. For Hume's theorem gives, so to say, a theoretical ground to Montaigne's

empirical observations. He observed that norms and values appeared as highly variable from one society to the other. Is this diversity not primarily grounded in the fact that normative statements cannot be objectively grounded, according to the conclusion currently derived from Hume's theorem?

Many anthropological studies follow the objective to show, not only that norms and values appear as variable from one culture to another, but that this is also true of these norms and values which Westerners currently consider as universally valid, as the value of equity and the norms related to this value. Thus, an impressive study, resting on an ambitious observation design (Henrich et al. 2001) observes that the answers to the *ultimatum game* appear as variable from one culture to the other. A Western respondent A chooses in most cases to share the benefits of the game equally between B and himself while the situation created by the experiment would make possible for him to get much more; in some other cultures, this answer appears as less likely. So, even the feeling of equity would not be universal.

Not only anthropologists, but many sociologists seem to consider Montaigne's and Hume's core ideas as evident, even though they do not evoke them explicitly. The difference between the two corporations is that the latter is more interested in the variation of norms and values within a given society than between societies. Sociologists observe that norms and values differ from one group to another in a society. They explain this variation by causes they hold the social actors themselves as unaware of. This kind of analysis is illustrated for instance in the UK by Douglas and Ney (1998) or in France by Boltanski's and Thévenot's *cités* (1991): they christen under this term what was called earlier *subcultures*.

My guess is that the ponderous assumptions introduced by such analyses cannot be perceived as evident if one does not see them as corollaries of Montaigne's and Hume's core ideas. I am thinking notably of the assumption that the sociologist can see the causes of the convictions of social actors, while social actors themselves would be unable to see these causes and would see their convictions as grounded on fallacious reasons.

### **Max Weber**

Social sciences owe to Max Weber a third core idea. Some commentators present him as a relativist on the basis of two famous metaphors: "value polytheism" and the "war of Gods." These metaphors evoke easily the idea that societies are ruled by norms and values that can be incompatible with one another. They suggest that value conflicts rather than, as in the Marxist tradition, class conflicts would structure social life.

So, the greatest of sociologists (with Durkheim) would have insisted on the idea that values and norms are established by force. They would confirm Nietzsche's philosophical theses about values.

Do we need to believe in the hyperbolic interpretations of the three core ideas?

### **Montaigne**

First of all the distance between Montaigne and Geertz is immense. To Montaigne norms and values vary from one "nation" to the next. But he does not endorse the idea that socialization would produce mechanical irreversible effects in the mind of individuals. He mentions on the contrary a number of cases where people change their mind even on basic issues under the influence of minor factors. Religious conversions can even be produced by anecdotal factors, as mentioned in *Essais* (Montaigne 1948: 292).

Montaigne's core idea takes a radical form with Geertz when he introduces the principle of the no middle term: norms are either conventional or rationally grounded. If they were rationally grounded, they would tend to be the same everywhere. As this is not the case, they are conventional. So, when social actors see them as rational, they rationalize ideas which they owe to socialization. By so thinking, Geertz ignores the "middle term": that some norms and values would be conventional, while others would not. The ordinary language introduces, though, a distinction between norms and values which owe their origin to "custom," while others do not. A rule can be arbitrary and grounded in custom, while it expresses a value which derives from reasons. Shaking hands is an arbitrary sign of politeness, while politeness itself, far from being arbitrary, is positively valued in all societies, even though it is not necessarily followed by all in all circumstances.

Let us go back to the case of female genital mutilation. Shweder (2000) seems to accept, as I said, that the feeling of indignation normally experienced by any Western observer when this practice is evoked before him would be "cultural": this feeling would be an effect of the exposition of the Western observer during his socialization to values typical of Western societies. Under the effect of a phenomenon Marxists identified as "false consciousness," the Western observer would believe that his reaction is, not cultural, but rational, while it would be cultural in reality.

It is perhaps simpler to get rid of this complicated assumption and to accept that the Western observer has some *reasons* to have a negative reaction against female genital mutilation. One can easily understand that all societies tend to develop rituals, the function of which is to integrate the young individuals into the world of adults and to help them developing

their personal identity, and that female genital mutilation can have a function of this type. One can easily understand that the anthropologist evoked by Shweder who submitted herself to excision wanted to be taken in her country as a genuine Sierra-Leone citizen, in spite of the fact that she was raised in the US. But we know also that personal identity and integration can be built by other devices and that these devices can legitimately be preferred if they appear as equally efficient and less cruel than the devices generating a corporal mutilation.

When a Western observer learns that in Saudi Arabia thieves can have their hands cut off, he has normally a reaction of indignation. This reaction can again be interpreted as an effect of his socialization in the Western world. No anthropologists have dared to my knowledge to extend the cultural explanation they treat as evident in the case of excision to this other case. Probably because the rational explanation appears in this case as much stronger than the cultural one: social control is needed in all societies; but as soon as a device appears as less cruel and as effective as another, the former tends to be selected. One does not need to assume the Western observer follows mechanically the values he was taught and that he is the prey of false consciousness when he condemns cruel practices: strong reasons are rather the genuine cause of his reaction.

This implicit theory which I introduce into the mind of the Western observer is no other than the theory Durkheim explicitly developed in his *Division of social labor*. Social control tends to rest on devices and procedures which become over time softer, he contends. This trend is caused by a fundamental value which inspires social life in all societies: individualism. Individualism (in the moral and sociological sense), he writes, can be observed in all times and all societies; this value tends over time to become more and more respected and served (Boudon 2002). For this reason, the devices and procedures aiming at facilitating social control, personal integration, etc. become softer over time: they tend to display an increasing respect for the dignity of individuals; now, personal integrity is a basic aspect of the dignity of individuals.

Following Durkheim, we can suppose that the Western observer perceives excision negatively, not because he would have been socialized to values incompatible with such practices, but because he has strong reasons of doing so. This rational explanation has the advantage that it is no more necessary to assume that he is the seat of a “false consciousness” which would distort his inner perceptions. It has the further advantage that it exonerates the anthropologist or sociologist of the hard if not impossible task of investigating the mysterious mechanisms underlying the notion of “false consciousness” and, moreover, of explaining why sociologists and anthropologists would not be exposed to the threat of false consciousness.

In a word: it is impossible to make all normative beliefs the product of socialization and of the mere exposure to the conventions and customs characteristic of a society. It is true that mathematics is a cultural product we owe to Egypt and Greece. In that sense it is cultural; but  $2 + 2 = 4$  is not a cultural truth. The same could be said of some normative and axiological beliefs.

The question raised by Geertz and the other culturalists treats as obvious the assumption that it would be possible to decide between two contradictory statements, describing normative and axiological beliefs respectively as conventional-cultural or as rational. The assumption is actually an undesirable *a priori*. It gives birth to a question without any answer.

### Hume

The correct formulation of Hume's theorem is the following: it is impossible to draw a prescriptive conclusion from a set of statements which would be *all* descriptive. Or: generally a prescriptive conclusion is derived from a set of statements *one of which at least* is prescriptive. A simple statement as "traffic lights are a good thing; they should be accepted, for, without them, traffic would still be more difficult" shows that normative statements derive currently from a mixture of prescriptive and descriptive reasons.

Many sociologists, among them the so-called functionalists, have fully recognized this point. Thus, the functional theory of inequalities maintains that inequalities are accepted by people as long as they can consider that a lower level of inequalities would be detrimental to all. This theory asserts in other words that people see a level of inequality as legitimate (normative statement), if they can accept the idea that a lower level would generate negative consequences (factual statement). In the same way, people tend to view such and such institutions as good when they have the impression that these institutions generate positive effects with respect for instance to some value, as the dignity of individuals.

The pseudo-corollary currently drawn from Hume's theorem according to which "prescriptive conclusions cannot be drawn from descriptive statements" is thus a sophism and the popular image derived from this sophism which depicts a wide gap between norms and values on the one hand and facts on the other is a worthless caricature. But the influence of this sophism contributes to explain that the false idea, according to which normative and axiological beliefs would be cultural-conventional, has become widespread.



## Max Weber

Max Weber is often represented as a hard relativist: he would have insisted that societies are endemically threatened by endless and merciless value conflicts. Bryan Turner (1992) not long ago, like Leo Strauss (1953) earlier has defended hyperbolic interpretations of this type of Weber's metaphors on the "war among Gods" and on the "polytheism of values."

Weber's point is actually simple: every theory, including the most robustly established physical theory, rests necessarily upon undemonstrated principles. Otherwise, the statements appearing in first place in the presentation of a theory would not be principles. Simmel has a marvellous formula to express the same point: when we discuss a chain of reasons, he states, we should start from the second element in the chain. Albert's "*Münchhausen trilemma*" expresses the same idea (Albert 1975[1968]). This point contradicts a common *a priori*, though: that a theory cannot be held as solid if it does not rest on solid principles. For this reason, Leo Strauss believed in a "natural" right: a right whose principles would be "natural," i.e. uncontroversial. Bryan Turner believes neither in "nature" nor in any other absolute entity and concludes that no theory can be held as solid. Leo Strauss' "naturalism," exactly as Bryan Turner's "relativism" derives from the *a priori* assumption according to which a theory has to be grounded on solid principles to be held as solid.

Weber by contrast sees principles as provisional assumptions which are deemed to be kept up or rejected according to the interest of the consequences they generate. To him, normative as descriptive theories are developed on the basis of principles which give birth to *programs*, as we might say, which either are progressively developed and consolidated or are more or less quickly abandoned if it turns out that they lead to dead ends. To Weber, the selection of ideas, of scientific, but also of moral, political, philosophical and even theological ideas, follows a process of diffuse rationalization (*Durchrationalisierung*). Under the effect of this process, undemonstrable principles are consolidated *a posteriori* thanks to the interest in the outcomes and consequences they produce.

On the whole, Weber sketches in his various writings a theory of social action and social knowledge which I would qualify as "programmatic." Thus, when a political institution seems to lead to an enhanced respect for the dignity of individuals, it tends to be perceived as legitimate, to become the object of a collective demand and, if the circumstances are favorable, to become established in the real world. One can think of the right to strike or of the existence of unions conceived as independent from the public authorities as well as from the management of the enterprise. These institutions have become established in a growing number of places because they generate in principle a protection of workers and employees.

The demand of these categories for protection derives from the general notion according to which every member of a community should be equally protected, notwithstanding his location in the socio-professional space. This notion itself derives from the principle according to which a good society is a society where the dignity of all is respected as far as it can be. This latter principle cannot be demonstrated. But it inspires implicitly all moments of political life. This is exactly what Durkheim meant when he asserted that “individualism” has always been a central value, in all times and all societies. This does not mean that political life is peaceful. It took a long time and many struggles before the right to strike was accepted. Before it was accepted, the “polytheism of values” ruled: many employers explained that strikes would ruin the economy, while employees maintained the economic system would run more smoothly if power was more evenly distributed among the various economic actors. Today, the “polytheism of values” and the “war among Gods” are over, as far at least as the issue of the right to strike is concerned. Many issues have given birth to a situation of “polytheism of values” in a first stage and to an irreversible selection of a solution to the conflict in the long term: think of the separation of State and Church, of the notion of *Rechtsstaat*, of the subsidiary principle of the right to become educated, of the equality between genders, etc. It seems to me Weber had such examples in mind when he evoked the “war among Gods” and the process of “diffuse rationalization.” In other words, Weber has never drawn from the idea that principles cannot be demonstrated any relativistic conclusion. This conclusion can be drawn only if an undesirable *a priori* assumption is introduced: that a theory should be grounded on absolutely valid principles or, if not, be held as a mere conventional “construction.”

### **Toward the End of Cultural Relativism**

To conclude on cultural relativism: it results from a hyperbolic treatment of core ideas developed by Montaigne, Hume and Weber notably. It draws hyperbolic conclusions from these core ideas thanks to the introduction of some controversial *a priori* assumptions. These *a priori* assumptions are built notably on a misuse of the principle of the no middle term.

As in the case of cognitive relativism, an account should be taken of the fact that cultural relativism is “useful” in Pareto’s sense. If norms and values derive from mere conventions, they are incommensurable and hence all equally good or bad. Shweder’s analysis of the reaction to excision will certainly please some people in Sierra Leone or more importantly the people in the West concerned with making no displeasure to anybody in Sierra Leone. If cultural relativism is right, no culture is better than any

other, no society better than any other, and no institution better than any other.

Is this universal benevolence the most useful present the Western world can make to the rest of the world, or to use today geographic references, the North can make to the South?

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# Sociology, Critique and Modernity: Views Across the European Divide

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## ABSTRACT

Questions raised by the collapse of Communist power and ideology have major implications for the self-understanding of sociology as a mode of inquiry. These questions are linked to unresolved disputes and incomplete projects, inherited from earlier phases of the sociological tradition but still relevant to the central issues of theoretical and substantive debates. In that context, the idea of comparative analysis is a defining characteristic of sociological inquiry rather than one research strategy among others. Social theory and comparative history need each other for mutual information, as well as for protection against the danger of disciplinary closure. The idea of sociology as a critique of modernity – or at least a possible foundation for such a critique – should be reconsidered in light of comparative and historical perspectives. Both the predicament of Marxian critique and the question of alternatives to it should be considered from the East Central European angle. It provides a compelling case for re-examining the very idea of critique, the arguments on behalf of rival versions, and the role of critical perspectives in sociological analysis. A civilizational frame of reference will broaden our perspectives on the antinomies of modernity beyond the partial views of earlier sociological theory.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the orientations and self-interpretations of Western sociology were often related, in more or less overt and antagonistic ways, to rival claims of Marxism-Leninism (the latter term refers to the official doctrines of Communist regimes, both the

mainstream Soviet version and the variants that contested it in the name of a more genuine orthodoxy). It may therefore be useful to begin a discussion of present tasks and prospects with a brief reflection on the global change of scene: the abrupt disappearance of a once powerful adversary must have major implications for the self-understanding of sociology as a mode of inquiry (it seems best to avoid the leveling idea of a discipline), but it is not obvious that the most tempting and triumphalist responses will be the best guarantees of further progress. As I will try to show, there are good reasons to link the questions raised by the collapse of Communist power and ideology – and by the “new great transformation” (Bryant and Mokrzycki 1994) that followed it – to unresolved disputes and incomplete projects, inherited from earlier phases of the sociological tradition but still relevant to the most central issues of theoretical and substantive debates. In that context, the following argument will focus most directly on the idea of comparative analysis as a defining characteristic of sociological inquiry, rather than one research strategy among others.

### **Sociology in the Bipolar World: Confrontation and Critique**

The boundaries between Western sociology and the Marxist-Leninist alternative were neither impassable nor uncontested. At the most basic level, an idea of sociology as a research-oriented and methodologically grounded project, disconnected from ideological premises and capable of demolishing ideological constructs, served to highlight the contrast with a system of ideological beliefs dressed up in scientific rhetoric. The sociological self-image reflected in this polarizing view was older than the confrontation with a global counter-project after World War II, but the new constellation called for a more militant stance. Similarly, the quest for a unifying general theory was a logical outcome of intellectual and institutional trends, prior to the bipolar turn of world politics (the epoch-making Parsonian “charter” for a general theory did not owe much to any perceived challenge from a counter-ideology), but the need became more urgent with the ascendancy of Marxism-Leninism as a professedly universal theory. More direct responses to the Communist challenge – it is tempting to describe them as examples of mimetic rivalry – are evident in some substantive contexts, most importantly in the emergence and development of modernization theory from the late 1940s onwards. An explanatory and prescriptive model of social transformation was needed to counter the Marxist-Leninist paradigm, and it was put together from rather disparate and underdeveloped theoretical traditions. Later shifts towards a more critical theory of modernity were largely due to rediscoveries of classical insights that had been disregarded by the postwar pioneers of modernization theory.

Principles and programmatic self-definitions of Western sociology were to play a major role in reformist efforts to strengthen or resuscitate sociological traditions in Eastern Europe. Such attempts – most innovative during the 1960s, but much more durably effective in some countries than others – began with the re-legitimizing of sociology as a science with its own agenda and problematic, went on to contest the Marxist-Leninist image of society in general terms, and led to more or less extensive borrowings from modernization theory in order to construct a less ideological frame of reference. In short, the uneven revival of sociology in the post-Stalinist phase of “real socialism” can to a significant extent be understood as a push for intellectual Westernization, with results varying from case to case but everywhere of some importance to public culture; and from the post-Communist vantage point, it is all too easy to combine this interpretation with the supposedly more definitive lessons of the 1990s. The decline, fall and disappearance of an alternative modernity and its ideology is then subsumed under the transitological scheme (a grand narrative if there ever was one). The claim that mainstream modernization theory has been vindicated by the demise of Communism is an integral part of this line of argument.

A dissenting view – less compatible with the neo-liberal consensus but more likely to make sense of post-Communist surprises – is that the diverse exits from Communism should be taken as starting-points for a new round of research and reflection, not as reasons to close a debate. This proposal is even more appealing when combined with “an invitation to sociologists to re-visit those old sites which were investigated by classical sociological theorists like Marx and Weber” (Eyal et al. 1998: 3), i.e. to re-read the classics without any presumption of an established way to filter their ideas. The following discussion will suggest some further connections between the hermeneutical and the comparative dimensions of analysis. But before moving closer to current issues, another glance at the bipolar background may be useful. The confrontation that undermined and then eliminated one claimant to knowledge and power was not the whole story; a reassessment of the intellectual legacy of the period must also consider the attempts to develop critical diagnoses of both sides, and particularly those that did so by way of theorizing latent or long-term similarities across the official border. This more detached perspective on the Cold War constellation was, in turn, open to multiple interpretations of very different cultural and political types. No systematic survey can be attempted here, but brief comments on two representative cases should give an indication of the variety as well as of the affinities.

Alvin Gouldner’s account of the “crisis of Western sociology” (Gouldner 1971) was at the same time a comparative analysis of constitutive ideologies

on the Eastern and Western sides of the postwar divide, with particular emphasis on parallel mechanisms of stabilization through rationalizing models of the social world. In that regard, the dominant Parsonian system of sociological theory and the institutionalized orthodoxy of the Communist party-states were less incompatible than the conventional wisdom of the times would have it: Parsonian functionalism had provided a theoretical rationale for the postwar settlement that stabilized capitalism in the West, and since the ruling elites of the Soviet bloc were obviously in search of ideological tools that would suit their increasingly complex societies (and fit the demand for a stabilizing phase after revolutions from above), an opening to functionalism – including a gradual legitimating of academic sociology – could be expected. The underlying logic and the enduring appeal of functionalism were best understood in terms of an interpretive “infrastructure” that entailed a tacit commitment to “master institutions,” but not a dogmatic identification with any particular social regime. A harmonizing and conventionalizing interpretation of power and wealth is crucial to this framework, and Gouldner’s extensive critique of Parsonian conceptions of power and wealth was meant to unmask the most recent offshoot of a much older ideological tradition. Conversely, it was one of the prime tasks of reflexive sociology (this was Gouldner’s term for the anti-functionalist program, and it was designed to link up with critical trends within the Marxist tradition) to show how institutions were “shaped by the power matrix” (*ibid.*, 503); how this translated into conceptual distinctions between “permitted (or “normal”) worlds and un-permitted (or “abnormal”) ones” (*ibid.*, 484); and how the direct and indirect expressions of power relate to the social forms and roles of knowledge. These suggestions prefigured Gouldner’s later work on intellectuals and their specific claims and paths to power. More generally speaking, his book can – despite its lack of conceptual rigor and its thoroughly obsolete perspective on world politics – to some extent be read as a forerunner of more effective attacks on functionalism and its image of society. And although the post-Communist Westernization of Russia (such as it is) was spearheaded by other forces, drew on other models and unfolded in a very different context, a comparison with Gouldner’s version of the convergence scenario may still be useful. The market utopia that served to entrench a born-again oligarchy had something in common with functionalist visions of order.

Gouldner’s book was an early and influential example of dissent from the sociological mainstream. For a representative statement of criticism from the conservative side, it seems best to turn to a book published fourteen years later by the German sociologist Friedrich Tenbruck (1984). As he tried to show, the success story of sociology – and of the social



sciences more general – had less to do with the growth of knowledge than with the spread of a secular religion of which they had become privileged exponents, and the essentials of which were common to the Western social sciences and their Marxist-Leninist rival. For Tenbruck, the core of this secular religion was “the age-old dream of a predictable world that would be liberated from the concern with an uncertain future” (ibid.), but this utopian vision had now been translated into the model of a “wholly calculable law-like order of events” (ibid.). The final outcome was what Tenbruck called the “expropriation of action,” degrading the human subject to a mere epiphenomenon of external conditions or circumstances.

Tenbruck’s idea of a sociological viewpoint beyond the converging conformisms of East and West was very different from Gouldner’s: it was defined with direct reference to the classical (and more particularly German) sociology of culture, and in sharp contrast to the sociocentric reductionism that had prevailed in twentieth-century sociology. As Tenbruck saw it, the functionalist conception of culture was only a watered-down version of the basis-superstructure model (a programming code was still a subordinate part of a larger system); against this cross-ideological current, he pleaded for a stronger emphasis on culture as a meta-world of symbolic meanings, within which the domains of world, self and society are constituted and redefined in varying ways. The idea of culture as a self-interpretation of the human condition, adumbrated by some of the sociological classics but abandoned by their system-building successors, was to be brought back in; it led – among other things – to an insightful re-interpretation of Max Weber’s work. Although Tenbruck’s understanding of Weber was circumscribed by a theory of religious evolution, his writings (especially Tenbruck 1979) played a decisive role in shifting the focus of debates on Weber towards the comparative analysis of civilizations and their cultural traditions.

The cultural perspective can also help to clarify the questions raised by Tenbruck’s indictment of sociology. With the wisdom of hindsight, it is easy to observe that it was published at the very moment when it was becoming obsolete: in light of developments during the 1980s and 1990s, it seems clear that if there is such a thing as a Marxism-Leninism of Western societies, it is not sociology in any shape or form – it is the streamlined ideology that has crystallized around the academic discipline of economics. On the other hand, the search for an elementary form of secular religion seems to have been on the right track. The implicit world-view which Tenbruck denounced has been targeted by other critics, and it is perhaps better understood in other terms: it is, to cut a long story very short, identical with the cultural orientation which Castoriadis described as a vision of the unlimited expansion of rational mastery. As such, it is translatable into a wide range of theoretical models and

ideological programs – including mutually hostile ones; it has continuously and variously influenced the development of the social sciences; but it has not found a privileged or definitive expression in sociology. It would make more sense to write the history of the discipline as a record of interaction between this persistent and protean trend and the multiple countercurrents which it has provoked.

### **Capitalism at Large and in All Shapes**

I have briefly recapitulated some unorthodox visions of the bipolar world, as seen through the sociological lens; they should be taken into account when the classical sources mentioned above are brought to bear on contemporary problems. The juxtapositions of radical and conservative critiques highlights both the breadth and the fragmentation of the intellectual spectrum in question. To sum it up very briefly, the examples cited point to clearly distinct but perhaps not mutually exclusive tasks: the reactivation of classical ideas of culture and the reformulation of an inherently self-questioning project of critique. It remains to be seen whether a plausible connection can be established between them. But the next step is to return to the issue of comparative perspectives after the demise of systemic alternatives.

Since the belief in a uniform and irresistible logic of capitalism is central to the claims of those who see global unity as the final and now imminent destination of modernity, the counter-argument for a more open-minded comparativist approach should begin with the question of the varieties of capitalism. With regard to the new frontier of capitalism in the former Soviet bloc, the most incisive analysis has been developed by Ivan Szelenyi and his associates. As they see it, the “historical laboratory” of Eastern and Central Europe is giving birth to new types of capitalism, rather than importing an invariant model or adapting to uniform global pressures. Using ideal-typical concepts to pinpoint the contrasts, they distinguish between “capitalists without capitalism” and “capitalism without capitalists” (Eyal et al. 2003; for a more detailed analysis, see Eyal et al. 1998). The former pattern is characteristic of Russia and to some extent of Southeastern Europe; its key feature is the accumulation of property by former officials of the party-state, without a corresponding consolidation of market institutions. The latter is a central European, or more precisely East Central European phenomenon (Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic are the prime cases in point). Here the core market institutions developed more quickly than any domestic economic elites. The driving and dominant force of the transition was “a coalition of technocrats, former dissident intellectuals, and members of the educated middle management of socialist enterprise” (Eyal et al. 2003). Political

power (or political capital, to use the term preferred by the authors) was less important as a convertible resource than it was in Russia, but the neo-liberal ideology that held the coalition together was more authentic and articulate, and it translated into more systematic institution-building. Notwithstanding the ideological emphasis on property, the transformation of property rights lagged behind the market framework, with the result that managerial power (backed up by the state) gained wide scope and could at a later stage ally with foreign investors. When it comes to details, this analysis must of course – as the authors admit – allow for qualifications and intermediate patterns between the ideal-typical extremes. But the main point seems clear: different relationships between economic elites and economic institutions give rise to divergent forms of capitalism, with corresponding (at least incipient) paths of development; and these differences are linked to different patterns of exit from Communism, as well as to the ideological blueprints for transition.

The theoretical lesson to be drawn from these developments is a return to “the Weberian concept of capitalism, a comparative approach that conceptualizes capitalism as a *plurality* of forms and destinations” (Eyal et al. 2003). As the authors note, this line of argument must side with Weber against Weber: his outline of a typology of capitalisms, mainly concerned with past historical patterns, should be expanded into the present and set against his vision of a universal and definitive modern capitalist form of economic life. But the comparative study of post-Communist variants can also be linked to Western debates on the “varieties of capitalism” during the 1990s (although the authors do not seem to have taken any interest in this connection). In the Western context, the contrasts between Anglo-American capitalism on the one hand, German and/or Japanese capitalism on the other, were – for obvious reasons – at the centre of the discussion, and the analysis of different trajectories was at first intertwined with the search for superior models. More recent contributions have moved towards a more autonomously analytical focus (see Crouch and Streeck 1996; Streeck and Yamamura 2001; and for a significantly different approach, Hall and Soskice 2001). But a closer contact between the two fields of comparative study – the advanced capitalisms of North America, Western Europe and East Asia, and the emerging capitalisms of the post-Communist world – would open up new perspectives and provide new arguments against the ideologies of global conformism. This is all the more obvious if China is added to the picture. The Chinese question is of very major importance to all domains of comparative social inquiry, but it is beyond the scope of the present paper; it may, however, be noted in passing that the emerging configuration differs significantly from the two patterns mentioned above. A party-state which preserves the

monopoly of political power, as well as the economic controls necessary to ensure the stability of the political centre is at the same time trying – with some success – to apply a whole spectrum of strategies of limited capitalist development. Autonomous entrepreneurship is encouraged up to a point; foreign investment plays an increasingly important role; but formally “socialist” enterprises, both at central and at local levels, have also entered the capitalist arena.

### **Unsettled Modernity: Another View from Central Europe**

Szelenyi and his associates have made a powerful case for the pluralistic concept of capitalism – and for a comparative analytical use of it – in the most challenging and currently most heavily mythologized field (the “transitological” approach has, to say the least, not been a very fruitful exercise). Their work reinforces a more general idea of capitalism as a variable component of modern constellations. The following discussion will take this for granted and move on to consider broader theoretical implications of the argument – not necessarily those that are most important to the authors, but with some reference to their concerns. Eastern Europe is, as they note, a “historical laboratory”; but it is also, and for that very reason, a privileged site for theoretical reflection. Here I will primarily deal with questions and perspectives that emerge from the East Central European context, seen in relation to the broader horizons of global modernity. It has often been claimed – and shown in some detail – that Central European experiences have a particular bearing on the problematic of modernity. Here the main focus will be on the eastern part of the region, with particular reference to its Communist and post-Communist trajectory.

It seems appropriate to begin with the exceptionally salient role of the intellectuals. As Szelenyi and his associates (Eyal et al. 2003) argue, “origins, trajectories and, above all, class actors, matter a great deal” in shaping the course of history, and they propose to analyze the successive projects as well as the changing self-images of the intelligentsia in that context. Both the use of the term “class” (with a mixture of Marxian and Weberian connotations) and the specific description of the intellectuals as a cultural bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*) raise far-reaching questions which cannot be discussed here. But the claim that the East Central European intelligentsia has had a decisive and defining part in modernizing offensives is well-founded. It can be linked to more detailed accounts of the social history of the region (especially Stokes 1997), where the liberal, statist and revolutionary projects of the intelligentsia are seen as aspects of a complex interplay of social forces, with significant variations from country to country. However, this does not alter the fact

that for more than a century, several generations of the intelligentsia – characterized by enduring structural features – have played key roles in the coalitions which implemented different projects of modernity. There is no Western European parallel to this contrast between the continuity of major collective actors and the discontinuity of their cultural models. This point can, furthermore, be linked to other distinctive aspects of the region's recent history, such as the strength of statist visions of development. Although this tradition has been stronger in some countries than others its overall importance is obvious enough for some historians (especially Janos 2000) to treat it as a defining and unifying factor. On that view, the strategies of the intelligentsia reflect an underlying structural logic: they articulate and exploit the historical and geopolitical rationale for statism (the permanent but variously perceived problem of backwardness with regard to the West), but also the inevitable resistance to it, and the latter stance can take self-contradictory turns which end up in resurgent or even radicalized versions of statist policies. The problematic thus defined in terms of actors and structures is grounded in a long-term historical constellation that has – from the early modern phase onwards – set East Central Europe apart from neighboring areas. Its key aspect was perhaps most memorably identified by one of the most lucid and courageous political thinkers of the region, Istvan Bibo: in a seminal essay on “the distress of the East European small states,” first published in 1946, he singled out divergent but interconnected processes of state and nation formation as the main determinants of a trajectory that had led to a catastrophe for the whole European state system. The fall of the three “deep-rooted historical states, Poland, Hungary and Bohemia” (Bibo 1991: 23), had paved the way for the expansion and consolidation of imperial power, but had not obliterated the national identities linked to the defunct political centers. The Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires were involved in the destruction of the historical states and gained control of the vacated space; imperial Germany was a latecomer to the field, but its brief ascendancy upset the regional balance more thoroughly than any earlier developments had done. Its particularly explosive impact was – among other things – due to a fusion of national and imperial ambitions. This path, which ended in the uniquely destructive de-civilizing project of National Socialism, was not open to the older empires.

Bibo's line of argument was not geared to an unconditional defense of renascent nations against empires. He was acutely conscious of the deforming effects which the whole constellation had had on national identities and sensibilities, and his aim was to explore ways of transcending both sides of the legacy: the bankrupt imperial visions and the neurotic nationalisms. But he was writing on the eve of a historical upheaval

which transformed the region in ways very different from what he had envisaged. In retrospect, the Soviet model must be seen as a mutant offshoot of imperial traditions, but it presented itself as a revolutionary negation of imperialism and at the same time as a universalistic alternative to nationalism, and its appeal – varying but never negligible – in the countries formerly subject to Habsburg and Ottoman rule was partly due to this twofold claim. Its postwar victory was, however, a result of geopolitical shifts on a larger scale and did not lead to a stable or coherent form of modernity. There are good reasons to characterize the Soviet model in general as a fundamentally unbalanced and incoherent pattern; its inbuilt problems became particularly acute and visible in the context of the dependent East European periphery; and the three core countries of East Central Europe – Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary – were the most refractory part of the Soviet bloc. This applies most obviously to the Polish pattern of permanent tension between party-state and society. But although the radical reformist phase in Czechoslovakia did not last long, it was the culminating outcome of a movement that had been gathering strength for some time, and the shadow of 1968 made the post-invasion regime the most thoroughly illegitimate one in the whole Soviet bloc. As for Hungary, the asymmetric compromise between regime and society after 1956 was adaptable enough for the country to take the lead in dismantling East European Communism in 1989. In short, the regional version of Communist modernity was a peculiarly unsettled one, and although the party-state model was imposed from outside, its practical record resembled earlier phases at least in the sense that it prolonged a state of acute tension. Unsettled modernity seems an appropriate label for this long-term historical experience; this is not to say that there were no significant attempts to create more coherent and viable patterns (the first Czechoslovak republic was perhaps the most impressive), but the overall picture was marked by enduring instability. It would be more than premature to claim that the post-Communist transformations have overcome this legacy. While some traditional causes of instability have disappeared, the contrast between post-1989 visions of rapid return to liberal-democratic “normalcy” and the emerging realities of a new type of dependent development must be seen as a likely source of persistent problems. The critical analyses of post-Communist capitalism, quoted above, lend further support to this view. But further changes will unfold in the context of European integration.

### **Historicity and Modernity**

The unsettled character of modernity in East Central Europe reflects the *longue durée* of regional history. As suggested above, two interrelated aspects – the contest between imperial and national projects, and the

permanent problem of backwardness (or at least uncertain parity) in relation to Western Europe – have been characteristic of otherwise different phases. Communism was the most ambitious and for that very reason the most conclusively abortive attempt to catch up with the West through an alternative model of development; but it can also be seen as the last variant of the imperial tradition, and this combination fits the long-term regional pattern. Here I will not pursue the historical questions further; the aim is, rather, to use the constellation described above as a background to reflection on general problems which relate directly to the self-understanding and the aspirations of sociology.

The above argument placed a strong emphasis on historical settings of social transformations; it is therefore a convenient entry to the debate on ways and means to reintegrate history and sociology. The revival and recognition of historical sociology during the last three decades have to some extent reversed an earlier trend (described by Norbert Elias as the retreat of sociology into the present), but there are still unresolved questions about the meaning of this new turn. In a retrospect on the first wave of historical sociology, Craig Calhoun (1997) distinguished between two very different interpretations: should we see the new field of inquiry as another branch of the discipline, to be tackled by specialists and institutionalized alongside other subdivisions, or as an opening to a general rethinking of sociology and its tasks? Calhoun argued for the second option, but thought the first one had so far prevailed; historical sociology had been “domesticated” in a way that obscured its critical and innovative potential. This diagnosis seems as pertinent now as at the time when it was written. The historical dimension of sociological analysis has yet to be fully acknowledged and articulated. Closer reading of the classics – especially Marx, Weber and Durkheim – has shown how central the historical perspectives are to their work. In that sense, they represent a model to be emulated. But the “retreat into the present” is more than a tacit or spontaneous reorientation of social research. It has found a less transparent theoretical expression in the distinction between modernity and tradition, as applied in mainstream modernization theory and to some extent reaffirmed in later theories of modernity. When this dichotomy hardens into a strict and definitive separation of two historical worlds, it may be seen as a way to construct an enlarged but still self-contained present. Conversely, efforts to relativize the distinction between tradition and modernity will – as the more critical re-theorizing projects have shown – tend to highlight the long-term historical sources, but also the historical contingency and diversity of modern constellations. This line of thought would seem to be the most decisive way to reconnect sociological and historical analysis at the level of fundamental problems. Here the classics

are of limited use: their conceptions of modernity are too one-sided, dated and undeveloped for a direct return to be possible. A contemporary frame of reference is needed, and the most plausible proposal of that kind is the emerging paradigm of “multiple modernities.”

In the most general sense, the distinction between modernity and tradition should be seen as a case of the “double hermeneutic” that has now become familiar to social theorists. A polarizing interpretation is first articulated in the context of socio-cultural self-understanding – the self-defining constitution of modernity – and then translated into theoretical models. However, the whole interpretive complex is superimposed on and conditioned by historical constellations: traditions are reconstructed in relation and response to modern transformations, but against a historical background that differs from case to case and affects the interplay of legacies and innovations. The conceptual separation of tradition and modernity is questionable on general grounds, but its apparent plausibility in key cases is due to historical factors which gave relatively free rein to the dynamics of transformative forces, such as capitalist development, the bureaucratization and democratization of the state, and the intellectualization of culture. This constellation is more characteristic of the Western core – on both sides of the Atlantic – than of any other region. Its structural logic is reflected in the standard accounts and models of economic, political and cultural modernization, as well as in the widely accepted narratives of a past build-up which culminated in the “two revolutions,” industrial and democratic. At a more sophisticated theoretical level, the same historical experience is the main empirical basis for interpretations of modernity as a sequence of patterns; the most sustained argument of this kind, Peter Wagner’s analysis of the trajectory from restricted liberal to organized modernity and beyond (Wagner 1994), is primarily a reconstructive history of Western modernity, with more tentative claims as to parallels in Eastern Europe.

The East Central European experience, as briefly outlined above, does not fit this model. It is better described in terms of successive configurations, less coherent and much less organically linked across historical divides than in the West, and superimposed on a self-perpetuating condition of instability which has undermined one version of modernity after another. Although the theoretical approach adumbrated here is not geared to strong predictions, the implications of the long-term perspective are clear enough to justify caution in regard to post-Communist visions of order and progress reconciled. At the same time, this regional record exemplifies a more general point: the *differential historicity* of modern constellations. They are without exception shaped by historical contexts and processes, but the presence of history within the patterns of modernity can take different



forms. As I have argued, the distinctively unsettled character of East Central European modernity goes far beyond the mobility that may be seen as a defining feature of modernity in general; in view of the abrupt, radical and often catastrophic shifts from one social regime to another, we can also speak of alternating modernities. Similar perspectives, with variants due to changing contexts, may be suggested for other parts of the former Communist world. In Russia, both continuities due to the survival of imperial traditions in a new guise and discontinuities due to revolutionary transformations set the whole Soviet phase apart from contemporary Western forms of organized modernity. As for China, it can be argued that the extreme fragility and recurrent self-destructivity of its modernizing ventures (including the Communist episode) reflect the dynamic of an intercivilizational conflict that began when the Chinese empire collided with stronger Western powers and is still in progress.

These varying imprints of history are obvious reasons for adopting the framework of “multiple modernities.” But the whole field in question can also be viewed in light of a less developed complementary idea: the notion of “entangled modernities,” used by those who insist on the mutually formative links between multiple patterns, is a keyword for interconnections and combinations of the kind less familiar to mainstream modernization theory. In the East Central European case, the analysis of entanglements would begin with the multi-secular historical experience of backwardness in relation to the West, and with the changing mixtures of borrowings and inventions that have been proposed as solutions to that problem. It would also deal with the regional impact of imperial formations and rivalries rooted elsewhere. Finally, the regional adaptations of ideologies imported (or even imposed) from other parts of the world and derived from other historical sources are worth closer examination from this angle. In that context, a brief return to the above discussion of Gouldner’s and Tenbruck’s ideas may be useful. Their diagnoses of ideological affinities across the Cold War divide were important to their respective attempts to change the dominant orientations of sociological thought; and although developments after 1990 have deviated very markedly from their scenarios, the underlying *problématiques* are still relevant to the post-Communist patterns of ideological entanglement. Gouldner’s prognosis of an explicit functionalist turn in Soviet and Soviet-style social thought, without any political or ideological upheaval, has not been fulfilled, but in a more general sense, the prevalent trends of post-Communist ideology bear some resemblance to his expectations. The visions of radical restructuring through the combined institutional mechanisms of market and democracy are variations on a well-known ideological theme: the reconciliation of order and progress. Functionalist images of society have traditionally been

used to back up such projects, and they can remain operative when the more elaborate theoretical superstructures are abandoned. The architects and ideologists of post-Communist transitions have drawn intellectual substance from Western economics rather than Western sociology. But the attitudes reflected in their arguments were also reminiscent of the past which they set out to bury. The social engineering that was supposed to guarantee a rapid entry into the mainstream of capitalist development had obvious affinities with the defunct mythology of planning. This entanglement with the Marxist-Leninist legacy was characteristic of the whole ex-Soviet bloc, but with different accents in specific regional settings. Ernest Gellner compared the Russian version of “shock therapy” to the *phantasies* of War Communism; in East Central Europe, the planned restoration of capitalism was very closely associated with the vision of a “return to Europe,” but this idea was in some key cases put forward in terms reminiscent of “Great Leap” strategies. The common thrust of these “transitological” utopias is unmistakably akin to the beliefs and aspirations which Tenbruck saw as sustaining partners of the social sciences. His main emphasis was on an underlying ideology which had taken a more extreme and therefore more revealing form in Marxist-Leninist doctrines than in any Western schools of thought. As events have now shown, the Marxist-Leninist model was also much more fragile than the half-baked Western versions; in that sense, Tenbruck’s diagnosis is no less obviously dated than Gouldner’s. But if we read his argument as an attempt to reconstruct a secular religion at its most elementary level, it is still relevant to the unexpected turn of history in the last decade of the twentieth century. Instead of Western social thought drifting closer to Marxist-Leninist positions (as Tenbruck and some other observers expected), estranged heirs of Marxism-Leninism adopted a particularly streamlined version of liberalism and became during the 1990s the most unconditional devotees of a secular religion that had been active on both sides of the divide but more adaptable in the Western context.

### **The Critique of Modernity: Retreat and Reorientation**

To conclude this discussion, the idea of sociology as a critique of modernity – or at least a possible foundation for such a critique – should be reconsidered in light of the comparative and historical perspectives that I have outlined. The emphasis on varieties of modernity and their different historical destinies is, at first sight, not easily compatible with critical intentions: a pluralistic and comparative turn calls for a more clearly value-neutral idea of modernity, and strong normative orientations can no longer be secured at the level of basic concepts. Further questions about the meaning and rationale of critique arise from the historical context

of the above reflections. The demise of Communism as an alternative modernity with global ambitions was not only a fatal blow to movements and ideologies that had combined a critique of the West with illusions about its main rival. In less obvious ways, it weakened intellectual currents critical of both sides but indirectly or adventitiously linked to the same sources as the defeated one. For reasons both internal and external to the theoretical frameworks, critical versions of the Marxian tradition proved vulnerable to changes accompanying the end of the bipolar world – however hostile they had been to “real socialism,” they found it difficult to cope with the vacuum which it left behind. This is not a valid reason to rule out any future reactivation of critical potentials in Marxian thought. They might take on new meanings in new contexts; but for the time being, Marxian models have lost much of their former appeal. Both the predicament of Marxian critique and the question of alternatives to it should, furthermore, be considered from the East Central European angle which has been central to the whole argument. During the Communist period, the region in question was characterized by stronger cultures of dissent than any other part of the Soviet bloc, and they included distinctive versions of critical Marxism. After 1968, this dissident Marxist tradition – and the corresponding reform Communist strategies – lost credibility, but although it gave way to more unreservedly liberal views, the shift was often accompanied by attempts to maintain and broaden critical perspectives on modernity. But the critical stance was to all intents and purposes abandoned when the protagonists of this reorientation had power thrust upon them by an exhausted adversary. The atrophy of the critical imagination in the first post-Communist phase has been noted by many observers. There is no reason to believe that this is the end of the story, but the record so far is a forceful reminder of the uncertainties inherent in critical projects.

There is, in short, a compelling case for re-examining the very idea of critique, the arguments on behalf of rival versions, and the role of critical perspectives in sociological analysis. It is relatively easy to rule some alternatives out of court. If the critique of modernity is to mean the quest for an alternative modernity, in the strong sense of a different global pattern that would definitively transcend the inbuilt conflicts and dissonances of an existing one, then we can only quote Husserl’s verdict on the idea of philosophy as a rigorous science: the dream has come to an end (*der Traum ist ausgeträumt*). If it means the kind of critique built into universalistic theories of the one and only “main pattern” (Parsons), i.e. a general claim to diagnose the one-sided, unbalanced or otherwise defective variants, and to prescribe the proper remedies, it is open to the objections that have undermined the *unilinearist* version of modernization

theory: it ignores the diversity of both paths to and patterns of modernity. If the idea of critique boils down to the vague injunction that sociologists should seek to identify social problems and propose solutions to them, it may help to secure the institutional survival of the discipline, but there is no specific connection with the sociological understanding of modernity. Gouldner's idea of "reflexive sociology" as a mode of critique was hardly more than a variant of this view, formulated in a context – the situation of the late 1960s – where it seemed imperative to defend the critical imagination against the conformist pressures of different but to some extent mutually adaptable models. The critical stance did not translate into any comprehensive rethinking of modernity. Finally, the revival of classical insights into the autonomy of culture (exemplified by Tenbruck's work) is only a preparatory step. If the results are to go beyond conservative detachment, a closer analysis of the cultural constitution and differentiation of modernity is needed.

To clarify other possibilities, an excursus on conceptual history may be useful. Reinhardt Koselleck has traced the modern idea of critique back to the eighteenth century; as he argues, it grows out of the tensions and conflicts between the mislabeled "absolutist state" and the limiting factors which it has to recognize and cannot help strengthening in the course of its very attempts to bring them under control. It presupposes a "division of historical reality into spheres of morality and politics" and is sustained by a "process launched by the intellectual stratum of the emergent society against the State" (Koselleck 1988: 101-02). It has an a priori affinity with the idea of progress: "progress became the *modus vivendi* of criticism," and the link is strengthened by the experience that "thinking in terms of pro and con stretches to infinity" (ibid., 109, 108). As Koselleck sees it, Kant was the first to bring this process to an end – through a critique that culminated in an analysis of the inescapable antinomies of sovereign reason. Koselleck does not elaborate on nineteenth-century metamorphoses of the idea of critique, but work done by his associates (especially Röttgers 1982) has highlighted the emergence of a new concept of critique in the Young Hegelian milieu (Hegel's own mature philosophical system had not placed a strong emphasis on the idea of critique). A new interpretation of the relationship between theory and practice and an emphatic reference to human self-realization culminated in the Marxian redefinition of critique, which for a long time overshadowed the Kantian version.

If it is the case (as the author of the above-mentioned article argues) that all relevant conceptions of critique move within the intellectual space demarcated by Kant and Marx, it may be suggested – a detailed statement is beyond the scope of the present paper – that the current historical phase calls for a return to Kant, in a specific sense that links up with Koselleck's

thesis. It would seem to be the focus on antinomies that best defines the task of a post-Marxist and meta-liberal critique. It goes without saying that a sociological understanding of antinomies presupposes the irreversible de-transcendentalizing turn of philosophical reflection: the concept can therefore no longer be used in the technical Kantian sense. But it refers, in a looser sense, to paradoxically intertwined – mutually constitutive and at the same time irreducibly conflictual – logics at work within a shared historical pattern.

In this sense, antinomies of modernity are a central but underdeveloped theme of classical sociology. Such a view is implicit in Durkheim's analyses of the individualizing process in modern societies; it is conducive to new kinds of morality and solidarity, and it lends a new meaning to the sacred, but it also gives rise to anomie and to the pathologies of infinite desire. However, Max Weber's work is – in this regard as in many others – the *locus classicus* par excellence, and it also exemplifies two levels of the problematic: those of cultural orientations and institutional orders. Only a combination of both will add up to a sociological analysis of the antinomies of modernity. The theme of antinomian cultural orientations is more familiar: in Weber's version, it has to do with the modern quest for radical autonomy resulting in a loss of freedom through the progress of rationality, and with the attempts to defend some measure of autonomy being dependent on the creativity (charisma in Weber's terms) that is at the same time threatened by the ascendancy of rationality. The question of institutional orders or spheres and their antinomian interrelations is even less developed, and Weber's treatment of it suffers from lack of clear demarcation between modern and premodern patterns (this is most obvious in his arguably richest and most insightful text, known in English as "Religious rejections of the world and their directions" (Weber 1977)). But the two levels are interrelated: the institutional orders (*Weltordnungen*, world orders, as Weber also describes them) and their totalizing logics would not be complete without their respective models of rationality and images of human autonomy. We might speak of a *polarizing* and a *pluralizing* articulation of the antinomies of modernity. In the latter case, the antinomian aspect consists in the fact that the spheres (the economic and the political, but also the scientific and the aesthetic, as well as others) are interdependent and at the same time bearers of rival totalizing logics and visions of the world.

Weber's analysis, however incomplete, is still a useful starting-point for a new round of discussion. But both levels of the problematic will now have to be interpreted in more general and more differentiated terms. Here I can only indicate the main directions of a more up-to-date approach and signal connections with the historical and regional

contexts of the argument. At the most general level, the problematic of modern antinomies can be linked to the question of modernity as a civilization (this is, by the same token, also a way to link the redefined idea of critique to the rediscovered autonomy of culture). This line of inquiry has been pursued by S.N. Eisenstadt (see especially Eisenstadt 2001). It is still very much a matter of debate whether modernity should be analyzed as a civilization in the sense applicable to premodern formations, or as a new type of civilizational formation; but irrespective of that issue, it seems clear that a civilizational frame of reference will broaden our perspectives on the antinomies of modernity beyond the partial views of earlier sociological theory. A brief aside on autonomy may serve as a first sample of the field to be explored. The antinomies of the modern visions of human autonomy begin with the fact that they are – by definition – articulated in a strongly affirmative language, antagonistic to traditions and conducive to hubristic projections, but on the other hand open to rival interpretations and divergent ideological adaptations. More specific and derivative conflicts centre on the relationship between autonomy and rational mastery (autonomy is inseparable from the pursuit of mastery, but also from the reflexive resistance to absorption into the strategies and apparatuses that embody the logic of mastery), as well as the permanently unsettled question of individual and collective dimensions of autonomy. These contrasts have to do with the level of cultural orientations. On the institutional plane, we must now draw some lessons from the post-Weberian century of secular religions and ideological conflicts. The short twentieth century has – far beyond what Weber could imagine – revealed the plurality of interpretive, utopian and ideological constructs associated with each sphere, and the antagonisms between their respective visions of autonomy.

A second level of analysis would link up with the emerging paradigm of “multiple modernities”: the varying overall patterns of modernity represent different ways and degrees of partial containment, selective radicalization or imaginary overcoming of the antinomies of modernity. For present purposes, the most instructive case in point is the alternative modernity whose failure and collapse has – as suggested above – thrown new light on a whole range of central theoretical problems. The Soviet model can be interpreted as a project – unevenly articulated and variously adapted by the elites and organizations that implemented it – to transcend the conflicts and dissonances characteristic of Western modernity and symptomatic of underlying antinomies. This claim was built into basic institutions; at the ideological level, it was most openly formulated with reference to the “contradictions of capitalism” which were to be overcome by a superior economic system; but closer analysis of implicit structural principles shows

that parallel patterns emerged in relation to Western models of democracy and science. As the Communist version of modernity crystallized and expanded, the supposedly neutralized antinomies reappeared in more acutely destructive forms. But the shadow of the failed project seems to have survived into the post-Communist phase: the holistic and harmonizing visions of a liberal-democratic order were presented as instant alternatives to the defunct totalitarian one, but the search for a radical and definitive solution was – in spirit – reminiscent of the rejected past. The strategists and publicists of transition have been quick to blame the legacy of Communism for unforeseen setbacks, but less willing to admit that this background might have left its mark on their own projects.

Finally, the question of modernity's civilizational dimensions – and alternative definitions of them – is particularly salient in the East Central European context. This was the region where the Soviet version of modernity was most directly confronted with Western conditions (unequally developed but to some extent present in all the countries in question). The half-century of Soviet rule was the result of an upheaval brought about by a third force, the fascist counter-revolution against Western modernity, which had a particularly destructive impact on this part of Europe. It was an exile from East Central Europe who first identified fascism – and National Socialism in particular – as a “war against the West.” But the attempt to translate victory over fascism into assimilation of the whole region had to be abandoned: the impossibility of in-depth Sovietization was apparent at an earlier stage than elsewhere in the bloc. In response to the acute tensions between imposed regimes and resistant societies, critics and reformers made sustained efforts to remodel the Communist project. East Central Europe was the home ground of reform Communism. The legacy of this political counterculture was of some importance to the post-Marxist dissent of the 1970s and 1980s, but it does – to say the least – not loom large in post-Communist collective memory. The militantly Westernizing turn after 1989 is another twist to the regional pattern of unsettled modernity.

As I have argued, reflections on sociological theory – more particularly on problems inherited from the classics and central to ongoing debates – could benefit from closer contact with the interpretation of recent and contemporary history. The theory of modernity must pay attention to the unfolding destinies of really existing modernities, including the less viable ones. But as the case of Communism and the multiple exits from it shows, long-term historical perspectives are also relevant to the understanding of current trends and seemingly abrupt transformations. To sum up, social theory and comparative history need each other for mutual information, as well as for protection against the danger of disciplinary closure.

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# The Decline of the Social

ALAIN TOURAINE

## ABSTRACT

It is impossible to define sociology other than by reference to ill-defined entities like society or the social. Nevertheless, it seems necessary nowadays to ask the question explicitly, whether these referents have relevant meaningful contents. The idea of society has been profoundly reformist or reforming. Wherever the political system has become open and more complex, and state intervention in economic life has expanded, the field of sociology itself has expanded to the point where we can speak of the triumph of a sociological vision of the world. Industrial society was a complete historical construction, defined by a morality, a philosophy of history and various forms of solidarity. The idea of society was never more closely associated with those of production and social justice. Now, we no longer live our collective life in purely “social” terms nor expect social answers to our problems. The decomposition of the idea of society, set off by the fragmentation of the world in which that idea developed, got worse. The current predominance of the theme of globalization has been accelerating the decline of the “social” representation of public life. The time has come to reconstruct sociology, no longer on the basis of what we thought was a definition of the social and of society, but on the basis of the explosion of those ensembles which had been thought to be solid, and of the attempts to reconstruct the space in which subjects can reconstitute a fabric of consensus, compromise and conflict.

It appears to be impossible to define sociology other than by reference to ill-defined entities like society or the social. Nevertheless, it seems necessary nowadays to ask the question explicitly, whether these referents have relevant meaningful contents. Some people might look for other definitions

of sociology, whilst retaining the same word; but it seems to me both less ambitious and more realistic for us to ask ourselves, within the context of the sociological discourse and beyond, what is the meaning of the “social”? At times it seems that the word itself is meaningless, and that the word “society” is only a weaker equivalent to the word “state.” For example, discussing Australian society could in fact be paralleled to discussing Australia. The problematization of such references becomes clear when we consider Australia the continent and Australia the state. Likewise, when we speak of Australian society, we mean to focus our analysis on the central political institutions of that society and not anything else. Nevertheless, we can take this analysis a step further. The notion of society is useful – indispensable, even – when we think of the different components/sectors that comprise the life of a collective and have common aspects which are more important and thus supersede the opposing dimensions within the same collective.

Turning, for example, to nineteenth-century English society, the central components I wish to focus on are industrialization, the labor movement, colonial empires, class relations, the political regime, the educational system. These terms have enough common features and orientations for the word “English” in the expression “English society” to be a direct reference to the unity of the society under consideration. More concretely, it seems to me, when addressing English society we denote that the different aspects or elements of this ensemble are combined together by *political* mechanisms in the broadest sense of the term – that is, by consensus, compromises and conflicts between social actors who thus become political actors. It is the strength of this political process, be it more or less formalized, centralized, or diversified, which constitutes what we call “society.” It is precisely because of the existence of an English state, of a “United Kingdom,” that we can speak of British society. In an even narrower sense, we have long defined a society, at least in the modern world, by the manner in which the State deals with relations between employers and employees, upper and lower categories. Where these classes or categories are completely opposed to one another, we hesitate to speak of societies; just as we do in colonized countries where there appears to be no integration between the colonized country and the colonizing power.

It is no coincidence that public opinion, whether in a spirit of praise or blame, has often related sociology to socialism – or, more precisely, to social democracy, that is considered the democratic form of socialism which can, under different political pressures, become revolutionary. In light of the latter example, we can stipulate that the idea of society has been, and still is, profoundly reformist (or reforming, if the former terminology is still pejorative for some). Wherever the political system has become open and

more complex, and state intervention in economic life has expanded, the field of sociology itself has expanded to the point where, at a certain moment, we can speak of the triumph of a sociological vision of the world. To be more precise, this moment of triumph can be historically situated in the period following WWII at the time when nation states almost everywhere, although very diverse among themselves, worked out programs of *modernization* which were at the same time economic, social and national, under the pressure of social and national forces. Programs which translated into a plurality of forms were called *development*. A word that was defined more by the past than by the present and in itself conjures a plethora of meanings: the creation of society from unconnected elements, external dominating forces and legacies both social and cultural.

What often prevents us from recognizing the central importance of these observations is that we choose an opposite point of departure, which in fact corresponds better to the origins of industrialization: the social or political rupture which brings a new society to life. It is true that there is never any important economic transformation without the destruction of social, cultural, religious, familial or other forces which used to control and regulate the economy. This rupture is what constitutes capitalism. The first European countries to enter the industrial society followed a very capitalist way of modernization; but from WWI onwards the socialist idea imposed its presence on a large part of the world in opposition to the capitalist powers: in socialist or communist countries, a domineering logic which was both political and ideological crushed the logic of capitalism. The world appeared divided between the masters of the economy and those who mobilized the “masses,” and above all the demands of workers in the service of voluntarist objectives, passionately supported by the great variety of groups fighting against “money.” During a large part of the twentieth century this confrontation between the capitalist camp and the socialist or communist camp preoccupied world politics. Condemnation and contempt were heaped on every attempt to find a less unilateral solution.

Nevertheless, extreme solutions, even if occupying a central place in this analysis, have been implemented to a far lesser degree. Do any properly socialist economies exist? In communist countries we witness a more bureaucratic, technocratic or ideological way of managing the state. One would have to be naïve to think that the Soviet economy was at the service of the Russian people. On the same scale, it is difficult to be convinced by propaganda campaigns which, since the late seventies, have sought to convince us that opening up exchanges and internationalizing production and trade can resolve all the problems of economic and social life. This directly leads us to a study of the institutionalization of conflicts and to the search for the meaningful content of “social” and “society.”

During the first period of industrialization, from the eighteenth century to the First World War, Europe and the countries closely associated with its economy experienced neither the triumph of uncontrolled capitalism nor the omnipotence of voluntarist states. These societies lived through open, violent conflicts between the owners of capital, organized labor and the state. From one country to another the relative weight of each of these players *varied*. It was in Germany that state intervention took place earliest, because the principal task of the new German state was to make Germany into a great power. On the other hand, it was in Great Britain that the idea of industrial democracy took hold and emerged. In the United States and France, the state intervened in the economy at a later period, due to their preoccupation with more principal tasks; In France, the struggle against the Catholic Church, and in the United States, the occupation of national territory and the integration of immigrants. These differences, important as they are, do not detract from the fact that everywhere the state intervened in work relations that were themselves deeply marked by class struggle. The salience of class struggle is a point of emphasis – that is, the organization of employers and workers as central actors in social and political life. This general type of labor relations led to the attribution of social terms to the economy. Nevertheless, the broad definition of the “social” narrowed quickly. During the first generation, trade unionists dominated parties of the social democratic type; but fairly quickly, in the second stage, the parties won out against the unions. In the third stage, economic internationalization limited yet further the autonomy of these actors who can properly be called social. For all that, employers were not completely dominated by government, and no labor organization completely gave up the class struggle. In every case, social democracy was a conscious effort to simultaneously stop the class struggle from getting out of hand, yet not to suppress it altogether. During the twenties the social democratic idea was even reinforced by the unions’ frequent enthusiastic acceptance of rationalization and “scientific management” as one of the elements which strengthened their action. It was in the Soviet Union under Lenin’s influence that Taylorism and Fordism were received with the greatest enthusiasm, as techniques which would increase the efficiency of the economy and the well-being of the Stakhanovites themselves. But it was in Germany that the transformation of union’s ideas, visible in all the industrialized countries, was pushed furthest as a result of in-depth debates on the relationship between unionist policies and the modernization of the economy.

After the Second World War, a new type of social democracy appeared that was conceived more as a collection of economic and social policies than as a desire to enlarge the scope of collective negotiations. Whether we

speak of French-style indicative planning, of German *Sozialmarktwirtschaft*, or of the British model of Welfare State, we can see in the post war period the progress of the idea that social democratic politics ought to be a central element in the reconstruction of Europe. That reconstruction itself was defined, from the years of the European Coal and Steel Community onwards, as an economic and social project, based on the state, employers and unions, and thus capable of uniting a vigorous capitalism with a labor movement which was powerful everywhere, and with states convinced of the necessity for the social partners to negotiate with each other. The idea of development, acclaimed by all, was defined by the interdependence of economic growth and social well-being. For policies of development, production, distribution, education and the tax system were complementary means to associate economic efficiency and social justice. Development programs also referred to the theme of national integration. The policies defined by these three goals gained the upper hand throughout most of the world, as much in democratic societies as non-democratic ones. Soviet-type regimes sought to be at once modernizing, national and working-class societies. Countries born of decolonization and inspired by ideas expressed by the non-aligned countries at Bandoeng developed another type of solution, in which the idea of the nation occupied a central place. In Latin America what we know as “national-popular” regimes succeeded in broadening their social base and developing an urban economy adapting to the world; they also reinforced national awareness, although this did not prevent such national-popular regimes from maintaining the gulf which separates participation from exclusion, and well-being from poverty or destitution. But it was western Europe, with the larger Commonwealth countries, which proved to be the principal zone of application for social democratic ideas. The United States, which had an orientation analogous to that of Europe during the New Deal, was the only region of the world to keep its distance from this dominant model, except during the Johnson presidency. Admittedly the history of all these countries could be presented differently, with the emphasis on alternative aspects of their respective transformations. But the common feature of most of the countries at that time was a self-image in which all the various component parts were heavily interdependent.

The above discussion leads us to the following question: how did this model of the political creation of societies, which dominated our world for half a century, come to break down?

The collapse of this “social” model of modernization was the result of the separation of its three main components: (1) The industrial society and, more widely, a society based on production, of which social democracy was one of the main political expressions. (2) The suppression of the controls

and regulations that political society imposed on it. In other words, the return to extreme capitalism, to economic activity liberated from – or deprived of – all social control, destroyed the mode of development where political, economic and social forces were considered interdependent. (3) Finally, the withdrawal of the state into itself, abandoning its role as the central agent in national development, led to the juxtaposition of a heavily state-supported public sector and of a much larger private sector, a large part of which was exposed to accelerated economic change without any protection from the central power.

This general model of development, defined by the combination of economic growth and social progress belonged more broadly to industrial society, and more broadly still to the type of society which organized itself around forms and problems of work and production. The principal actors in social democratic regimes, already named – unions, employers, the state – were all defined by their economic role in labor relations. The combination of economic growth and social progress could not have been recognized as a central goal of a society which defined itself by its mode of production and its forms of organization and consumption, that is, in broader terms of a society which can be called a society of production. The strength of social democratic policies is that they took shape in societies which considered themselves the result of their own production relationships and of their ability constantly to promote new technologies.

In this type of society – from which we are exiting only now – the policies of big business, the political influence of employers and unions, the management regulation of markets, expounded problems of work, employment, wages, etc., as the foreground of choices to be made. Moreover, Industrial society was a complete historical construction, defined by an individual morality, a philosophy of history and various forms of solidarity. It sought, above all, to be a society rather than an economy, state or even a nation.

Nowadays, because we live in a dense and rapidly-changing technological environment, we forget that the classical industrial society, where sociology took shape, was much less a society of mechanization than of management, where the work situation was defined above all else in terms of social relations. It is no coincidence that the emblematic figures of the industrial society, Taylor and Ford in particular, were managers, not technologists. The examples Taylor chose to show meant to illustrate the advantages of scientific management, such as, for instance, a man who carries a bricklayer. These examples, however, had little to do with mechanization whereas Fordism extended these early preoccupations to the level of workshops and factories. Scientific management could be defined as the



invasion of workers' occupational autonomy (particularly that of skilled workers) by technicians who studied the time and motions of work which could produce the maximum profit for the employers. The central importance given to the notion of "working class" derives from the fact that it meant, at once, an occupational category, a social status, and a major actor in social conflicts. There is no doubt that social democracy was a political force, nevertheless, one which defined itself above all else by its action in favor of the working class, understood in its broadest sense. It sought the union of economic growth and social progress because it wanted to create a society based on the workers, on science and on a drive for social justice. It defined the citizen as a worker, and defended his social rights and political rights at the same time.

This central importance given to social notions in social democratic countries contrasts with the communist idea that a proletarian state could rationalize the whole of social activities. The word "society" was used in the "west" in its full sense: social functions and forms of power were considered attributes of a society, not a political regime.

At the same time, the main social participants – entrepreneurs, capitalists, workers, or social policies makers were better defined by their social status than by their professional characteristics. Never in our history were we more completely defined by our *social* characteristics. At no other moment were we thought of in more *social* terms than during industrial society. And the idea of society was never more closely associated with those of production and social justice. Social democracy was first and foremost the management of social conflict and the struggle against workers' poverty by means of the close association of these objectives, the search for technical efficiency and recourse to the law. Hence, the highly fertile ambivalence in our attitudes towards social democracy.

For many, social democracy sought to be an industrial society in the service of progress and justice but was often also accused of succumbing to capitalism. Nineteenth-century observers favorable to the labor movement coined the expression "social movement." The fact that the expression is in the singular is highly significant, since it implies that collective action by workers and the movement of historical progress are two sides of the same story; the story of work, a notion which is more central in industrial society than that of money – which, on the contrary, had had a more important place in the first modern societies, and which were more commercial than industrial. When the English Fabians talked about industrial democracy in the late nineteenth century, they indicated (as clearly as did the communists who were just starting to appear) that political and social policies ought to give power and freedom to the workers, since they were the most

productive of all citizens; they were entitled to lead political society by virtue of their role as producers of economic goods and services.

Until our days, certain countries, regions, towns, have borne this social democratic vision of social relationships more than others. Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden, remain social democratic countries where opposition between parties is supposed to represent the conflict between classes, where state intervention not only protects the sick, the unemployed, the elderly and the unfortunate, but where there also exists wide support of these political and social choices. It is in these social democratic countries too that women have achieved considerable access to power and that solidarity with the oppressed of the world is felt most intensely.

The main industrial countries give their workers and economic organizations a central place in their axis of self-representation as in their social and political life. Workers' claims, at all levels, from slow down in the workshop to political struggle for the redistribution of the national product were inspired by the consciousness of the central role of labor conflicts. This homogeneity in the social and political field has disappeared. We still claim the right to participate, by our work and by our income, in an economic existence which is more and more internationalized, but at the same time, we claim the right to be different – that is, to keep alive the maintenance or the rediscovery of our heritage and our cultural choices. We do not define ourselves in the same way in the order of means and the order of ends. Many of us find it more and more difficult to put up with having to choose between integrating into a globalized economy and defending a language, a religion or a mode of social relationships. Those who consider equality and difference to be contradictory (and they are still very numerous) live in a state of suffering or revolt. But few of us still ascribe a central role to work activity and social relations of production like we did in industrial societies.

Social phenomena should no longer be analyzed in the light of only one image of social life. The failure of social democracy is inseparable from that expressed in Durkheim's work, which sought to explain the social purely by reference to the social. We no longer live our political life – and, more broadly, our collective life – in purely “social” terms. Society is a notion which slips through our fingers like sand, when we thought it was as solid as concrete! We no longer expect primarily social answers to our problems, because they are not only social but equally often technological, economic, military or cultural.

The decomposition of the idea of society, set off by the fragmentation of the world in which that idea developed, got worse, and became fatal, when the following idea spread as if along a trail of gunpowder: We cannot choose our future, our political choices are empty because right and left are

equally powerless and dominated by the global economy the functioning of which cannot be controlled by national authority. Social democracy rested on the strength of national politics, on the concrete effects of state interventions which were themselves based on organized labor and on a lively political society. The new discourse about globalization is at the opposite pole of the discourse on social democratic politics. Recognizing the complexity and unpredictability of markets is incompatible with voluntarist politics. Since the mid-eighties, the current predominance of the theme of globalization has been accelerating the decline of the “social” representation of public life.

The theme of European construction, which was more social democratic than liberal, is also losing much of its drive: Its object is above all to bring down barriers and especially to bring the economies of the former communist countries into the European Union; our main leaders are more concerned with this enlargement than with improving the status of workers’ rights, or with making education a measure of reducing inequality rather than a measure that increases it.

Economic leaders no longer insist, as they did in the heyday of social democracy and the European social model, on the social and political determinants of economic growth. Quite the contrary: they only talk about reducing social charges and diminishing the weight of the state. We hear of few people involved in helping to eradicate poverty and see far more preoccupation with stock options, mergers worth billions and the fall of certain stocks in the market, in particular in the new technology and telecommunications sector.

Of course, it is unimaginable that the extreme liberalism’s obtrusive domination will last very long, nevertheless, the abrogation of relations between the economy and society has already been accomplished – at least sufficiently enough to have rid contemporary reality of any reference to the idea of society as the principal framework of all analysis. This is why Europe, still so marked by its social democratic tradition, is more and more silent, has only a limited capacity to take initiatives, and seems to be devoting itself above all else to the problems involved in its management of itself. If we pick up the capitalist idea *par excellence* that in times of greatest difficulty the economy ought to make itself more independent of all kinds of social and political pressures, that it ought not to concern itself with integration, solidarity and the struggle against inequality, that what it needs above all is investment in new and more profitable sectors, we must recognize that the pendulum has swung to its extreme in the direction of extreme liberalism.

The rise of liberal ideology has been accompanied by a critique of the state, of the excessive weight of its tax burden and of its limited

effectiveness. Indeed, practically every category of the population is dissatisfied with the interventionist state. In all countries inequality is increasing and a large part of the population has the painful feeling of being deprived of the fruits of growth, of being excluded from this modernity which the advertisers praise so obsessively. At the upper limit of society, a new elite of entrepreneurs and financiers prefer the risk and profits of finance capitalism to the management of industrial capital and is getting exponentially stronger and more predominant.

This accumulation of discontents might lead the state to re-examine its role, but there are only a few groups, themselves very much in the minority, who contemplate new forms that state intervention could take. A direct switch from old forms of state intervention to new ones seems impossible, and in the majority of countries the social democratic inheritance is declining or has already been destroyed. This failure stems not only from the dissatisfaction of categories at the top or bottom of society, but also from the fact that the state has become the property of its own employees who often manage to get unnecessary activities maintained, or who oppose the modernization of the state apparatus. The defense of vested interests is often associated with a very radical ideology which helps to defend privileges.

This decomposition of society, and hence of the concept around which sociology was organized for so long, makes it difficult to continue referring to the idea of social movements, at least not without heavily revising the meaning we give to that notion. It has been important, as long as it has referred to relationships and conflicts associated with our economic life. Some commentators have tried to avoid this difficulty by giving the expression an extremely vague meaning, talking about *the social movement* as the sum of all collective action, extra or para-institutional, as if that exteriority was enough to define the social movements category of collective actors as a whole, although they have always been very different from one another. Such lax usage gives equally meager results whether it is given a tone of protest or reduced to the analysis of marginality.

If we want to preserve the essence of the concept, which is the idea of societal conflicts (calling into question the *social use* of systems of knowledge, accumulation and morality by which any collectivity operates upon itself, its organization, production and change) we have to recognize that the conflicts which have developed in the recent period are deeply different from those which achieved their greatest force in industrial societies. This is just as much the case for religious or ethnic movements as it is for the women's movement or "moral" protest in general.

We can see these strong tendencies towards the dissociation of the economic domain from the cultural domain in every part of the world.

This is the consequence, or the logical expression, of what I have called the decline of the “social.”

This means that we have to look for a principle of unity in whose name movements, which are no longer really social, act. If the idea of the *subject* has come back to life, despite its death being so often announced and prepared for, it is because it has been defined precisely by the individual and collective search for something which binds economic activity and cultural orientations together. Such a combination is not at all impossible. After all, economic activity is of the order of means while cultural orientations are of the order of ends and it is arbitrary to think that ends and means, or even values and norms, are always entirely bound to each other. It is dangerous to claim the right to difference, since this right would destroy itself in the fragmentation of the collective which claims for it. Yet, we can claim our right to combine participation and difference, economic integration and cultural identity.

It is my contention that this last reflection on social movements, however brief, indicates one of the ways in which sociology can survive the decline of the “social” view of collective life and even the destruction of the idea of society. The idea of the social movement, in which we must include the institutional guarantees those movements demand and obtain, could be substituted for the idea of society as it was defined at the beginning of this paper. On the one hand, societies are falling apart: military forces, membership of a religion, technical revolutions carry on with less and less reference to, or connection with, other aspects of social life. And at the other extreme of observable behaviours, we can see that they are more and more associated with unconscious phenomena, or with psychological mechanisms of various kinds, which mean that consumption in its broadest sense cannot be reduced to quantitative data. What is there in common between the world of beliefs and wars and the world of desire? Not much, maybe nothing at all. On the other hand, in no man’s land, that social void which has expanded immeasurably, strategies of reconstruction appear, or constantly strengthen and transform themselves. Reconstruction of society, should we say? Here it would probably be wiser to return to another term which is just as canonical, that of institutions – but understood as the shaping, juridical or otherwise, of guarantees obtained by subjects in order to fight against being dismembered or buried under all the different forms of violence. Perhaps the time has come to reconstruct the ensemble of analyses and interpretations which we call sociology, no longer on the basis of what we thought was a definition of the social and of society, but on the basis of the explosion of those ensembles which had been thought to be solid, and – even more important – of the attempts by individual and collective players to reconstruct the space in which their quality as subjects

can avoid disaster and reconstitute a fabric of consensus, compromise and conflict.

# Sociology as a Science of Culture: Linguistic Pluralism in Australia and Belarus

JERZY J. SMOLICZ AND MARGARET J. SECOMBE

## ABSTRACT

In the first part of this chapter the pioneering achievements of Thomas Kuhn in natural sciences and of Florian Znaniecki in social sciences are examined and compared. Attention is focused on the fundamental impact that the ideological positions adopted by each has exerted upon our understanding of the way their respective disciplines develop and affect the study of natural and cultural phenomena as distinct aspects of reality. This chapter traces elements of the commonality of their visions, as well as the way both authors have emphasized the distinct and unique characteristics of their particular fields of knowledge. In the second part, Znaniecki's humanistic sociology is applied as a theoretical framework to the study of linguistic pluralism in two multi-ethnic societies – Australia and Belarus. Rather than making a direct comparison of the two linguistic contexts, the aim of the paper is to use that framework to gain insights into these diverse multilingual configurations from the perspective of those actively involved in them.

## Introduction

This paper wants to illustrate the application of a sociological approach that starts from a humanistic approach in the choice of research fields and research motivations, but which also emphasizes, in the collection of data and their analysis, the importance of valid scientific criteria. In the first section we examine the pioneering achievements of Florian Znaniecki

in social sciences, and then apply his humanistic sociology framework to the study of linguistic pluralism in two multi-ethnic societies – Australia and Belarus. The aim is to use that framework to gain insights into these different multilingual configurations from the perspective of those actively involved in them. In each case, we focus then on the study of national and ethnic cultural systems in the broadest sense – ideological, linguistic, as well as social (Znaniiecki 1968).

### **Znaniiecki's Approach**

Florian Znaniiecki (1968:viii), a philosopher and social psychologist, turned sociologist, has championed a strongly anti-positivistic approach to the study of “cultural sciences,” emphasizing the need “to accept human values and activities as facts, just as human agents themselves accept them.” Although a respected figure in American and Polish sociology between the wars, his humanistic sociological school based upon memoirs, personal documents and collections of life histories, was largely swept away from the mainstream of American sociology by the behaviorist tide that gathered pace in the 1940's. Following the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), a number of social scientists, who looked up to natural sciences as guidelines for the future development of their disciplines, were only too happy to welcome Kuhn's work as virtually forecasting their “scientific” future and the eventual emergence of social scientific paradigms. Kuhn himself always insisted that his paradigm was applicable only to natural sciences, but it took little time for a plethora of works to appear, unaware of or disregarding Znaniiecki's insistence on the dependence of their fields of knowledge on human consciousness, and to propose “paradigms” in far wide-ranging realms of human endeavor, including sociology, psychology, ethnology, politics, economics, and even fertility and forestry (Harvey 1973; Heyl 1975; Zambrzycka-Kunachowicz 1992).

The different nature of conceptual frameworks in politics, sociology and other social sciences from Kuhnian paradigms has been discussed over the years, with at least some authors pointing to the deceptive similarity between the rivalries and lack of agreement about fundamentals to be found in social sciences and the situation that prevailed in the natural sciences (Smolicz 1970, 1971, 1998:283-308). Yet, this did not prevent a number of sociologists from trying to quicken the transition of their discipline to quantitative methodological approaches that became so fashionable during the supremacy of the behaviorist ideology with its associated survey research method. Such “methodological orthodoxy” eventually began to “thaw,” however, as sociologists became again interested in empirically-grounded theory construction other than the



survey. One of the most devastating critiques of behaviorist dominance was delivered by Bauman (1975:27). This new climate ushered in a renewed appreciation of ideas embedded in “humanistic sociology.” The starting point of the study of cultural and social phenomena, it was now increasingly agreed upon, requires a methodology that is different from that of natural sciences, and that is based on what Weber called “*verstehen*,” and Znaniecki’s (1968:177-182) “imaginative reconstruction.”

Znaniecki’s underlying assumption is that human beings can never be regarded as organisms or as “natural entities” in any psychological or biological sense. Znaniecki’s conception of sociological enquiry is founded upon the essential autonomy of culture from the world of both material objects and subjective mentality. Independence from the latter world was particularly stressed because the threat of dissolving the cultural in the psychological was perceived as most acute (Znaniecki 1963:134). Znaniecki upholds the independent existence of cultural data “in their own right” although, that existence is of a different kind from that typical of the material objects found in the natural world. Thus, cultural data can be regarded as objective in their own sense. Bauman (1973:115) has expressed similar sentiments when he argued that “culture [is] a reality in itself, different from both the ‘hard,’ material constituents of the human world and its ‘soft,’ mental, introspective data.” Bauman’s comments reveal that Znaniecki’s concept of humanistic sociology anticipated many of the concerns of latter day sociologists like Bourdieu and Habermas (White 1988:106).

Znaniecki’s humanistic sociology has left a profound impact upon Polish sociology. Stanislaw Ossowski, in particular, continued to stress that the distinctive characteristic of the phenomena of culture lay in its analytical connection to human consciousness (Ossowski 1967:343). Humanistic sociology imposes a specific structure upon nature (Mokrzycki 1969, 1971) by viewing each item with what Znaniecki (1968:37) termed the *humanistic coefficient*. Znaniecki (1968:41) differentiated between natural objects or “things” – and cultural objects or “values.” The distinction between a value and a thing carries with it no implication as to objectivity or subjectivity. A value is as objective (or subjective) as a thing, for a meaning (like a content) can be experienced an infinite number of times by an indefinite number of individuals. The full meaning of a value, however, can only be understood by finding the role which it plays in a wider system of cultural values (Znaniecki 1968:176).

Following Znaniecki (1963:267), we take the ideological system as referring to the group’s “standards of values and norms of conduct,” or the principles of judgment and ways of acting which members are supposed to accept and abide by. Such core values are often linguistic because of

the nexus between the group's identity and its native tongue (Smolicz & Secombe 1989; Smolicz, Secombe & Hudson 2001). The ideological system generally acts as the evaluating agent for other items of culture and for structuring both the individual's and the group's social systems.

Scientific paradigms may be regarded as ideological systems *par excellence* in the way they guide the work of scientists in the areas to which they relate. Scientific paradigms, however, are replaced when they cease to be useful for the practice of "normal science." In the sphere of culture, on the other hand, breaks with tradition may be more protracted and never entirely complete, so that participants are often not fully aware of the implications of changes for the interpretation of their heritage. Since most established societies have had many different pasts, with varying interpretations of them, it is the ideological orientation of those living today that determines which aspects from the past and which interpretations become the traditions of the present. It follows, according to Znaniecki's humanistic sociological framework, that each ethnic group has its own more or less unique set of cultural value systems, such as political, economic, religious, ideological and linguistic. These are referred to as group cultural systems to distinguish them from personal systems of cultural values which individual members construct for themselves to meet their special situation in life. The concept of personal cultural system recognizes that individuals do have an influence upon their own destiny. Their actions and thoughts are influenced by their personal characteristics and their previous life experiences. However, personal choice can be exercised only in particular cultural contexts, involving the extant personal systems of other persons and ultimately the values of the cultural groups which impact upon the lives of the individuals concerned. Znaniecki himself did not make a clear distinction between group and personal value systems; in most instances he refers to an individual's propensity to activate the value system of the group. The concept of personal cultural system was found, however, of great assistance in providing theoretical expression and practical recognition of conscious activity of human agents in selecting values from the group stock and organizing them into a system which suits their own particular purposes and interests (Smolicz 1979, 1998).

The values that constitute the group's ideological system are in a state of dynamic equilibrium with the corresponding attitudes to be found in individuals' personal ideological systems. Furthermore, these attitudes supply the connective link between ideology and action, with attitudes viewed as individuals' potential for a particular course of action, and tendencies as its actual manifestation. Only those attitudes which individuals have successfully incorporated into their personal systems can ultimately be activated into tendencies in the course of their daily life.

In this way humanistic sociology identifies an interdependent sequence, composed of values in a group system, attitudes in a personal system and individual actions in the concrete world.

In some instances, a lack of complementarity can be observed between what individuals perceive as, in principle, worthwhile group values and their own attitudes on a particular point, leading to a possible divergence between individuals' attitudes and the group's corresponding values. Moreover, it is to distinguish between "ideational attitudes" which are never directly translated into actions and "realistic attitudes" which find their expression as tendencies in the performance of actions (Znaniecki 1968:57-61, 1963:133). In order to understand the nature of such tendencies, one must distinguish between their primary or "initial" manifestation as an attitude, which leads individuals to construct a personal linguistic system and the subsequent or "continuing" tendency for on-going activation. The interaction between members of different ethnic groups in a multicultural society augments the dynamic interplay among values, attitudes and tendencies to action by creating opportunities for individuals to access the values of more than one group. The application of these concepts to the experiences of individuals in a plural society helps to highlight the subtle complexity of choices that individuals can make in multilingual context. In ethnically plural societies minority ethnic individuals are usually presented with two or more sets of group cultural values. Where a plural society adopts a multicultural perspective, however, members of the dominant group may also be given the opportunity to enter into social relationships with other ethnic groups and to make use of those minority cultural values that they may find useful or attractive for their own personal cultural system construction.

From among the various types of personal cultural systems that individuals can build in a plural society, we may distinguish between those that are culturally *homogenous* – i.e. derived from one ethnic source, be it that of the dominant group or that of one of the minorities, or *heterogenous* which assumes that a degree of interaction is taking place between different cultures. In the latter case, it is possible to consider the process of interaction taking place in two ways. The first represents the coalescence of values drawn from the two or more cultural systems in varying proportions, to form a new type of system, namely, *synthesis* or *hybrid solution*. The second way is through the formation of a dual system of cultural values in which two components co-exist within individuals and are activated by them in different social and cultural contexts labeled as *dual system* or *co-existence solution*. All these variants of personal cultural systems are evident in the approaches being adopted by a number of countries, including those which, although overwhelmingly culturally plural, frequently still opt for *dominant*

*monism*, preferring to maintain the myth of cultural uniformity under the guise of the dominant cultural group supplying the “authentic” ideological, cultural and linguistic values for the “nation-state” as a whole.

The adoption of a synthesis type solution at society level has been advocated by countries where the terminology of “integration” has often acted as a euphemism for assimilation. The form of *hybrid monism* that it breeds heralds an uniformity that is essentially a copy of the majority group’s culture, except for minor culinary and folkloric additives that are deemed to “enrich” the society and facilitate the absorption of minorities. The inapplicability of the synthesis solution to the diverse linguistic systems in modern societies under the impact of globalization is demonstrated by the seeming impossibility of amalgamating Greek, Spanish or Chinese with English, with the result that where English is dominant, it emerges as the only language of significance in a supposedly “hybrid” societal outcome. The dual system solution, since it takes place within individuals, can be labeled as *internal cultural pluralism* at a societal level. It is clearly the most appropriate form of pluralism in the case of linguistic diversity, since it enables individuals with bilingual personal systems to live in a society where linguistic pluralism is the preferred ideology. This distinguishes it clearly from *separatist* outcomes, which may be regarded as those of *external cultural pluralism*, where different ethnic individuals adhere to their own cultural and linguistic traditions so that interaction with members of other groups within the same state is peripheral and spasmodic, or completely non-existent. In theory at least, such a model of patterns of cultural interaction implies that the individuals concerned can draw upon a variety of cultural stocks in constructing their own personal systems and that there are no barriers to such construction.

It is thus our contention that Znaniecki’s humanistic sociological concepts have proved to be most useful in the systematic investigation of linguistic transmission and cultural dynamism in ethnically plural societies. The study of such phenomena from the perspective of those participating in them requires a method that allows the researcher to collect data from the participants’ point of view, by minimizing external influences on the data gathering process. Znaniecki’s own favored method involved the analysis of memoirs, as well as personal documents such as letters and diaries. The memoir approach became the hallmark of Znaniecki’s school of humanistic sociology, beginning with *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Thomas & Znaniecki 1927). It reached the apogee of its popularity in inter-war Polish sociological research; it survived the period of communism (Dulczewski 1986; Kwilecki & Czarnocki 1989) and, following the total collapse of this ideological straight-jacket in 1989, enjoyed a revival, as exemplified in the work of Antonina Kloskowska (2000) and Elzbieta Halas (1991, 2000).

Ideally the memoir method gives individuals free expression of their ideas, thoughts, feelings and aspirations, in reflecting upon themselves, their situation as they see it, and their actions within it. The researcher's active involvement with the data begins with the stage of analysis for the purpose of interpreting the participants' actions and situations with the humanistic co-efficient – as they appear to the human individuals who actually experience them (Halas 1985). Znaniecki argued that personal documents give direct access to the consciousness of individuals and hence to the distinctively human dynamic in social and cultural life. They provide the means by which a researcher, as well as other readers, can vicariously share the experiences of the respondents. Weber defined this process as *verstehen*, while Znaniecki referred to it as *imaginative reconstruction*. In reading such personal accounts, the researcher is able to reconstruct the writers' experiences, thoughts, emotions and ideas and thus see the world as it appears to them, through their eyes.

Moreover, individual attitudes are in dialectical interaction with group cultural values in such a way that one individual's personal world is “not merely his inner isolated world, but also represents the world of meanings and values of his social milieu, especially of those groups with which he is connected by primary group relations.” This means that if we, as researchers, “are in possession of empirical data about the language of meanings and values of single individuals we can draw conclusions and formulate opinions about the social groups of which those individuals are members” (Dulczewski 1982:80; see also more recently Kloskowska 1996:466-67, 2000). The process of “interpretive understanding” extends beyond memoirs and can be applied to public, historical and demographic materials related to the social, political and economic context of the respondents.

The application of this method to historical and public documents was found to be invaluable in the studies of languages and cultures in the two settings analyzed in the following – Australia, and Belarus. But whereas in Australia memoir research formed the basis of the investigations, in the case of Belarus the authors did not find it possible to carry out any empirical investigations and were obliged to make use of the reports and data which were made available to them. In *Australia* the diversity to be found among the indigenous people, augmented by the great influx of immigrants from around the world, has resulted in the presence of over 200 languages being spoken in 2001 (Trewin 2001; Clyne & Kipp 2002). Empirical investigations based upon memoirs and personal statements have been conducted on the languages and cultures of some one dozen ethnic groups over the past three and a half decades. Language shift, as well as ethnic linguistic tenacity, and the factors which influence these processes,

including the majority Anglo-Celtic-Australian group's changing attitudes to pluralism, represent a complex mosaic of linguistic, cultural and social interactions.

This humanistic sociological perspective has been applied in a modified form to linguistic pluralism in *Belarus*. The national language after centuries of subordination to the languages of more powerful neighbors, and a brief period of official recognition, has once again been subjected to governmental denigration and public disdain. Since the collection of personal documents from people living under an authoritarian government was impossible, the humanistic sociological approach was applied to the study of official documents, such as census data, ministerial statements, official educational statistics and circulars, press articles and such empirical data as could be gathered from the collaborating scholars in Belarus and Poland or from the few papers to be found in the published literature.

### **Australian Minority Languages under Assimilation and Multiculturalism**

#### *The components of multiculturalism*

Over the relatively brief period of its history since European colonization, Australian society has experienced most of the ideological orientations outlined above and recently reviewed in more detail by Smolicz & Secombe (2003). Our research studies provided evidence of the effect of these ideological orientations on the linguistic systems of young people of minority background. The respondents in the Australian studies were mainly young people who had arrived in South Australia at a very young age or been born there to immigrant parents from Italian, Greek, Latvian, Polish, Dutch, Welsh, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, and Cambodian backgrounds and had gone on to university studies. They either wrote or orally recorded memoirs concerning their linguistic experiences at home, school and university. These research studies were undertaken over a span of three decades (Chiro & Smolicz 1997; Hughes 1994; Smolicz, Lee, Murugaian & Secombe 1990; Smolicz & Secombe 1981, 1986, 1989; Smolicz, Yiv & Secombe 2003). During this time Australian language policy changed from dominant monism, which assumed that all immigrants from "foreign" language backgrounds would linguistically assimilate to the point of using English only, to multicultural policies which adopted a number of strategies to support what came to be called the "Languages of Australia" (for those of indigenous origin) and "Community Languages other than English" (for those of minority immigrant groups). The memoir statements were analysed with special reference to the extent of minority language activation revealed; evidence of the effect of changing language

education policies; and the ideological attitudes expressed to minority languages by ethnic minority and majority group respondents.

In the case of all groups, the memoir data illustrate, in terms of personal life experiences, the census statistics from 1976 to 2001, which show the decline of minority language activation and the corresponding shift to English at varying rates among different ethnic groups (Clyne 1982, 1991; Clyne & Kipp 1997, 2002). In addition, the comments made show how the respondents felt about their personal linguistic systems. Respondents from all the research groups revealed that their use of their personal cultural systems in their home language in the Australian context was more limited than their parents.' They were very much aware of the greater extent and frequency in activation of their English linguistic system, which incorporated both oral and written skills learned at school. In all groups there were some who had constructed personal linguistic systems only in English, as was the case with two Indian respondents who considered that English fulfilled all their communication needs. They saw "no need" or "no point" in learning their parents' ethnic tongue in Australia (Smolicz & Secombe 1989:501). Another respondent rejected Tamil as antithetical to her Christian beliefs (Smolicz, Lee, Murugaian & Secombe 1990).

However, a number of respondents, especially in the earlier groups investigated, indicated that their personal cultural systems in their home language was limited to listening and speaking in the family domain. They were unable to read and write in their ethnic tongue – a limitation they became increasingly aware of as their English linguistic systems developed more and more through their schooling. Many respondents who had not learned their parental tongue, or had no literacy skills in it, expressed regret or concern at their lack of knowledge, like the Welsh-Australian respondent who was "ashamed" that he could not speak Welsh better (Smolicz & Secombe 1989:494), or the Chinese girl who felt it was "silly to be Chinese" and unable to speak the language (Smolicz & Secombe 1989:496). A number of Italian and Polish origin respondents from the early studies claimed, like a Greek-Australian girl, that they "would have gladly studied" their home language if it had been part of the normal school curriculum (Smolicz & Secombe 1986:31). Such comments indicated that their inadequacy in or lack of a home linguistic system was not due to their negative attitude toward it but to their lack of access to the linguistic values of their group.

In a few cases the efforts of parents, often with grandparents, in maintaining the home as a minority language domain had resulted in their children having well developed personal systems, which included the acquisition of literary skills in the home language. For some Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Polish respondents, the achievement of literacy

skills had come with the support of language schools, which throughout the fifties, sixties and early seventies were run outside of normal school hours by the communities concerned, at their own expense and voluntary effort. Personal linguistic systems at this level gave, as one Lithuanian girl expressed it, “some sense of belonging to the group ... identify[ing] with the community” (Smolicz 1995), as well as access to its literary heritage (Smolicz & Secombe 1981).

The positive attitudes toward their home language expressed by many parents and their children, in the ethnic minority, and its concrete reality in the so-called “ethnic schools” which they established, challenged the assimilationist assumption that minority ethnic linguistic transmission would be short-lived and that languages restricted to the domestic domain would rapidly become extinct by choice. This research evidence, together with submissions to government from parents and communities stressing that immigrants who were well integrated nevertheless wished to retain their own linguistic values alongside English, helped to persuade Australian governments to abandon their vision of a mono-ethnic nation state in favor of a multicultural approach (Smolicz 1998). While recognizing the “shared,” “common” or “national” significance of English, state and federal governments began to create opportunities for ethnic language transmission, including the introduction of at least some of the ethnic languages into mainstream schools, the establishment of state run part-time Schools of Languages and the provision of state aid to community-operated ethnic schools (Smolicz & Secombe 2003). In states such as South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, languages other than English which were widely spoken in the community were gradually included as Year 12 subjects counting toward university entrance. In South Australia, Italian was the first to be given this status in 1967, followed by Dutch, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Modern Greek, Latvian, Polish, Hungarian, Vietnamese, Khmer, Croatian and Persian over the next two decades. Through national syllabus and assessment arrangements for community languages among the various state examining authorities, up to thirty different community languages became available to students in most Australian states. Most recently, the first Year 12 syllabuses ever developed in indigenous Australian languages have been introduced in this way.

Fishman (1991, 2001) has argued that the acquisition of literacy is second only to cross-generational language transmission in the importance of arresting language shift. It is accordingly that conferring upon community languages the same status as such established “foreign” languages as French or German, through its recognition as a subject for university entry requirements, has raised the standing of minority ethnic heritage in the eyes of the younger generation growing up in Australia and opened



up for many children of immigrant groups who arrived in the eighties and nineties much greater opportunities to maintain and develop more extensive personal systems in their home languages than had been possible for the earlier arrivals. The memoirs of respondents from groups who arrived during the eighties, such as Poles from the post-Solidarity period and Cambodian refugees, as well as Chinese business immigrants, revealed that they were quick to take advantages of the opportunities that then existed for them to study their home languages up to year 12 level (Smolicz, Yiv & Secombe 2003).

A number of key community languages were also introduced as higher education subjects in at least one of the Australian universities. Among our respondents were a few Chinese, Greek, Italian, Latvian and Polish origin respondents whose personal cultural systems were well developed and more frequently activated because of the university studies they had completed in their home language, either in Australia or in their parental homeland (Smolicz 2002). A Chinese student enrolled for a science degree chose to include Chinese in her studies, because she felt the need to preserve her identity. Another Greek-Australian respondent, who felt that school had developed her English at the expense of her Greek language, returned from an extended visit to Greece “adamant to develop [her] ethnic identity.” She was able to take advantage of the new opportunities at tertiary level and “enrolled in a college that was offering Modern Greek” (Smolicz & Secombe 1986:27).

#### *Ideological Attitudes and Core Values*

In discussing their regret at the inadequacy of their personal linguistic systems in their home language, or their delight in communicating in their home language effectively, many respondents indicated how important their language was for membership and identity within their group. Through comments such as, “Welsh has enriched my life enormously” (Smolicz & Secombe 1989:495); “Tamil supplies me with a significant sense of identity” (Smolicz & Secombe 1989:503); for Greek people, their ethnic language “is viewed as a central part of their self identity” (Smolicz & Secombe 1986:27), they were clearly revealing positive ideological attitudes toward their mother tongue. By repeatedly highlighting the integral link between language, sense of identity and participation as a group member, these extracts provide evidence of the core value status which most of the minority groups in our studies accorded to their language.

The core significance of minority languages in the ideological value system of the group lies in the way it is regarded as necessary for the survival of the group’s culture in its integral and non-residual form, as vital for the members’ social cohesion, creative potential and historical continuity as a group (Smolicz, Secombe & Hudson 2001). In groups

where such ideological attitudes to their language were most evident – among Greek, Polish, Latvian, Vietnamese respondents, for example – the push for cross-generational language transmission and the achievement of literacy skills was strengthened. Recognition of the core value significance of a language for cultural survival does not invariably indicate its high maintenance, however, because of the complexity of factors involved in language transmission. For example, in spite of the renaissance of Welsh in its homeland, Welsh is not being learned by the younger generation in the Australian context because of the cultural overlap with the Anglo-Celtic majority culture as the result of being British, the small and scattered nature of the group, the high frequency of exogamous marriages and the prevailing assumption that Welsh is an outdated linguistic relic in their new homeland (Smolicz & Secombe 1989; Hughes 1994).

While Australia continues to be acclaimed for the success of its multicultural policies and the way it was able to reshape itself as a society, freed from its former assimilation-blinkers, many of the most promising initiatives aimed at deepening multilingualism are not being sustained. The freezing of support for multiculturalism *per se*, and languages education in particular, has not been done through any drastic legislative action, but rather through the cutting of funds allocated for languages teaching in the schools and universities, as well as within the universities themselves and the school systems. In view of the possibility of individuals being able to construct a dual system of linguistic values and of developing their multilingualism alongside the linguistic system of the majority and of other groups, one may wonder why, even in an officially multicultural society such as Australia, minority languages while not formally discounted, are yet once again being treated as unimportant, even dispensable.

An analysis of attitudes and tendencies can be applied to help understand the current state of Australian multiculturalism. Since it has been upheld as an official policy, it could be expected that it would be accepted as an ideological system for the whole of Australia, taken as a cultural group. As a result multicultural values, such as bilingualism, have become available to be incorporated into the personal ideological systems of most Australians, irrespective of whether they would activate such attitudes as tendencies by actually becoming bilingual themselves. Although a small number of our majority group respondents did take this step, many more incorporated multicultural values into their personal ideological systems as attitudes than were able or willing to act in conformity with them.

Public debate over the last decade, however, has demonstrated that many Australians, including some in leading positions in Australian society, have not incorporated multicultural values into their personal ideological

systems (Jupp 2001). Such refusal to incorporate official group ideological values into their personal systems, to the extent of publicly opposing them, may be considered a more serious threat to Australia's official ideological system of multiculturalism than if the individuals concerned had been prepared to internalise such values as ideational attitudes but refused to conform to them in their personal conduct. Indeed, the explicit public rejection, rather than purely personal refusal to activate such values, may ultimately constitute a serious threat to the continuance of Australia's multicultural policy.

### **Belarusian: A Minority National Language?**

Belarus can be considered as one of the most enigmatic countries of Europe which "received" its independence on the break up of the Soviet Empire and accepted it rather reluctantly, with the majority of its population continuing to prefer to view their country as an autonomous part of a larger East Slav super-state. The country's current language policies present a particularly challenging puzzle which can best be understood from a humanistic sociological perspective when people's ideological orientations are compared and contrasted with their actual linguistic practices. It is first necessary, however, to examine Belarus's linguistic heritage against the background of its turbulent history in which it has often been placed at the mercy of its more powerful and vigorous neighbors.

Over the past millennium, Belarus has been polarized between Poland-Lithuania (and their Western Catholic influences) and the Orthodox East, (ultimately represented by Russia). The Slavonic tongue of Belarus – Ruthenian or "old" Belarusian – was the dominant literary language of the political entity of the country that was known as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Engelink 2000). Over the centuries the gentry and a section of the towns people accepted Polish as the language of education and social advancement, alongside Yiddish-speaking Jewish people who were developing their own cultural and linguistic heritage (Cohn-Sherbok 1994). The peasants, speaking an array of Belarusian dialects, remained solidly Orthodox, except for a couple of centuries when, due to Polish efforts, most of their hierarchs were reconciled with Rome while preserving their Byzantine liturgy and customs and constituting the so-called "Uniate" church, until it was incorporated by the Tsarist authorities into the Russian Orthodox Church (Turonek 2001). Virtually all the Central and Eastern European neighbors of Belarus evolved national movements in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by building their national identities on the basis of their native tongues that had been preserved, mostly authentically, by the peasantry and developed by the nascent intelligentsia as the core values of their nationhood (Mironowicz 2001/2). Belarus, which came under Tsarist

rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, missed that chance, with its gentry developing some of the greatest epics in the Polish language, Tsarist officialdom and the Orthodox Church propagating Russian (including a prohibition to publish in Belarusian tongue) and its cities giving rise to some of the most celebrated centers of Jewish religious scholarship in both Hebrew and Yiddish.

At the time of the first World War, the nascent Belarusian republic was too short lived to produce a lasting linguistic impact, although some texts were produced demonstrating the literary presence of Belarusian – a distant echo of its golden age when the father figure of the language, F. Skoryna, wrote his works at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even then, however, the controversy reigned as to whether the language should be written in the Cyrillic or Latin alphabets, with texts in both languages making their appearance. This controversy came to an end with the partition of Belarus between Poland and the Soviet Union by the treaty of Riga in 1922. It was in the early 1920s that Belarusian enjoyed what could be viewed as its “first spring” when under Lenin’s nationality slogan of “socialist in content, national in form,” the communist party of the Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) declared Belarusian as the official language of the Republic in all government and educational institutions (Smolicz & Radzik 2003). In response there was a rapid increase in the use of Belarusian in all public institutions from 20% in 1925 to 80% in 1927. There was a corresponding increase in the use of Belarusian in schools, with 80% of schools claiming it as the language of instruction in 1928. Around the same time (1926) 82% of those people who declared themselves to be Belarusian claimed that Belarusian was their native tongue – this figure included 95% of those living in the countryside and 49% of the city dwellers (Radzik 2002a).

This massive adoption of Belarusian could have been interpreted as a demonstration of the latent presence of the long suppressed personal ideological systems of the people, at last permitted to fully activate their personal systems of Belarusian linguistic values in the public domain. Such an interpretation would be erroneous, however, since, as subsequent events were to demonstrate, no such suppressed ideological systems of Belarusian tongue were evident among a broad cross-section of the population. After a long period of the inferiorization of Belarusian as no more than a village dialect, the intellectual elite of those harboring the hope of its revival was very small. The native Belarusian intellectuals were only beginning to gather strength, anxious to take advantage of the unexpectedly favorable turn of political events, when their aspirations were abruptly dashed by an abrupt reversal in the Soviet language policy that culminated in the Stalinist era of the 1930s. This saw the use of Belarusian becoming

regarded as a sign of nationalist deviationism, the nascent national cultural elite stigmatized and largely liquidated, and Russian language once again restored to its former supremacy. While the methods of russification and sovietization were brutal, a fact that the Belarusian language movement initially rose so unexpectedly and later collapsed so rapidly suggests that Belarusian ideological systems were shallow rooted in the population and that those anxious to build Belarusian national identity on the basis of the Belarusian language were a narrow elite. The origins of the weakness of Belarusian national identity and the supporting ideological systems, can only be understood in the context of Soviet policy of russification and the general deprivation which prevailed in the period of the Stalinist purges in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The cataclysmic events that occurred in Belarus over the two world wars, caused the virtual destruction of the overwhelming majority of the cultural elites of the country – Polish, pre-revolutionary Russian and nascent Belarusian, in addition to the elimination of the majority of Jewish inhabitants, who represented 60% of the city population, during the Holocaust. The Soviet cleansing of “foreign” elites continued well after World War II, while the Belarusian peasants suffered the destruction of their traditional village communities during the ruthlessly enforced collectivization of land during the 1930s-1950s. Tereshkovich (2001:84) labels the latter “the third promulgation of serfdom.”

In consequence, during the post-war period of industrialization and movement of population to the cities, it was the Russians from outside Belarus that had a better chance of settling in the cities than did the Belarusian peasants forcibly tied to the collective farm system. The better educated Russians held important positions in the industrial and educational systems, forming a Russian-Soviet linguistic and cultural environment that became firmly entrenched in the cities and spread throughout the country. Once the rigors of collectivization were relaxed and country people were able to move to the cities, they encountered there no Belarus elite able to introduce them to the national group ideological values. As Radzik (2001:13) has pointed out, the absence of an ethnic Belarusian urban elite made socialism rather than nationalism the vehicle of change.

The sovietization of the ideological systems of the new urban dwellers went hand in hand with their assimilation to the Russian linguistic systems. While for the country as a whole, Belarusian language medium education was still available to half of the student population in 1970-71, there was a marked decline in the number of Belarusian language schools in the cities. By 1986-87, less than a quarter of the schools in the country were left teaching in Belarusian, with the result that BSSR came to be regarded as a

model republic because of the way it had been made to embrace Russian as the language of Soviet socialism (Tereshkovich 2001:86-87). The masterly way in which the Soviet ideological system equated political with linguistic values, rendered Belarusian language as deviant, with plebeian dialects tolerated as a step towards the elevation of the long oppressed peasantry to the socialism-promoting Russian language. In such an ideological climate literary Belarusian was regarded as a museum curiosity at best, with any attempt to teach it more widely at an advanced level firmly crushed as evidence of nationalist deviationism.

When it seemed that all hopes of the revival of Belarusian ideological consciousness among the people was lost for ever, the unexpected rupture of the Soviet Union into its fifteen constituent republics, brought an equally unanticipated “second spring” of apparent national linguistic revival. With scarcely one school teaching in Belarusian remaining in the capital city of Minsk in early 1990, the Belarusian Party leadership, in power at the time (a number of them of Catholic family background) promulgated a law conferring upon the Belarusian language the status of official language in the newly independent country. The hurried and uncoordinated imposition of Belarusian language upon the public institutions long accustomed to all business directives solely in Russian took most people by surprise. In a situation reminiscent of the “first spring” of the 1920s, the education system underwent immediate transition to Belarusian as the language of instruction. In consequence while in 1990/91 there remained but 20.8% of schools using Belarusian as the medium of instruction, by 1994/95 as many as 75.1% of students were attending schools that claimed to be Belarusian medium – the peak of the post-independence advance (Lozka 2002). In the absence of a preparatory explanation and educational resources, the resentment against the new language policy was widespread, although initially tacit, from a population long used to Party dictates. This discontent was seized upon by a maverick new President, who called a referendum on the language question which resulted in a large majority opting to restore Russian as the state’s second co-official language (Kruchkou 2002).

The destruction of Belarusian ideological value systems under Soviet rule was so thorough that any national intelligentsia-inspired Belarusian language revival was in danger of ending in yet another catastrophe. The decline in the proportion of school population admitted into the Belarusian medium schools and classes was as rapid as its former unexpected ascent, down to 24% of the total in 2001-2002 and with the corresponding new enrolments in Belarusian medium schools in the capital Minsk falling to 3.8% (Ministry of Education of Belarus Republic 2001-02:40-43). One might wonder, however, at the ease and rapidity with which the schools

changed the languages of instruction, first from Russian to Belarusian, and then back again.

### **Ideological and Linguistic Values**

The school attendance figures camouflage the complex overlap of ideological and linguistic systems that have prevailed in the country. The statistical data from the 1999 census illuminate the persistent dissonance in the people's self-declared national identity, 'mother tongue' and the language normally spoken in the home. A clear majority of 85.6% among those who identified themselves as Belarusian (four fifths of the country's total) declared Belarusian as their "mother tongue," but only 41.3% stated that they actually used Belarusian as their usual home language.

Dissonance between the declared mother tongue and actual home usage is not unknown in other societies (Khubchandani 1995, 2002). This is highly relevant to Belarus, where Belarusian dialects and Russian mostly form a whole spectrum of overlapping usages and where even those who have mastered either Russian or Belarusian in their literary forms tend to revert to a dialect-dominated variety in their domestic setting. As recent empirical studies on languages spoken in Belarus indicate, most of the countryside continues to stand apart from the city, in terms of both its linguistic and other cultural value systems (Radzik 2002a, 2002b). In the villages, the people's daily lives are pervaded by a whole range of dialects, which are influenced by Russian in their lexicon, although less in their phonetic structure and grammar. For its part, Russian used in the villages has been penetrated by the local dialect systems. Even in the cities, however, the speakers' daily speech is influenced by Belarusian dialect systems, resulting in a mix often referred to as "trescianka" (Siemeszka 1998). Such people usually consider themselves as Russian speakers due to the mutual interpenetration of the two languages, the similarity of their structures, the failure to recognize any dividing line between them, the ease of switching from one system to another and, above all, the incomparably higher status as a language of high culture and social prestige enjoyed by Russian. The need to change to the higher status language that accompanies occupational advance has historically been perceived as virtually predestined. Such a switch, however, had no special effect on the villagers' ideological systems and national consciousness (Smulkowa 1997:601).

The empirical findings together with the census figures and the data on school attendance, demonstrate the complexity of Belarusian ideological systems, with the humanistic sociological perspective highlighting the way that the forces of russification and sovietization have affected people's personal linguistic and political systems, but failed to penetrate the deeper

levels of consciousness, as revealed in their perceptions of “locality” and of “belonging.” In this ideological context, Russian, for all its recognized political power and cultural and social sophistication, has never been accepted by Belarusians as *their own*, in contrast to the core value meaning that it occupies for the Russians themselves (Radzik 2002a, 2002b).

What the combined Russian/Soviet infiltration of the Belarusian consciousness did achieve, however, was the rupture of any sense of historical continuity, by virtually obliterating some four centuries from the country’s past – the period when it enjoyed a high level of cultural activity as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which retained its legal statutes in old Belarusian. The architectural land-marks of that epoch, which have escaped the deliberate Soviet policy of devastation and destruction, remain today to recall the country’s culturally pluralist achievements. This past has now been mostly discarded as “lordly” and essentially foreign-inspired, in favor of group ideological value systems grounded in the plebeian local surroundings and submerged in the regional provincialism of the Republic, perceived as a part of the greater Pan-Slavic entity, and Russian viewed as the repository of high culture encompassing the subordinate regional linguistic variants, including the Belarusian dialectal segment (Smolicz & Radzik 2003).

Another Belarusian ideological phenomenon that needs further analysis is the origin of the resentment which the great majority of the population feels against the narrow circle of the intellectual elite, grouped around the slender national movement and non-government organizations, whose aim is a national renaissance with the Belarusian language as the core value of national identity. One explanation rests in the perception of the “language nationalists,” as not only “odd” or “intellectual pedants,” but possibly foreign-inspired agents who, in their propagation of school instruction in Belarusian, are belittling Belarusian people and keeping them at the village level by precluding them from wider spheres of activity beyond the locality, region and province. In contrast, the Russian language, is accepted and welcomed, because it conveys the image of opening up wider horizons in the social, political and cultural sense. Hence the refusal even to contemplate building personal ideological systems that would bestow positive ideational attitudes upon literary Belarusian. Its rejection as an ideological value does not inhibit, however, the Belarusians from constructing personal linguistic systems which are often dual, Belarusian and Russian, with the Belarusian dialect more frequently activated than Russian in the home and locality domains. As Radzik (2002a) maintains, this domestic linguistic usage is of a routine and “taken for granted” kind, which stops short of any ideological connotation, let alone appreciation of literary Belarusian.



Such consideration may account, at least in part, for the strong opposition to people speaking Belarusian in public, made evident in the open discrimination against such “offenders,” both by the general public and at an official level, including the law courts, with judges mostly unwilling to hear cases in Belarusian – formally a co-official language of the Republic. This hostility may also be traced to the fact that the initial hopes that the post-Soviet democracy would herald a brighter future have turned sour; the declining economy and rising corruption have induced an ideological desire to return to the halcyon days of the late Brezhnev epoch, which now appears as a period of tranquility, comparative wellbeing, relative security and ostensible equality. In contrast, the enthusiasts supporting the revival of literary Belarusian reject the Soviet-type mentality and uniformity and instead pin their hopes on the Western ideals of democracy and market economy, along the lines being followed by their Western and Northern neighbors, such as Poland and the Baltic States. Such pro-Western sentiments put them immediately in opposition to the present rulers of the country and their pro-Russian policies. They also run headlong into confrontation with the majority of the Belarus population, which fears Western influences as demanding of them all those individual and anti-conformist patterns of behavior that they have been taught by their Soviet leaders to reject as alien, destabilizing and dangerous.

While the small circulation Belarusian language press (*Narodnaia Vola*, 2001/2002s) reports some shocking examples of discrimination against Belarusian speakers in hotels, in public transport and restaurants, it is the government’s action, aimed at excluding the young from their grandparents and parents’ language, that bodes least well for the continued transmission of the Belarusian tongue. Appeals of Non-Government Organizations of Belarus (2002) to the General Assembly of UNESCO and other international for a concerning “the catastrophic state of Belarusian language in the electronic media” have so far had no effect on the authorities who are responsible for the elimination of Belarusian from the “visual space” of the country and from “all shops and services, including the labeling of consumer products” (Kruchkou 2002). In this context, the calls of the Belarusian language society for the opening of a Belarusian language medium university have little, if any, hope of success.

Yet all may not be lost for the Belarusian tongue, despite the relentless pressure for its elimination from all aspects of the country’s public life and the authorities’ strenuous efforts to strengthen the negative ideological evaluation of the language. For writers, literary scholars and intellectuals, however small their number, Belarusian remains the vital element of their personal intellectual systems as the language of their national self-

expression, their historical heritage and their cultural distinctiveness and identity. As Maksymiuk (1997:53) points out most worthwhile literature created in Belarus today is almost entirely in the Belarusian language. The paradox of Belarus is that while in the course of their history, the people have grown indifferent or even disdainful of the Belarusian language, demonstrating their refusal to regard it as a value worth incorporating into their personal ideological systems, they have nevertheless continued to nominate it as their “mother tongue,” revealing in this way its symbolic significance for their continued perception of themselves as Belarusians – however provincial or subordinate this may be.

It would seem that humanistic sociological perspective is particularly appropriate to disentangle the complex web of overlapping cultural systems, whereby people who have been taught to despise their own language and discriminate against its advocates, yet continue to make use of its dialectical forms in the home and local setting and view it as the one integral feature of their cultural being that distinguishes them from the dominant neighbour whose language they admire, and yet are unable to accept as their own. As long as that identification persists, and as long as an elite, no matter how tiny, continues to preserve Belarusian as the core value of its identity, an avenue remains open for a possible third and more lasting “spring” and a revival of a language described by the leaders of the Belarusian Writer’s Union and the Belarusian Language Society as “one of the most beautiful Slavonic languages” (Ipatava & Truscau 2002).

### **In Conclusion**

In his classic analysis of sociological models, Inkeles (1964:44) sees their role as

devices for focusing our attention. They point to problems; they suggest relevant data; they imply apparent technique by which the data may be collected and by which they may be analyzed.

They also differ in the extent to which, in a given situation, they may be “useful or useless, stimulating or uninteresting, fruitful or sterile, but not true or false,” a proposition in accord with those adopted by Kuhn and Znaniecki, discussed earlier in this paper. In deciding upon a model to match a particular research project, Inkeles recommends selecting a model that is most “productive” and “capable of generating studies which, one after another, excite us and spur us on in our research.” In the research reported here, the authors’ task was to select an approach that both excited our interest and spurred us on to study the complex and diverse multilingual systems of two countries, with their changing and frequently conflicting language policies. In doing so, we have adopted the humanistic

sociological perspective as, in our opinion, the most fruitful for focusing our attention and pointing to problems, as perceived and experienced by active human agents personally involved in constructing their ideological and linguistic systems.

In both countries being studied, the pressure exerted by the values sponsored by the governing authorities was intended to mould individuals' attitudes so that they would construct and activate languages that were required of them by the dominant entity. The responses of individuals differed, however, in each country depending on the historical and political situation of the setting. Differences of responses were also dependent on the ideological values of the ethnic or national groups concerned. Our research has unearthed a variation in what we have called the "core values" of particular groups, with a number of them showing a remarkable resilience in maintaining personal ideological and linguistic systems which resulted in the activation of their native tongues, in spite of the pressure exerted upon them to shift to the dominant language. In the case of *Australia*, the attachment by members of a number of ethnic groups to their mother tongue (accompanied by the acquisition of personal linguistic systems in English) has been influential in reorienting Australian society from an assimilationist to a multicultural approach. The extent of this reorientation is still unresolved and likely to depend both on the internal situation of Australia and its external place in the Asia Pacific region and the world. The *Belarus* case has shown how centuries of devaluation of the native tongue, and the frequent use of force against it, can de-activate people's ideological systems of any conscious appreciation of the language's core value significance. Yet the persistent recognition of Belarusian as the "mother tongue" and its informal use, even as it continues to be despised as plebeian and counter-productive to social and cultural advancement, shows a most interesting state of ideological development which still remains unresolved. With the small elite which has remained steadfast in positively evaluating the language and its literature as the core value of their nation, there remains a "spark," which might yet set the Belarusian ideological system alight, although equally well it may eventually be extinguished under the pressures of conformity built up over centuries of alien rule.

It is our contention that the choice of Znaniecki's humanistic sociological approach and its application to the two very different countries, which yet hold certain essential features of subordination and dominance in common, meet Inkeles' criteria for a model that is both inspiring in its application and fruitful in developing insights and deepening understanding of the complex world of multilingual configurations in culturally plural settings. In one sense, each of the two country analyses stands for itself

and is to be understood in its own right. Juxtaposed, however, they help to throw into relief some of the taken-for-granted features of each society's linguistic pluralism. Together, they represent an example of inductive practice in the science of culture. This implies a thorough and systematic investigation of the distinctive features of each linguistic context, as the participants perceive these to impinge upon their actions and attitudes. Each analysis also highlights the commonality of human agents in responding to their particular situation, with individuals constructing a wide range of personal linguistic systems at ideational and activation levels, as they see fit. For Znaniecki, the way forward for sociology was the adoption of such a "scientific" approach, but from an ideological standpoint which recognizes the distinctive reality of human consciousness in all the cultural sciences.

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# An Old Theme Revisited: Sociology and Ideology

MICHEL WIEVIORKA

## ABSTRACT

The main theme here is to combine a sociological perspective, in which we examine how sociologists deal with the concept and realities of ideology, within a historical interpretation. Two major periods in which sociology promulgated ideology are compared. The first period, the age of ideology, is the one in which modernity seems to be defined by the decline of tradition and religion, and by the triumph of Reason and Science. In this phase which extends from the coining of the term ideology to the end of the 1980s, sociology or sociologists either over-valued or under-valued the theme of ideology. The second period, marked by the end of the era of ideology, is one in which modernity seems if not to give way to post-modernity, at least to enter a new phase, in which it tends to be defined as the growing separation between reason and identities – particularly religious ones. In this phase the end of ideology which had been predicted for many years became a “historical truth.” Today there are no powerful all-encompassing grand ideologies anymore which might claim to personify at one and the same time, the people, science and progress and with the capacity to dominate and mobilize society. However, even in the second period, the “modest” or “particular” dimension of ideology referring to “false representations” of specific aspects of collective life, should be acknowledged.

## Introduction

The word “ideology” has taken on a number of meanings in the two centuries of its brief existence and has been formulated through various perspectives. When examining how the social sciences, in particular, have

dealt with ideology, one's first impression is often one of considerable confusion. At the outset, the impressive list of books and articles in which sociology and ideology are linked – thousands of texts – is an added difficulty given that the definitions, viewpoints and modes of approach vary substantially. Nevertheless, it is possible to clarify the issues and suggest a coherent argument. Our main theme here is to combine a sociological perspective, in which we examine how sociologists deal with the concept and realities of ideology, with a historical interpretation. To do so we compare two major periods in which sociology promulgated ideology. The first period is the one in which modernity seems to be defined by the decline of tradition and religion, and by the triumph of Reason and science. In this period, ideology was for some scholars a new form of religion which masked the reality of social relations. For others ideology was a discourse which promised the emancipation of the oppressed by relying on the perversion of reason; it is part of what Raymond Aron refers to as “irrational reason” (Aron 1955). The paradox, which should be stated at the outset, is that marxism has a foot in both camps: on the one hand, the reference to Marx provides the social sciences with one of its soundest sources. On the other hand, in the 20th century, marxism emerges as *the* ideology par excellence.

On the contrary, the second period is one in which modernity seems if not to give way to post-modernity, at least to enter a new “late” phase, as some call it, in which modernity tends to be defined as the growing separation between reason and identities – particularly religious ones. In this second phase, the one in which we now live, ideology can no longer be attached to a central problem or discussion as this concept seems extraneous to the history of our times. On the one hand, it is on the wane, giving way to religions and sects – to Islam, revivals of Christianity, Aum or Raël. On the other hand, it is becoming a widespread source of concern for any sociological approach preoccupied with an understanding of the subjectivity of actors, and an appreciation of the awareness that they have of the meaning of their own action. In other words, on the one hand, religious belief is becoming metapolitical and metasocial as the concept of faith refers to the sacred and not only to convictions rooted in social and political life; and on the other hand, it is becoming a widely discussed issue nonetheless lacking any precise historical relevance.

### **The Age of Ideology**

The term *ideology* was coined by Destutt de Tracy in the context of the First Empire at the end of the 18th century. The term derives from the Greek words, *eidōs* (idea) and *logos* (reason, discourse) and was attached to the project of creating a science of mental phenomena and studying

the formation of ideas on the basis of feelings. One of Napoleon's famous dictums, in which he discredited the "ideologists" (the liberal thinkers who were opposed to him), associated the concept of ideology with something pejorative in nature at an early stage. This association has since remained intact, despite the fact that at a later date, Communist regimes took the term very seriously, so much so that they created Secretaries for Ideology, otherwise considered high-ranking political administrators who were entrusted with codifying political thought and shaping the official categories of political discourse.

Throughout the long period which lasted until the end of the 1980's in the 20th century, the concept of ideology did indeed occupy a polysemic space. This did not to any great extent overlap with the concerns of sociology which was then emerging, coming of age in the work of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber and reaching maturity with Talcott Parsons. On the one hand, through reference to central political discussions and major historical questions, ideology played a key role in the higher spheres by referring to central political discussions and to major historical questions. It fuelled discussions – about world affairs, the class struggle, socialism, the choice between right and left, the Cold War, etc. – in which the sociologist was only one intellectual amongst others. On the other hand, for sociology, ideology only seemed to constitute one instance, amongst many, of a much more general phenomenon, that is, beliefs and values. In this second perspective, the actual term, ideology, was rarely used. Hence, one practically never comes across the term in the works of Durkheim, Weber or Pareto, who nevertheless are constantly interested in the general family of phenomena of beliefs and values.

Thus, in this phase which extends from the coining of the term to the end of the 1980's, sociology or sociologists either over-valued or under-valued the theme of ideology.

### **Modernity of Ideology: Marxism**

We can distinguish two principal meanings in the definition of ideology. According to the first interpretation, ideology is, in a thousand and one ways, a false idea, a fallacious or otherwise very limited, representation of social life. This usage is what we would call *modest* or, in Karl Mannheim's words *particular* (Mannheim 1936).

A second meaning of ideology refers less to a mistaken perception of the social than to a general vision in which history combines with politics and is ultimately legitimated by science. It becomes a general system and an integral part of political mobilization. And even if it is based on highly questionable and possibly quite simply false statements, it is not a mistaken perception of the real world which could be destroyed by

criticism. In Mannheim's terminology, it is *total*, and it is then that it takes on a central role in totalitarian phenomena, where, as Hannah Arendt has demonstrated, it belongs to the pursuit of an idea which liberates its carrier of any need for a relationship with concrete experience and with reality (Arendt 1958). From the perspective of a *total* ideology, there are hardly any historical events which cannot be interpreted in terms of a pre-established grid. The strength of *total* ideologies, at the difference from *modest* ideologies, is that they claim to combat the irrational and declare that they are based on reason.

Marxist ideologies, by far the most dominant in the period which concerns us here, are paradoxical in this respect. Already in the work of Marx and Engels, the declared aim was to counter tradition and any form of the sacred implying the religious principle. Actually, these ideologies were presented as the highest form of a given kind of modernity. Marx's thinking itself is profoundly modern; it is convinced that it takes its inspiration from reason as opposed to the obscurantism of traditions, and fights ideological mystification which, assumedly, conceals, protects and enhances the interests of the dominant strata.

For Marx, ideology has to be opposed; it constitutes a sort of reversal of reality, an inversion which, in man, originates in his material conditions of existence. In the well-known words of *The German Ideology*, he explains that in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*. From this perspective, the aim of science is to set ideas in the context of real life and it sees ideology as the opposite of truth and knowledge. Science itself should be used for action and struggle against social injustice. Marxists, it was self-evident, were therefore to combat ideology by identifying themselves with science – the paradox that spurns from this alliance is that, in the eyes of their opponents, they constituted ideologists who constructed nothing but ideological systems. Marxism has thus been a criticism of ideology which has in turn been transformed into a major ideology.

Marxism therefore provided intellectuals, parties and political regimes with a form of thinking whose status has long been confused: was it a set of analytical tools, which were as valid as any others in the social sciences? or an ideology which mistakenly claimed to be scientific in nature?

During the same period in history, marxism was not the only domineering ideology. In many respects, nazism, also endeavored to take an active role by claiming scientific legitimacy, particularly in the search for arguments in support of its race theories. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the marxists, there was no possibility of discussion with nazism, whereas for more than a century there have been major discussions and arguments

between the “marxists” and their political and intellectual opponents – including, in the last resort, sociologists.

This discussion between marxists and their political and intellectual opponents really developed only when marxists came to power. From then on, one version of marxism became the discourse of a totalitarian state, the Soviet Union. This state and its discourse played a seminal role in numerous communist parties and many liberation movements. Throughout its historical existence, official marxism, subservient to Moscow, competed with diverse variations which also claimed to originate in Marx; these included trotskyites and maoists.

### **The Sociological Contribution**

To be sure, sociology has provided both camps with intellectuals. On the one hand, sociologists advanced arguments – especially in the aftermath of World War Two and in the context of the Cold War –, which challenged the marxist discourse in its multiple political and intellectual variations. Daniel Bell, Edward Shils and Seymour Martin Lipset in the United States, Raymond Aron in France, Ralf Dahrendorf in Germany and many others have delved into the strength of marxist or communist ideas and in what constituted their power of seduction; they discussed the texts and their contents; they analyzed the erroneously ideological nature of the statements of their opponents, and mobilized their abilities to criticize marxist ideologies. They run then the risk, however, of tending to act as ideologists for their own camp rather than as purely scientific figures. On the other hand, other sociologists chose to see in one of the many versions of marxism, both a source of inspiration for themselves, their scientific activity and a possibility to adhere through it to a political project. This tendency reached its peak in the 1960’s and 1970’s, with, in the United States, C. Wright Mills and Irving L. Horowitz, in France, Lucien Goldman, Henri Lefebvre, and researchers associated with the Communist party like Louis Althusser or Manuel Castells.

Did this combat produce major sociological works? There is room for doubt. The sociologists who participated either wrote their most important texts outside any direct involvement in the struggle which they considered anti-ideological, or did not leave any genuinely sociological work at all. It should however be noted that in the French case, marxism did contribute to the development of concrete areas of research such as urban sociology and sociology of education.

Yet, one cannot deny that sociologists, whether willingly or not, are always prone to being ideologists in the eyes of other sociologists, as if in the last resort there can only be a “bourgeois” sociology in opposition to a “working-class” sociology. Robert Nisbet in his classical

*The Sociological Tradition* links many sociologists with ideologies; he describes, for instance, Le Play as a “conservative, par excellence,” Marx as “the very personification of radicalism in the nineteenth century,” and Spencer as “a liberal” (Nisbet 1966). For other sociologists, such a description is more difficult but, still, it is Nisbet’s contention that sociologists, whoever they may be, are hardly conceivable as completely indifferent to any ideological tendency. Actually, his general outlook in this respect is that there is a dominant trend in sociology which is something of a paradox:

The paradox of sociology – and it is as I argue in these pages, a creative paradox – lies in the fact that although it falls, in its objectives and in the political and scientific values of its principal figures, in the mainstream of modernism, its essential concepts and its implicit perspectives place it much closer, generally speaking, to philosophical conservatism. (Nisbet 1966)

In a good example in line with this paradox is the case of Soviet sociology that developed during the Cold War. Sociology was then bound to those in power who assumed the right in these countries to a monopoly over science. In this regime, sociology was afforded some space as a subject officially recognized as a *science*. Concretely, the majority of sociologists in the Soviet bloc, were whether purely and simply *apparatchicks* or bearers of categories that replicated most frequently structural functionalism which they draw from the intellectual world of the enemy. This testifies that even in the middle of the East-West intellectual battle, Eastern sociology succeeded to remain in contact with the West “under” the iron curtain.

### **What Is Ideology?**

Sociologists, however, have finally opted to include ideology as an object of study into their discipline. This could be understood in the context of the discussions referred to in the above, but it requested from sociologists to get to the definition of this somewhat strange and confusing topic through attempts of conceptualizations. Karl Marx has been here too a kind of founding father; for him, ideology is a function of the social relations of production (Marx 1975). In other words, Marx postulated that ideology cannot be understood without reference to the social structure, the social relations and the nature of the actors who convey it. An offspring of this approach, nearly one century later, in the mid 1970s, the French sociologist Pierre Ansart suggested to construct a sociology of ideologies (Ansart 1974). Ansart explains that the aim of this sociology is:

Grasping the relations between practice and symbolization work, the relationship between action and theory, the relation between the sphere of social practice and that of ideological expressions. (Ansart 1974)

In view of this general ambition, one may ask if this sort of sociology is not an element of a larger sub-set, namely, the sociology of knowledge? If so, between Karl Marx and the sociologists of the 60s and 70s in the 20th century, we have to insert a sociologist who constitutes the missing link: Karl Mannheim. In the words of Raymond Boudon,

Karl Mannheim is required reading on any excursion into the literature relating to ideology: his classic book, *Ideology and Utopia* is the founding document of a new subject, the sociology of knowledge. (Boudon 1986)

Mannheim states in the set of articles written between 1929 and 1931 and published in *Ideology and Utopia* that two different meanings of the term *ideology* must be distinguished. These two meanings were already referred to in the above as the first of them is *particular* the function of which is to mask a real situation and, more precisely, unavowed and unperceived motives or *interests*, and the other is *total* in which ideology is a general analysis of total situations. Karl Mannheim speaks of ideologies for *attitudes* which correspond to the world of the past and utopias to describe ideas which are advanced for their time. In his interpretation, historical change means that some ideas are now outdated; if they live on, it is only as ideologies which belong to the past and serve to legitimate the existing order, to defend the *status quo* or to maintain a nostalgia of the consequential benefit of dominant or conservative social forces, whereas the ideas which are orientated to replacing the established order or which inherently carry this promise belong to the category of utopia.

An approach of this nature, hailed in its time by Louis Wirth, who wrote the preface to the English edition of *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), has been widely criticized over time, but it does have the merit of isolating the concept of ideology from polemical discussions. This is the first step in making a sociological object of ideology. In the impassioned and anxious atmosphere of the 30s, Wirth wrote:

One looks in vain ... for an analysis of the basic factors and processes underlying our social and intellectual chaos. In contrast with these Professor Mannheim's work stands out as a sober, critical and scholarly analysis of the social currents and situations of our time as they bear upon thought, belief, and action." (Wirth 1936)

Following Mannheim, it became possible in sociology to define ideology as a belief and then to outline its various dimensions. Edward Shils, for example, in *the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, suggested that it was possible to see therein a system of beliefs which had eight main characteristics – explicitness of formulation; intended systemic integration around a particular moral or cognitive belief; closure to

novel elements or variations; imperativeness of manifestation in conduct; consensus demanded from those who accept the ideology; authoritativeness of promulgation; association with a corporate body intended to realize the pattern of beliefs (Shils 1968).

Above all, ever since ideologies are considered beliefs, we can leave behind the pre-sociological approaches which aim at demonstrating that ideologies do not tell the truth, or the polemical arguments which pursue the lies and mistakes. We can then ask the main questions: how is it that such beliefs exist, how do they work, how are they propagated and what bearing do they have on practices? “Why are erroneous ideas so easily believed?” asks Raymond Boudon in a book which is entirely devoted to this question. Why are such misuses possible? Why is it possible for “misinterpretations” which are based not on “scientific theories but on false or doubtful theories or theories which are incorrectly interpreted” to be propagated (Boudon 1986, p. 45)? The answer which he suggests is: because there are effects of situation, position and disposition, be they cognitive or affective, effects of communication (more than of imitation) and epistemological effects, the end result being that ideology must not be considered a form of irrationality. Here, sociology can take all sorts of directions in research which consist of examining whether or not ideas have an autonomous existence external to material practice and social life.

### **Is There a Sociology of Intellectuals?**

From this point of view, ideology is definitely a discourse for action. It can be linked with other discourses and constitute a weapon – Lenin went very far in this direction when he stated in *What Is to Be Done* (1902) that “the only possibility is the choice between bourgeois and socialist ideology.” Jean Baechler (1976) explains the functions of ideology as the rallying of troops, justifying, thinly disguising, naming and perceiving. It corresponds to demands and has its own effectiveness.

In this sense, the study of ideologies actually belongs to the domain of sociology of knowledge (Merton 1968) and it leads to the uncovering of the role of intellectuals. The fact is that there are no grand ideologies without experts – without these actors who organize it symbolically as well as – in many cases – in practice. Ideology is, indeed, an integral part of action; the thrust of this action has to be expressed in words and phrases – it requires actors whose role is to make some of these ideas genuine levers for action. In Daniel Bell’s words, “One could say that the intellectual is to ideology, what the priest is to religion” (Bell 1997).

From this point on, the sociological analysis of ideologies can concentrate on these intellectuals, their interests as a social group, their status,



their place in society and, less cynically, can also move away from the instrumental dimensions on which their intervention may be based and towards a concentration on their role as purveyors or inventors of systems of ideas. Thus the sociology of intellectuals seems to move away from pre-sociological thinking, in which one group of intellectuals confronts another, each of them claiming to be the source of authority and legitimacy, including in scientific matters. We now have, *grosso modo*, three major paradigms all of which assign to sociology a basic role in the production, distribution and functioning of ideologies. The first paradigm is that of frustration, in the tradition of the few lines which de Tocqueville devotes to the French philosophers under the *Ancien Régime* when he compares their degree of proximity to the ruling class with that of their English counterparts: from this point of view, intellectuals tend to be more radical when they are frustrated by being at a distance from the world of public affairs (Tocqueville 1967). In the second paradigm, intellectuals are *calculating* people for whom the ideas to which they adhere are the basis of power strategies, for example along the lines of Leninism. Finally, in the third paradigm, intellectuals are people who produce meaning, discourse and symbols competently expressing the hopes and fads of social actors by merging ideas and action.

The sociology of intellectuals is constantly threatened with regression because, depending on which paradigm is functioning, it becomes apparent that the sociologists' own ideological likes and dislikes will play a role: for example, if we analyze sociologists by examining their calculations, we minimize their convictions and personal involvement; similarly, if we speak of frustration in relation to the situation of the most radical, but also the most anti-establishment intellectuals, from the start we discredit the thinking and therefore the *ideology* of which they are the bearers. The problem sociologists must deal with regarding ideology is undoubtedly structural and linked to sociological activity itself: can the sociologist be a pure academic? Do his publications provide proofs which would confer scientific value on them? Does he not tend to be an intellectual who participates in the general activities of the City possibly relying on his own knowledge but without necessarily contributing scientific arguments which could justify his intervention in the public sphere? This is a vast and multi-faceted question, the formulation of which varies depending on the political culture: in the United States, if you describe a sociologist as an intellectual, this tends to discredit him as a sociologist; in France, to describe a sociologist as not being an intellectual, is also a way of discrediting him!

## The End of Ideology

Since the 1950s a theme that occurs repeatedly states that the age of ideology is over. The supporters of this theme are intellectuals – including sociologists – markedly opposed to marxism and communism. Again and again, this theme returned to Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology* (French version: 1997) “which, in its time (the 1950s) was involved in the ongoing war of ideas in intellectual circles – particularly in Europe – about the Soviet Union and Stalinism. In front of pro-Soviet intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bertold Brecht, Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukacs stood men like Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, George Orwell and Czeslaw Milosz” (Bell, op. cit., p. 362). It was some of these men who, along with Bell, were to launch the idea of the “end of ideology.” Albert Camus, as early as 1946, used the expression; Raymond Aron in *L'Opium des Intellectuels* (Aron 1955) ended with a chapter which questioned: “Is this the end of the ideological era?” and from then on, this theme was the subject of numerous debates, colloquia and publications. And when Seymour M. Lipset re-edited his book *Political Man* in 1981, he added several pages on this theme (Lipset 1981).

However, we had to wait for about thirty years before we could really speak of the end of ideology as far as communism, if not marxism, was concerned. Aron and others had indeed demonstrated how fallacious is the “scientific” nature of the marxist statements on industrial society and social classes. But the fascination exerted by them on intellectuals remained considerable until the 1970s. The USSR may well have appeared as an unacceptable model – that is, in the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, as a bureaucracy or a statocracy (Castoriadis 1981) – at a relatively early stage, but there were still plenty of references – the Chinese revolution, guerrilla movements or national liberation movements – that continued to exert a strong attraction on intellectuals and young people in Western societies. It was not until these societies underwent major social and political changes that they really entered the era of the end of ideology.

Hence, in more recent decades – the 1970s and 1980s –, Western societies witnessed the decline of the working class movement which gradually ceased to play a central role in the polity. The new movements that appeared in universities and urban or rural areas and which were now involved in political discussions were very remote from the shop floor and the factory. This development was not always perceived from its inception, and in France, the country where ideology has always been a major axis of public life, the decline of the working class movement was not perceived until a fairly late date. A powerful Communist party co-existed, not without considerable tension, alongside leftist organizations

that flourished ever since the student revolt of May 68. In a research which I directed with Alain Touraine at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, we met great difficulties to carry out our fieldwork with workers, because of our hypotheses which assumed the end of the working class movement. Our findings which confirmed this hypothesis also met with the opposition of a considerable proportion of French intelligentsia (Touraine et al. 1984). Nevertheless, ever since, as André Gorz (1980) put it, we had to say “Farewell to the working class,” and society ceased to be structured by the central opposition between the working class movement and employers, it became increasingly artificial to speak on behalf of the working class. Under these circumstances, ideology which had been dominant until then was played out and on the wane, losing its appeal and mobilization power. On the other hand, the end of the cold war also constituted an event of primordial importance with respect to the role of ideology. The whole planet was suddenly orphaned, so to speak, with its major conflict that had exerted a decisive role in structuring the international life for decades. From the point at which the USSR ceased to exist and even before, perhaps dating from the arrival on the political scene of Mikhael Gorbachev, Glasnost and Perestroika, and, in any event, ever since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the struggle between the West and the East became meaningless, and concomitantly, the discussions about marxist or communist ideology became artificial or purely rhetoric. The end of ideology which had been predicted for over thirty years, then became a “historical truth” and Francis Fukuyama, in an article and then a book announced the End of History (Fukuyama 1992) and the universal triumph of the market and of democracy, theorizing about the meaning of the fall of the wall.

Raymond Aron’s position was triumphing marking that one intellectual-political group had finally gained the upper hand – though this owed little to the social sciences, and sociology as such was not really concerned.

### **Back to 68**

1989 seems to have definitively marked the end of the era of ideology, but before going further one still has to have a last look at what 1968 meant at the time. It is true that in many respects the student protest movements and those which followed – the feminists, the regional movements, the ecologists, the anti-nuclear movements – opened a cultural “breach” in the words of Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis (Castoriadis et al. 1988). In their own way, these movements were a sign of the entry into a new, post-industrial age. In Western societies the working-class movement was breathing its last moment as a central figure. “*New social movements*” with a strong cultural input were preparing to take over,

a form of protest still in the making, it is true, but which appeared to be as important for post-industrial times as the working class movement had been in the preceding era. To use Mannheim's words, had the time not come for utopia, rather than for ideology?

It is important to recall here how far these movements, struggles and events were a challenge to sociology. Alvin Gouldner (1970) showed how the functionalism of Talcott Parsons, so powerful in the Anglo-Saxon world, entered at this time a phase of decomposition and subsequently caused numerous sociologists to choose sides – protest or order. On the other hand, in some countries, and particularly in the United States, the actors of 68 and the later new social movements thought of themselves in categories which shared nothing with marxist ideologies. Elsewhere, however, and in particular in France and Italy, while protest was concerned with new social and cultural themes, these themes were still interpreted in old marxist categories.

New wine, true, but in old bottles in which it quickly spoils: leftism. Old leftism was overtly associated with structuralism, which contributed to the very destruction of the new social movements, by distorting the new practice at the benefit of obsolete ideologies. From our perspective, the most important aspect of this scene was the subsequent confrontation that resulted among sociologists deeply involved in the discussions. For some, one witnessed here the outcome of the hold of ideology on the new forms of protest; this feeling brought them to stand against the new movements and to see in these movements a discourse which bore no relation to reason and that could by no means be taken seriously. Thus, Raymond Aron, in a foreword to a new edition of *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, referred to three “ideological” themes which, in his opinion, lay behind the student protest movement in May 68: the criticism of the consumer society, the call for democratization and the refusal of hierarchy in the student/teacher relationship. He himself who always defined himself as a “concerned spectator” opposed the ideology of these actors by adopting a stance of reason as opposed to what he considered to be either prejudice or ignorance. But as he said, this meant he was “criticizing by comparing ideology and reality.” This was possible because “yesterday's prejudices were related to a reality which was supposed to personify historical Reason, the Soviet Union” (Aron 1968, p. 14) whereas, in 1968, in his opinion, the references to Cuba, to Mao or to an “unknown future,” meant that any possibility of criticism or reasoned argument was out of question. In a way, Raymond Aron expresses a nascent awareness. He realizes that we are entering a new era and leaving the classical age of ideologies behind, but he cannot accept the idea that this new era might be positive because he is ultimately concerned with one thing only: the fact that the new forms of

protest are encapsulated in old forms of discourse and old ideologies. He resented the “outrageous” nature of these new ideological variants which, in some cases and particularly in Italy, led to terrorism.

In contrast, Alain Touraine sided with the movement. He enhanced the status of these new orientations which, in his opinion, made of them the emerging figure of the major protests which would be the driving force of post-industrial society. Like Aron, he observed the hold of marxist ideologies but refused to dismiss them outright only because of that: his interventions in public discussions, and even in action, were characterized by a concern for the defense of what he considered as the positive aspect of these movements notwithstanding the leftism which was taking hold on them and threatened their very survival (cf. Touraine et al. 1978). I have often heard Touraine say that he regretted he had not entitled this book: *The End of Leftism*.

These movements did indeed announce the end of the classical industrial era and the birth of a new era, which was to be called by many different names – postmodern, consumerism, communication, post-national, network, etc. They all pointed to the beginning of an inversion of the “total” ideology which the enemies of Moscow fought against during the “cold war.” New extremist and hypercritical variants such as maoism were expressed in ways which were to be increasingly outrageous because they bore no relation to reality.

### **Sociology and Ideology after the “End of Ideology”**

Today there are no powerful all-encompassing grand ideologies anymore which might claim to personify at one and the same time, the people, science and progress and with a capacity to dominate and mobilize society – as Daniel Bell rightly observes “the historicity of the term has lost its context” (Bell 1997, p. 403). Furthermore, we also lost the habit of thinking of modernity in terms of a triumphant march of reason; we are much more inclined to discern between objectivity and subjectivity and to acknowledge a tense relation between reason, science, technology, as well as between market on one hand, and convictions, passions and cultural identities on the other (Touraine 1992).

To recall Marx’s famous statement about religion, his contention is that

... [religion is] the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

Who would speak in these terms nowadays? Actually, the sociological concept of ideology has been widely constructed on the basis of the criticism of the phenomenon of religion, considered an obstacle to modernity. Though, after decades of modern ideologies that assumed

exclusive rights to the discourse of science and reason, and their link to the progress of mankind, we are today confronted with revitalized religious phenomena all over the world. In fact, religion is no longer considered an obstacle to contemporary forms of modernity.

To specify further, all along the struggle against “all-encompassing” or total ideologies – that is, mainly against marxism –, a kind of gentleman’s agreement between belligerents excluded religious phenomena from the discussion. On the whole, the social sciences had little interest in religion at the time of the cold war. It must be said that since Max Weber, sociologists had learned to think in terms of the disenchantment of the world and the decline of religious phenomena.

We have now entered, however, an era where religious phenomena are recognized by the social sciences as fundamental – so much so that some have spoken of the “return of God.” In themselves, they are merely configurations of the widespread upsurge of identities, convictions and passions into the public domain – but they are undoubtedly most decisive. There is a steady increase in the number of studies – more on Islam and Islamism than on any other religion but also on contemporary changes in Christian religions or on the spread of oriental religions. From our point of view the most impressive aspect of this development is that religion is in no way dealt with by sociology as a sort of substitute for ideology. Sociologists no longer campaign in favor or against religion, as they did in the age of anti-ideology passions. They no longer participate, as individuals, in the public mobilization regarding religious issues. Instead, religion is an object of study for them; it may be a cause for concern for them but this is not the driving force behind their work. This does not mean that campaigns about religion do not take place but if they do, it is elsewhere, with other protagonists. Not a single sociologist today, for example, criticizes the phenomena of religion as such, is worried about it or sees it as a form of regression or a threat to community life. From this point of view, sociology has definitively broken away with evolutionism and the identification with Enlightenment and with the progress of reason against tradition and obscurantism. Without fully realizing it, sociology is almost becoming relativist, since religions are seen as objects and not as enemies or opponents – and, as objects, they are all equally respectable. It is able to watch the war of the Gods but it does not take sides.

This sort of situation does not mean that there are no numberless controversial issues in this field, such as – and primarily – about the emergence of sects. Such a phenomenon occasions the confrontation of convictions and universal values with the specificity of sects; it is then reminiscent of the period of the Enlightenment when Voltaire spoke about “crushing the infidel.” Sociologists then tend to mostly illustrate

two positions. Some stick to the Weberian approach and request that sects be considered in the same way as other religious phenomena, which might be conducive to tolerance – which many people may find excessive and dangerous. Others may involve themselves in criticizing sects; then however, they run the risk of reviving modes of thought inherited from the Enlightenment which no longer seem appropriate today. We should add here that once again, political cultures vary from one country to another and that sects are much more widely tolerated in the United States and, generally speaking, in the anglo-saxon world, and in Japan (where the word in fact means a plethora of Churches) than in a country like France. The sects which have attracted attention in recent years resemble in many respects the all-inclusive ideologies we referred to for the previous period. Be it Scientology or the Aum sect in Japan particularly, or the Raélians, all have a close link to science. Aum developed by mobilizing numerous scientists offering them more opportunities to exercise their talents than Japanese industry and research (Trinh 1998). The Rael sect attracted public attention by binding religious conviction, scientism and money transactions.

All in all, we are no longer in the age when ideology acted as an all-inclusive phenomenon and was able to mobilize sociologists. Hence, for example, we have seen sociologists speaking in support of Salman Rushdie when he was accused of blasphemy by Ayatollah Khomeiny and was the victim of a “fatwa” which is a genuine call for murder. But this defense has never been a criticism of Islam, or an acceptance of the principle of blasphemy; it was rather the defense of the right to think and write, and the refusal of intimidation and terror. Throughout the world, Islam gives reasons for concern, especially when amalgamated with Islamic terrorism. Though, by no means are sociologists the carriers of these anxieties; on the contrary, they tend to appear as those who analyze particular aspects of the religious experience and downgrade the significance of potential dangers.

### **What about “Modest” Ideologies?**

Should we, in the context of the all-above, consider that sociology no longer has to bother about ideology, or is no longer concerned by it? That, as Daniel Bell says, “ideology is a word which has been irretrievably demeaned” (Bell 1997, p. 403)? This would be to forget a “modest” or “particular” dimension of ideology referring to “false representations” of specific aspects of collective life. As soon as sociologists study actors, they are faced with forms of discourse which are never devoid of ideology, in the modest sense of the term – that is to say, representations of the subject’s action or situation which necessarily include false, biased, possibly insane

dimensions. This is in fact the starting point of the sociologist's work: revealing the meaning of action behind or through actors' ideologies.

Usually, sociology is differentiated from the discourse of the actors and their representations. These representations constitute a discourse which provides meaning for the action, the analysis of the situation and the social relationships which are at stake. The sociologist is possibly in direct relation with the actors at the time of gathering his information: he carries out participant observation, interviews people, submits a questionnaire, collects documents. Then he takes some distance from the situation and, far from the actors, he works out his analysis, re-reads the notes from his observations, examines the content of the interviews, deals with the statistical treatment of his data and comes to a conclusion. In most cases, the sociologist seems to act with no concern for any sort of return to the actors. Sometimes, however, he does make some form of "restitution" either out of gratitude, friendship or in the hope of providing a useful perspective to those he studied.

To put it differently, in its everyday procedures, sociology suggests an analysis which steps back from the actors' "modest" ideology with little attempt to combat or weaken it. At this stage, his discourse is aimed at an audience other than the actors. The sociologist is speaking to his/her colleagues or to a wider public. When the sociologist is not, or is no longer, involved in a campaign against an "all-inclusive" ideology or, on the contrary, in a battle at close quarters, his/her research usually aims at having an intellectual impact in a forum of discussion and propagating ideas that are not intended directly to the actors involved.

The question at this stage of the end of "all-inclusive" ideologies, is: what should the sociologist's attitude be when confronted with "particular" ideologies of actors? Should the sociologist be satisfied with his/her being closer to the truth than the actors and show no great concern for what actors might do with his/her analyses? Should s/he contact them, at least to help them to get rid of their ideology? And in this case, to what end, and with what vision of the relationship between actors and analysts?

On the whole, sociologists hesitate to formulate questions of this sort, and hesitate even more to get involved in concrete answers. Is their task not simply to produce knowledge, to demonstrate propositions even if it means moving away from the actors' spontaneous ideologies? The sociologist who remains in contact with the actors after the data have been gathered runs the risk of lapsing into one of the traps characteristic of intellectuals. S/he may adopt the position of an ideologist of the Leninist ("vanguard") type by conviction that actors themselves are unable of self-awareness regarding their own action; s/he may adopt the position of the organic intellectual and present him/herself as the spokesperson of the actor, which is possible



only if s/he also adopts actors' ideology. From the actor's point of view, the danger lies in accepting to subject oneself to ideologists who are supposed to control the meaning of the action. The risk here is a risk of heteronomy, that is, that the actor is incapable of thinking for himself and the extreme version of which is insanity. This is why sociology has an interest in exploring different approaches. Can we create the conditions for an exchange, or a confrontation, enabling the actor to be less subject to ideology and have more sociological knowledge about his action? Before considering what a positive answer should imply we still have to answer a preliminary question which is in fact a powerful objection to this type of approach.

We saw in the above that ideologies exist only because of their strength; they are elements which enable or strengthen mobilization. Would weakening them not amount to depriving the actors of an essential resource? Does the replacement of an ideology by an analytical point of view necessarily contribute to raise the capacity for action? This is not obvious. Even if we assume that the answer is positive for some actors, this means that we should get involved in this type of approach only on behalf of actors whom we think are useful to society, for whom the sociologist has genuine empathy. The question then, however, concerns actors who may represent a good reason for concern; we think here of individuals who are motivated by racism or involved in violence. Would their move from ideology to analysis not strengthen their capacity for action and consequently reinforce their racism, or their violence?

The best way, in fact, to begin to think about these questions is to take some concrete examples.

### **Trial by Fieldwork**

In the mid 70s, Alain Touraine suggested the use of a new method, sociological intervention, to study collective action and more particularly social movements (Clark & Diani 1996). I participated, under his supervision, in the first applications of this method. I then adopted it on numerous occasions for studies dealing with terrorism, racism, urban violence, public management and the study of post-communist societies. This method gives actors the possibility of participating in group meetings with interlocutors who are either partners or opponents of their own action. The researchers then analyze the meaning of their action and discuss their findings with the actors.

This treatment enables us to envisage "modest" or "particular" ideologies and aims at the outset at weakening the ideology of the actors, thanks to discussions in which the latter confront real life, that is to say, in very practical terms, the discourse of other actors. These other actors, by the

mere fact of their presence, hamper the members of the group who receive them to propagate excessively artificial representations of their relationship. For example, when leftist terrorists have lengthy discussions with interlocutors who are ordinary workers and who explain to them how hostile they are to the violence which is perpetrated in their name, it is then difficult for the terrorists to continue to say that they personify an anti-capitalist struggle and that they represent the expectations of the working class.

As the research lasts, this method has also the effect of replacing the ideology of the actors studied within the analysis. This is the case in so far as in the second part of the research the sociologists present their analyses to the actors. They defend their arguments tooth and nail, attempting to convince the actors to adopt them. As a matter of fact, it is quite the case that actors effectively do accept the arguments and do not hesitate to utilize them by themselves – for example, to think about their past struggles in a new framework, or to modify their concept of action.

I will refer here to three specific experiences and draw lessons of a general nature. The first is a research carried out with anti-nuclear militants at the end of the 70s (Touraine et al. 1980). One of the strong points of the analysis which the militants resisted was that their movement could increase its vigor if, instead of relying on the fear of nuclear power in public opinion, it succeeded in organizing a political and social criticism of technocratic administrators responsible for the French electro-nuclear program. At the time when the research was nearing its end, an incident occurred in the United States (emission of toxic products by a nuclear power station on Three Miles Island) which was widely covered by the media. This incident afforded the leadership of the movement the opportunity to launch a public campaign. Though, this campaign spontaneously adopted the theme of “nuclear power is dangerous”; the militants who had participated in the sociological intervention project felt that this campaign would be much more efficient if it centered on the technocratic-elite theme. This meant to emphasize that the power station had been set up by technocratic elites who may show up as unreliable – as proved by the Three Miles Island incident. This example, which is of course very limited, suggests that the analysis, by replacing the spontaneous ideology of actors, can enable them to improve their basis of political mobilization.

The second example is terrorism. I carried out a very extensive program of research on terrorism which was based on several sociological interventions, some of which were carried out with former terrorists (in particular Basques from ETA and Italians from the Red Brigades, Prima Linea, etc.) (Wieviorka 1988). The most interesting aspect from the point of view which interests us here is the indirect impact of these studies. On two occasions – once in Mexico and the other in Paris – I learned that

my findings had served to dissuade political actors from joining the armed struggle or from supporting it. The analysis which concerned the ideologies of terrorist actors and principally resulted in deconstructing them, had given rise to the refusal of some actors to become involved. It raised these actors' capacity for democratic action and weakened their tendencies to take the path leading to violence.

Finally, the third case is that of racism (Wieviorka 1992). In Roubaix, a town in the north of France in economic decline, I set up a group of approximately ten people of working class origin whose racist discourse targeted at immigrants was relentless. As the research progressed, the spontaneous racist discourse gave way to themes other than the immigrants. Not only did the group discuss social and cultural questions with their interlocutors but also, in the second phase of the research, when I presented to them an analysis of the spontaneous racism of its members, they seemed to accept it, consider it, understand it and adopt it. At least at this phase. Though, just when I was delighted to see the extent to which the racist ideology had given way to analysis within the group, in the very last hours of the endeavor, there was an outburst of racist remarks of unheard violence, worse than anything I had heard at the outset and in the preparatory phase. In fact, these people, who lived in extremely difficult conditions, had been perfectly capable of appropriating and even, one might say, of co-producing the theory of their racism, of which the social, political and cultural sources had become clear. But they did not have the slightest means of transforming this theory into action or into practices. They knew that as soon as they went home, they would find their usual existential difficulties. In one word, the sources of their misfortune and of their discourse of racial hatred remained unchanged. The research had not raised their capacity for action; it had on the contrary accentuated their impotence to transcribe into action the consequences of an analysis which they had succeeded to formulate in a relatively abstract manner. This reminds us that ideologies do find their sources in ideas, but also in real living conditions.

The research studies which have been briefly outlined above suggest that it is possible to create a relation of co-production and discussion of sociological knowledge in the field by creating dynamics of research in which both sociologists and subjects participate. They indicate that it is possible to create the conditions whereby analysis can replace, at least in part, or provisionally, ideology. They also suggest that a replacement of this sort can lead to a increased capacity for action of those involved in it, but that this is only possible in certain circumstances. The experience of Roubaix, which was particularly painful for the researchers, does indeed indicate that the return to action depends on numerous elements and that

the latter may very well contribute to weakening, but also, on the contrary, to strengthening ideology.

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# Sociology and the Critical Reflexivity of Modernity: Scholarly Practices in Historical and Comparative Context

BJÖRN WITTROCK

## ABSTRACT

A sense of the contingency of human, finite existence, reflections on its temporal embeddedness and on the possibility to act, to bring about other states of affairs in the world, i.e. what has sometimes been labeled the reflexivity of modernity, are not phenomena that appear only in the epoch of modernity. However, they become articulated in a distinctly new way, at the turn of the 18th century, one in which categories of the social and new notions of temporality and of agency become key components. Sociology came to depend on the existence of certain epistemic, institutional and existential conditions that allowed the new discourses of society to uphold epistemic claims to valid knowledge but also to reflexively engage in societal practices and their transformations. This article focuses on the ways in which this dilemma was articulated at three crucial historical junctures, namely the turn of the 18th century; the period of classical sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and finally; the present situation in the early 21st century with a global diffusion of professional sociological practices. This comparison in historical time is, for the last two periods of transformation, complemented also by a comparative analysis in space, by juxtaposing a Continental European experience with a North American one.

It is obvious that an understanding of actions and of agential potentials and dispositions is necessary for an understanding of human beings and human practices. It is less obvious, but a corollary of this, that an understanding of systemic and institutional features, an understanding of what we have come to think of as a society, is also premised on an understanding of agency and action. In the last instance, the power of institutions – or their perlocutionary force as speech-act theorists might prefer to label it – can only be understood against the background of the ways in which human beings locate themselves within and identify themselves with collective identities and choose answers to questions such as the following ones: Who are we? How do we construct memories and how do actions relate to expectations and hopes directed towards some horizon of the future?

Of course, a sense of the contingency of human, finite existence, reflections on its temporal embeddedness and on the possibility to act, to bring about other states of affairs in the world, i.e. what has sometimes been labelled the reflexivity of modernity, are not phenomena that appear only in the epoch of modernity. On the contrary, they are crucial already to the deep transformations that we now, following the Weber brothers, Jaspers and Eisenstadt, have come to think of as the axial age in the centuries around the middle of the first millennium BCE (see Arnason 2003 for an excellent overview). However they become articulated in a distinctly new way, at the turn of the 18th century, one in which categories of the social and new notions of temporality and of agency become key components.

In this sense the problem for sociology is not so much whether “society” has disappeared and been replaced by actors and systems. The category of “society” has always been a way to denote a relative, but ultimately contingent, stability in a set of practices that have been variously grouped together and referred to as a political, economic or social order. To the degree that such practices have involved the mobilisation and exercise of power, resources and violence, the notion of society has always depended on various “systems.” Indeed the modern use of the term “society” is in many ways a manifestation of the existential situation of human beings in general, and of intellectuals in particular, in the wake of the great transformation of discursive genres in a formative moment of modernity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Society has in this sense been described, e.g. by Pierre Manent, as post-revolutionary discovery. In a period in which the existence of contingency had reflexively become part of the human condition, new discursive practices emerged, among the social sciences that served to install a certain degree of stability and intelligibility amidst a generalised condition of contingency and rupture.



## **Sociology in Historical Context**

In the rest of this article I shall highlight how sociology as the science of this new contingent reality came to depend on the existence of certain epistemic, institutional and existential conditions that allowed the new discourses of society to uphold epistemic claims to valid knowledge but also to reflexively engage in societal practices and their transformations. I shall focus on the ways in which this dilemma was articulated at three crucial historical junctures, namely the turn of the eighteenth century; the period of classical sociology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and finally; the present situation in the early twenty-first century with a global diffusion of professional sociological practices. This comparison in historical time will, for the last two periods of transformation, be complemented also by a comparative analysis in space, viz. by juxtaposing a European, or rather a Continental European, experience with an American, or rather North American, one.

There have always been rules regulating the life of a community. Tacit social knowledge of such rules exists in any human community. In this sense social science is ageless. Thus political scientists often portray Plato and Aristotle as early representatives of their discipline. Economists and educational researchers may point to the perennial nature of the aspects of human life that constitute their scholarly domains. In the case of legal scholarship a tradition, if only in a weak sense of the word, may be said to obtain from at least the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The emergence of this tradition is in fact coterminous with the creation of European universities (Kelley 1990). If the tradition of Roman law is invoked in a broad sense, it is even much longer than that. Examples of this kind are interesting in their own right. However none of them amounts to a disciplinary social science history in any real sense of the word. This is so for three reasons.

First, the concept of social science appears only in the 1790s and its use presupposes a meaningful conceptualisation of something called a society. This does not occur in any real sense before the second half of the eighteenth century. Second, in none of these cases can we talk of a discipline in the sense of a relatively coherent and delimited program of research and teaching that is consolidated and consistently reproduced in a university environment. This presupposes the existence of a university, but also that the university is seen as a primary vehicle for research activities. However, the research-orientated university in any real sense does not emerge as a key societal institution until the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993). Third, in none of the cases mentioned above is there an unbroken scholarly tradition that links these early efforts to present-day activities in university settings. Such

intellectual and institutional continuities presuppose a degree of disciplinary consolidation that does not occur on a more general level until the early twentieth century. In this respect, developments in the 1930s are crucial although limited to Europe and the Americas. Elsewhere, disciplinary consolidation does not occur until after World War II.

### **The Rise of the Social Sciences: From Moral and Political Philosophy to Social Science**

The first recorded uses of ‘social science’ as a scholarly self-description appear in France in the 1790s. Ever since then, these new forms of knowledge have been characterized by an effort to understand the world of modernity. They have tended to describe key features of this new world in terms of processes of industrialization, urbanization, and political upheaval, originating at the North-western edge of the Eurasian landmass but eventually having global repercussions. In the self-understanding of the social sciences, accordingly, there is a long-standing and predominant view about the formation of modernity, which highlights transformations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It focuses on the conjunction of a technological and a political transformation – the industrial and the democratic revolutions, respectively.

This traditional interpretation radically underestimates the deep-seated epistemic transformation that occurred in the same period. In fact, in this period there is a fundamental transition from earlier forms of moral and political philosophy into social science. This transition is linked to an institutional restructuring not only in forms of political order but also in the forms in which human knowledge is brought forth and claims to validity are ascertained.

One feature of this institutional transition is the emergence of a public sphere that gradually replaces arenas of a more closed nature such as aristocratic literary salons. Another is the rise of new or reformed public higher education and research institutions that come to replace both the laboratories of wealthy amateurs and the academies under royal patronage and partial control. The rise of the social science disciplines must then be cast in terms of the fundamental transformation of European societies that the formation of modernity entailed. One intellectual and cultural transformation in this period pertains precisely to the concepts of society and history and to the new awareness of the structural and constraining nature of societal life. Pierre Manent has put forward the notion that society is a ‘postrevolutionary discovery’ (Manent 1998: 51).

It is true that the term ‘society’ underwent a long conceptual development in the French context in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Baker 1994) – with a dramatic increase in the utilization of

the term in the mid-eighteenth century. However, even if there was a long process of gestation for the modern concept of society, the unique event of revolutionary upheaval requires that discursive controversy and political practice become joined in the formation of a distinctly modern era. The late eighteenth century witnessed, as elegantly elaborated by Reinhart Koselleck (e.g. 1985, 1987 but also 1988), the creation of a political project encompassing the whole world and shattering the existing absolutist order. In this process horizons of expectation opened up that were previously unknown. This sense of openness and contingency also served as a forceful impetus to an examination of the structural conditions of the political body and entailed a passage from political and moral philosophy to social science. This transition required that four key *problématiques* – which today are more acutely open to reinterpretation than they have been for decades – be formulated or at least fundamentally reformulated and enter into the new social science discourse.

First, the role of historical inquiry becomes crucial. Historical reasoning becomes an integral part of the intellectual transition, and even abstract reason itself becomes historicized in early nineteenth-century philosophy. However, the moral and political sciences break up into a variety of new discourses that in the course of the nineteenth century coalesce and are reduced to a number of disciplines. This means that the stage is set for the divergence between a professionalised historical discipline and the other social and human sciences, a divergence that we still today experience as a major intellectual divide.

Second, interest in language and linguistic analysis enters into all domains of the human and social sciences. One outflow of this is the constitution of textual and hermeneutic modes of analysis. There is also an effort to historicize language and linguistic development itself, thereby allowing for the construction of notions of different peoples on the basis of the history of language and linguistic usage.

This leads to a third problematic: that of constituting new collective identities. This becomes a *problématique* open to articulation and contestation. The bonds of the body politic could no longer be cast in terms of a relationship of obligation and loyalty between the princely ruler and his subjects or simply be taken for granted in terms of the life experiences of the inhabitants of a certain village or region. That, however, meant that even the most basic categories of societal existence were open to doubt. In the western part of Europe, categories such as ‘citizen’ and ‘compatriot’ originated or were fundamentally redefined at the turn of the eighteenth century and gradually became an accepted part of political life.

Fourth, assumptions about what prompts human beings to act and how to interpret their actions within a broader framework are at the very core of

any scholarly program in the social and human sciences. At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fundamental categories that we still largely draw upon were elaborated and proposed. We might describe these categories as follows:

- (a) *Economic-rationalistic*, with a corresponding view of society as a form of compositional collective;
- (b) *Statistical-inductive*, with a view of society as a systemic aggregate;
- (c) *Structural-constraining*, with a view of society in terms of an organic totality; and
- (d) *Linguistic-interpretative*, with a conceptualisation of society as an emergent totality.

The transition from a discourse of moral and political philosophy to a social science entailed a decisive shift from an agential – some would say voluntaristic – view of society to one that emphasized structural conditions. In economic theorizing this also entailed a shift away from a concern with moral agency. During the nineteenth century, the context of ‘average economic man’ became a web of structural properties and dynamic regularities rather than a moral universe of individual action.

Thus, fundamental categories of agency and society that came to be elaborated and basic conceptualisations and contestations in the social sciences during much of the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be discerned in rudimentary form already during the great transition. So too, however, can some of the features that came to affect these endeavours. One such tacit but crucial feature concerns the abandonment of the truly universal heritage of the Enlightenment project in favour of forms of representation and endowment of rights based on territoriality or membership in a linguistically and historically constituted and constructed community.

Another feature was an emerging and growing chasm between moral discourse and other forms of reasoning about society. Thus, an earlier encompassing conception of the moral and political sciences was gradually replaced by social sciences that marginalized moral reasoning or consigned it to the specialized discipline of philosophy. Third, historical reasoning, which had been at the core of the intellectual transformation at the end of the eighteenth century, became a separate discipline and, toward the end of the nineteenth century, a permanent divide emerged between history and the social sciences.

The end of the eighteenth century was a formative period in the rise of the social sciences in conceptual terms. It is possible to discern, across all confrontations and divergences, a fundamental acknowledgement of the idea that agency, reflexivity, and historical consciousness might help construct a new set of institutions but that this takes place within a complex

web of interactions that jointly constitute a society. Thus, there existed a limited number of thematic foci underlying the cultural constitution of a new set of societal macro-institutions.

### **The Institutionalisation of the Social Sciences: The Social Question, the Research University, and the New Nation-States**

Relatively early in the nineteenth century, economics, or rather political economy, became differentiated from moral philosophy. It is also in this period that history emerges as a scholarly field with its own canon of rules, but the full disciplinary formation of history is a highly extended process. However, social science as an institutionalised scholarly activity performed within a series of disciplines is largely a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is an activity that directly and indirectly reflects concerns about the wide-ranging effects of the new industrial and urban civilization that was rapidly changing living and working conditions for ever-larger parts of the population in many European nations during the nineteenth century.

These changes, often collectively referred to as ‘the social question’ (*die soziale Frage*), were gradually forcing themselves upon the agendas of parliamentary bodies, governmental commissions, and private reform-minded and scholarly societies. Often the impetus for the search for new knowledge came from modernizing political and social groupings that favoured industrialization but advocated more or less far-reaching social reforms. These groupings gradually came to embrace the notion that political action to alleviate ‘the social question’ should be based on extensive, systematic, empirical analysis of the underlying social problems. In country after country, the political agenda of the nineteenth century was being formed by two macro-projects: the search for a solution to ‘the social question’ and to the question of national identity and nationhood within new or reformed nation states (Wagner 1990; Wagner et al. 1990; Wagner, Wittrock, and Whitley 1991; Wittrock 2003).

Between 1870 and the turn of the century, all signs seemed to indicate that new social science approaches would gain access to the scientific institutions. The thinking of their proponents was widely diffused among the intellectual and political elites. This occurred at a time when traditional liberal economics was undergoing a crisis. Thus traditional political economy was seen to be unable to deal with the ‘social question’ and the widespread deterioration of living and working conditions due to urbanization and industrialization. However, another important, and indeed competing, field of study and training, whose concerns overlapped those of the new social sciences, was that of the legal sciences. The strength of the legal scholar’s position in continental Europe arose from two factors.

First, the training function of the universities for the state service produced officials and judges.

This meant that legal scholarship came to exert a considerable impact on the general outlook of the servants of the state. Second, legal scholars sought to provide a doctrine, a body of concepts that was based on elaborate technical distinctions and would enable lawyers and judges to act with promptness and precision, clarify the deliberations of the lawmaker, and bring coherence and order into the legal system (Dyson 1980: 112). This doctrine was legal positivism, which was first developed for private law and later for public law (in the latter case known as the legal theory of the state). Legal scholarship remained an important alternative to social science and, in fact, strengthened its position towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus, the so-called 'state sciences' in the German and Nordic states did not really develop into anything that might be labelled 'political science.' Rather they became increasingly embedded in the legal constitutional scholarship that was expanding in Germany in the wake of German political unification. Conversely, in the Nordic countries a similar tradition of 'state sciences' in the late nineteenth century was characterized by a dual legacy of constitutional legal scholarship and, as in Britain, of studies of philosophy and political history.

By and large, approaches to a social and political science did not succeed in institutionalising themselves in European academia. In some cases, they tried but failed. In other cases, they did not perceive the relevance of academic institutionalisation, but blossomed during a passing period of a favourable political climate and decayed with the changing societal situation. For example, the term 'sociology' had been coined early in nineteenth century, but the key sociologists of the late nineteenth century (Weber, Durkheim, and Pareto) remained broad social science generalists. Their contributions and professional allegiances traversed a range of fields, including politics, economics, education, history and religion, and the term sociology often referred to a broad historical comparative study of society.

However, it was a type of study that saw itself as scientific and separate from reform-orientated activities of a more general nature. In the United States, social science research originally had the same characteristics of associational organization and ameliorative orientation as in Europe. For example, the American Social Science Association (created in 1865) embraced the notion that the social scientist was a model citizen helping to improve the life of the community, not a professional, disinterested, disciplinary researcher. During the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, this model was gradually replaced

by the emerging disciplinary associations such as the American Economic Association (1885), the American Political Science Association (1903), and the American Sociological Society (1905) (Haskell 1977; Manicas 1987; Ross 1991). They did not have to face the kind of entrenched opposition or ideologically motivated hostility that many similar efforts in Europe met with (even though it would be misleading to portray these processes as the harmonious unfolding of disciplinary consolidation).

By the turn of the century, a particular pattern of differentiation and professionalisation had emerged in the US and proved to be compatible with an active role in government service early on. Economists and psychologists were, for instance, able to play a role in government service as early as World War I, just as demographers were able to do through the Bureau of the Census. At the same time, disciplinary and professional recognition was being achieved within the setting of American universities that started to become ever more orientated towards research undertakings (Geiger 1986; Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993).

This process of successful disciplinary consolidation marked the beginning of a divergence between American and continental European social science. Late nineteenth century American social scientists, many of them German-trained, defined their intellectual projects in a society undergoing a process of rapid transformation: industrialization, urbanization, and concomitantly emerging massive social and political problems. As social scientists with a professional legitimacy, they tried to mark out their own scientific territory and establish their own systems of accreditation. These ambitions entailed the establishment of separate social science disciplines (Manicas 1987).

In Europe, on the other hand, university professors often enjoyed an established position; one writer (Ringer 1969) even uses the term 'a Mandarin class' to describe the situation of the leading German academics at the turn of the nineteenth century. The situation in some other countries, such as Sweden and Norway, was not different.

In sum, sociology emerged as a set of discursive practices involving the search for knowledge about societies undergoing fast and deep societal transformations. The success of a given research programme was certainly related to the intellectual coherence and viability of the programme. One key aspect of such programmes concerned their ability not merely to denote a broad genre of discourse as that of sociology but to construct objects of research – or rather domains of inquiry – made up of entities endowed with a sufficient degree of stability to permit the performance of statistical and other operations depending on the validity of assumptions of permanence amidst change.

The cases of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim are two of the most prominent ones amongst a large number of analogous efforts at elaborating programmes of intellectual coherence and institutional legitimacy. The sustained focus of Weber and Durkheim on questions such as the objectivity of social science, on the ethos of scientific inquiry, on the constitution of social facts, is exemplary in this respect. An interesting example from outside of the field of sociology is that of marginalist economics programmes that sometimes was able to assert itself even under political conditions, as in late nineteenth century Italy or, for that matter, early twentieth century Sweden, that may have appeared as far from advantageous.

However, the institutionalisation of the social sciences was also clearly related to two other forms of institutional processes. First, the late nineteenth century was the period when the idea of the university as a key vehicle for research became predominant in a number of countries across the globe from California in the west to Japan in the East. This process created the possibility for the new social sciences, if in a highly uneven way, to find a relatively stable basis for continued research and training.

Second, the late nineteenth century was also a period of deep institutional change in the political and administrative order in a number of countries. Administrative reforms were undertaken and new objectives assigned to the state. Furthermore demands for wider political representation meant that institutional reforms of the state, not least the demand for a culturally coherent nation state, created demands upon the social and historical sciences to contribute to these reform processes. The particular forms of interaction between research programs, efforts to deal with the social question, and the relationship of that question to the restructuring of universities and of the state, differed greatly across countries. However, in a number of cases, opportunities arose for the successful institutionalisation of sociology and some of the other social science disciplines in ways that came to structure disciplinary developments in these countries for many decades.

### **Research Programs in the Interwar World**

The end of World War I saw the triumph of liberal democracy and the reorganization of the political order across the European continent as well as a decisive weakening, if not the end, of European global predominance. Soon it became evident that the triumph of democracy was being replaced by its crisis and the emergence of new forms of political and social order with claims to represent the future of humankind in Europe and beyond. It was in this period that pre-eminent representatives of a range of social



science disciplines engaged in a self-critical reflection on the history of their own disciplines. Based on such historical reflection, however, they were able to formulate research programs that came to serve as focal points for scholarly endeavours for decades to come.

Within just a few years in the middle of the 1930s a range of path-breaking programmatic formulations occur. At this time economists, most notably Keynes in England but also Gunnar Myrdal and the other members of the so-called Stockholm school in Sweden, took stock of the historical experience of their discipline and formulated a coherent long-term research program. In sociology, Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* was equally historically and programmatically orientated. Its influence extended far beyond the domain of disciplinary sociology and came to affect developments in a number of other fields, including political science and social anthropology. In statistics, Fisher was able to achieve an encompassing synthesis that became a landmark. In political science and sociology, scholars at Chicago and Columbia opened up new areas of empirical research.

In Europe, the early work on electoral geography by André Siegfried in France was complemented by sociological and socio-psychological studies by Paul Lazarsfeld and his collaborators in Austria, and by Tingsten's and Wold's minor classic, *The Study of Political Behaviour* (1937). The comprehensive philosophical programs outlined by the Continental logical empiricists and their Anglo-Saxon counterparts came, despite their relative numerical weakness, to set agendas for years to come. In this respect, Alfred Jules Ayer's polemical and programmatic volume on *Language, Truth and Logic* (1934) became one of the most noted examples as did Otto Neurath's *Empirische Soziologie* published at roughly the same time.

Meanwhile the French Annales School charted a completely new terrain of research that forever changed scholarly efforts in the historical and the social sciences. This was also the period when the first edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* appeared, as a further testimony to need for reflection, for stocktaking but also for the setting of new scholarly agendas. Furthermore, research programs emerged in the 1930s that positioned themselves in conscious opposition to disciplinary developments in the social sciences and the humanities. One prominent example of this was the broad synthetic program associated with the so-called Frankfurt school. A very different one was the effort of philosophical phenomenologists, most prominently Husserl and Heidegger, to elaborate a conceptualisation of human activity from a point of view at odds with that of both analytical philosophy and dominant forms of empirical social research.

Many of these efforts proved to be of lasting importance. However, in institutional terms, the devastating effects of the European political landscape in these years and the ravages of World War II mean that it is difficult to discern clear institutional continuities in the continental European case. Many of the developments in the interwar years were followed by deep ruptures that made the resurrection of the social sciences after World War II appear as a new phenomenon.

### **The Internationalisation of the Social Sciences: The Age of International Associations, Public Policies and Mass Higher Education**

The full-blown institutionalisation of the social science disciplines on a global scale is largely a phenomenon of the era after World War II. One manifestation of this was the establishment, originally under the auspices of *UNESCO*, of the *International Political Science Association (IPSA)* and the *International Sociological Association (ISA)* in 1949. A process of professionalisation was set in motion and came to exert a truly profound influence worldwide in the wake of the expansion of higher education systems in a range of countries in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The 1960s saw a dramatic expansion of higher education systems across Western Europe and North America but in many other parts of the world as well. In the same countries, sweeping processes of administrative reform also occurred, which often coincided with the coming to power of new political majorities. Major new public policy programs were launched across the board in these countries. In this context, sociology came to be finally and firmly entrenched as an academic discipline in university settings. In this age of great public policy programs, disciplines such as political science and sociology were able to secure a firm basis in a series of European countries; in some cases (as in Denmark) for the first time; in others (as in Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Italy) in a renewed and greatly expanded form.

This expansion was paralleled by a growth of the social science disciplines on a global level that for the first time tended to make the international associations truly international. On all continents, the full array of disciplines and subdisciplines appeared. There was also an impressive expansion of research methods being utilized. Thus a previously predominant concern for institutions and processes on a national level was gradually complemented by a stronger research orientation towards the study and management of clearly quantifiable processes.

In terms of research methods, the 1960s were the period of the breakthrough of the behavioural revolution; a revolution which had been largely foreshadowed by European scholarly efforts in the interwar period.

No longer could historical, juridical, and philosophical reasoning alone or in combination be considered sufficient for the analysis of social and political phenomena. Methods and techniques previously elaborated in statistics, psychology, and economics were now being used and extended by sociologists and other social scientists on a vast scale.

This shift in research methodology coincided with the numerical expansion of the social science disciplines and in Europe was often complemented by the introduction of more formalized graduate education programmes, normally with compulsory courses in research methodology. At the same time it became possible to see the emergence of an informal ‘invisible college’ of younger scholars in Europe and in other continents as well, in marked contrast to the much more national orientation of scholars of older generations but in some ways also rejuvenating a tradition of internationalism prevalent among the classics of sociology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In those universities and countries where this shift was most decisively pushed through, there were certainly instances where the older historical and philosophical competence was either partially lost or could at least not be developed on par with developments in these neighbouring disciplines. Apart from external political-societal reasons for this pattern of disciplinary development, a fundamental fact of a long period after World War II was that only in the United States did the social sciences have sufficient size and scope to make widespread international emulation appear feasible. This was to some extent related to the sheer numbers of American sociologists.

Furthermore, although sociology in Europe could and did draw strength from its longstanding tradition, this was a tradition filled with ruptures, discontinuities and painful experiences that did not easily lead themselves to a sense of triumphant expansion. In the American case, conversely proponents of sociology and the other social sciences sometimes present their fields as the modern highly specialised sciences of a modern and increasingly differentiated society. The critical dimension of sociology was of course also present and gained increasing strength from the latter half of the 1960s onwards when the earlier predominant functionalist mode of theorizing seemed incapable of providing a meaningful interpretation of either macro-societal contestation or to be of much help to an interpretive analysis of human textual and oral communicative acts.

### **Continuities and Reassessments**

Three key features stand out in the development of sociology in the late twentieth century. First, its professional consolidation has proceeded. Its institutional position in the modern mass higher education systems seems relatively secure. Never before have there been so many sociologists

in the world, and never before have they been so well organised in professional terms, so well trained in technical terms, and so internationally linked through journals, networks, and research conferences. Sociology like many other social science disciplines – such as political science, sociology, educational research, business administration studies, and public policy research – have to a large extent emerged and evolved as confederations of different practices. They have been held together by a common concern with broad substantive themes rather than by a core of theoretical assumptions.

To a larger extent than these other social science disciplines, sociology however has been able to continuously engage with a limited number of modern classical authors and texts. This has helped to give a focus to theoretical contestations. However, it may of course also have contributed to making it difficult to challenge some of the most fundamental assumptions common to most of these classical authors. Thus to the extent, for example, and as recently argued by Alain Touraine, that sociology can no longer be legitimately described as the study of society but should just be the study of actors and systems, sociology may be forced to engage in a profound rethinking of its intellectual heritage extending back far beyond the classics of the turn of the nineteenth century.

Second, it is remarkable to what an extent truly innovative research contributions have resulted from work in scholarly settings outside the structure of regular disciplinary university departments such as organised research units at leading American, and to some small extent also European, research universities, such as research institutes, normally of a trans-disciplinary nature, have been created both outside and inside the structure of regular universities. In Germany, the institutes of the Max-Planck-Society have played a crucial role in this respect. Institutes for advanced study have become ever more important for intellectual developments during the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas initially such institutes tended to be international in their scholarly orientation and national in their own organizational structure, there has recently been an increase in the number of such institutes set up within individual universities. The recommendation of the Gulbenkian Commission (Wallerstein et al. 1996) that every university creates a transdisciplinary institute for advanced study is another indication, a recommendation that now slowly seems to correspond to an emerging institutional reality.

Third, the demands upon sociology and the other social sciences, from politicians, administrators, and the public at large, to demonstrate the usefulness of their contributions do not seem to have subsided but if anything to increase. The foremost social scientists of the late nineteenth

century had to demonstrate the intellectual and institutional legitimacy of their activities relative to competing forms of scholarship in law, economics, and philosophy. These competitors have been strengthened by management consultants, computer experts, and representatives of new transdisciplinary fields such as that of the cognitive sciences.

There is no reason to believe that sociology will not be able to defend its current position. It is important, though, to recognize that this depends upon its intellectual integrity in the face of an array of demands for immediate usefulness. At the same time, any truly innovative scholarly inquiry has to be contextually and historically sensitive. This also means that a search for a solution to most of the essential problems of sociology has to proceed with a high degree of openness to the contributions from outside of the discipline itself. This, however, should be seen as an asset rather than as a liability. In this situation, historical reflection is a necessary component of serious research efforts.

Clearly, a number of assumptions concerning our deepest identities and their relationship to the basic forms of political and social organization have to be examined anew with the same openness for foundational inquiry as sociologists of the generation of the classics exhibited. In fact, this type of scholarship may be crucial to enable us to grasp the consequences of our own actions in a context deeply structured by systemic properties but still in the last instance dependent on the actions, reflections and critical awareness of human beings themselves. Sociology in this sense is not just the study of society, nor just of actions and systems, but also systematic inquiry on the basis of an interpretative engagement with the existential dimensions of reflexivity, agentiality and historicity (see also Alexander 2002; Sztompka 2000 but also Wittrock 2001a and b). The outcome of such encounters may well determine the possibility of a civilized community of human beings.

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# Divergent Commitments and Identity Crisis

ELIEZER BEN-RAFAEL AND YITZHAK STERNBERG

## ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that recent heated debates within sociology around the definition of the discipline's terms of reference reflect basic identity dilemmas of sociology the seeds of which are found in the discipline's "deep structures." Our contention is that sociology is given to inner tensions rooted in a fundamental dilemma between its two basic and original aspirations: moral commitment and scientific validation. From this dilemma stem four syndromes that represent different solutions to this tension and which imply contrasting assertions of what sociology means to be: the moral commitment syndrome, the methodology syndrome, the engagement syndrome and the relativistic syndrome. General developments of sociology as well as of national sociologies are considered historically and comparatively in the light of these four syndromes. One is then led to see in the debates of today sociology a genuine crisis of identity where the basic inner tensions of the discipline engender acute divisiveness. These developments jeopardize the status and unity of sociology as a scientific and academic discipline, though on the other hand, they can also be seen as a proof of vitality formulating new problems, opening new horizons and creating new environments.

## **Sociology and Moral Commitment**

Sociology is the scene of heated debates in recent years. These debates go sometimes so far as to echo doubts of participants with regard to their "opponents" scientific endeavor, nay even straightforward denials of

their scientific status. This article grasps this situation as reflecting identity dilemmas of sociology the seeds of which are found in the discipline's "deep structures." In other words, we suggest that these present-day tensions in the sociological community around the definition of the discipline's terms of reference are endemically attached to sociology's basic aspirations, and may take on different formulations and paths of developments, according to circumstances, places and individuals.

The founding fathers' writings explicitly refer to the inherent tension between social science, on the one hand, and values and moral commitment, on the other. In the views of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, moral commitment and social science do by no means necessarily exclude each other (see Larrain 1979; Meszaros 1990; Thiele 1996). As a matter of fact, and beyond the differences which separate them in many respects, they illustrate what we describe as the *moral-commitment syndrome* of sociology. The main characteristic of this syndrome consists of the adherence to scientific procedures under the impulse of moral values understood as of universal validity. Yet, while a clear dividing line separates what is scientific and what is non-scientific, value commitment motivates the investigation of the social reality as well as the appreciation of its analysis – even though the value commitment itself should not interfere with the observation of facts and their conclusive elaboration. In brief, Marx, Weber and Durkheim ambioned to combine a positively-moral commitment to human emancipation as upheld by the project of the enlightenment, with adherence to science and scientific methods (see Thiele 1996).

In Durkheim's work, for example, this is manifest in his definition of anomie, his distinction between the "normal" and the "pathological" or his support for social reform while at the same time, his analyses emphasize the enormous attention he attached to methodological issues and scientific validation – see his use of statistics and his dedication of an entire book to "The rules of sociological method." The scientist, Durkheim contended (1964: 32), "must emancipate himself from the fallacious ideas that dominate the mind of the layman." Yet, according to Thiele (1996: 46), Durkheim also sees "sociology . . . as unique among the sciences. Other sciences might provide information, techniques or laws but have nothing to say about what moral ends ought to be pursued." Thus, Durkheim (1964: 49) maintains that

for societies as for individuals, health is good and desirable; disease, on the contrary, is bad and to be avoided. If, then, we can find an objective criterion, inherent in the facts themselves, which enables us to distinguish scientifically between health and morbidity in the various orders of social phenomena, science will be in a position to throw light on practical problems and still remain faithful to its own method.

Marx was not less committed to the emancipation project while emphasizing the distinction, with regard to scientific procedures, between his approach and what he considered as non-scientific “utopian” and “religious” socialism. An issue elaborated with firmness in Engels’ (1972/1892) “Socialism: utopian and scientific.” This combination of moral commitment and adherence to science was to fuel later debates among marxists. Hilferding, for example, argued that

... so far as marxism is concerned, the sole aim of any inquiry ... is the discovery of causal relationships... The practice of marxism, as well as its theory, is free from value-judgments... Thus marxism, although it is logically an objective, value-free science, has necessarily become, in its historical context, the property of the spokesmen of that class to which its scientific conclusions promise victory. Only in this sense is it the science of the proletariat ... while at the same time it adheres faithfully to the requirements of every science in its insistence upon the objective and universal validity of its findings. (Hilferding 1985/1910: 23-24)

Other marxists, Korsch (1972) and Colletti (1972), criticized Hilferding by insisting on the moral-commitment dimension. Hence, according to Korsch (1972: 66) Hilferding “deals with the economic theory of marxism as a mere phase in the unbroken continuity of economic theory, entirely separated from socialist aims and, indeed, with no implications for practice.” Colletti (1972: 370) even insisted that Hilferding’s view “allows no room for a link between science and class consciousness.”

The same syndrome is found in the work of Max Weber. His value orientations can be clearly seen in such notions as “disenchantment,” “iron cage” and the distinction between *wertrationalität* and *zweckrationalität*. On the other hand, his scientific rigor can also be seen in his extensive interest in methodological issues (Weber 1949). According to Weber:

It certainly does not follow (from the ‘subjectivity’ of the values inspiring scholarship) that research in the cultural disciplines can only have results that are ‘subjective’ in the sense that they are valid for some and not for others. What changes, rather, is the degree to which they *interest* some and not others. (cited in Ringer 1997: 49)

Hobsbawm (1997: 169) echoes this approach when he states

... for everyone engaged in scientific discourse, statements must be subject to validation by methods and criteria which are ... not subject to partisanship... Statements not subject to such validation may nevertheless be important and valuable, but belong to a different order of discourse.

Hence, all in all, for the founders of the discipline sociology is, indeed, indelibly bound to moral commitment from its very beginning. Under this

angle, it consists of an on-going argument with a reality that includes values, motivated by – and in confrontation with – the researchers' own values.

### **The Methodology Syndrome**

Though, this closeness to values may represent a predicament for sociologists in the academe when they want their field to be recognized as a scientific discipline. The scientific ethos, as widely consensual in major academic fields, aspires to the disconnection of subjective value judgment from scientific validation. Acknowledgements of differential applicability of this scientific ethos in various disciplines and fields of knowledge have brought about the distinction of hard-science (natural sciences) from soft-science (humanities and social sciences), marking a clear status differentiation between branches of knowledge (see Pels 2001).

Hence, for many sociologists it seemed obvious that the ambition to assert the scientific status of the discipline in the university requests getting as close as possible to models illustrated by – or at least converging toward – the hard sciences and warranting, above all, methodological and scientific rigor. The emphasis of this syndrome – we call it the *methodology syndrome* – is on scientific methods and procedures, and on the neutralization – as far as possible – of the influence of values on research. In this perspective, the link of science and moral commitment is conceived as a zero-sum relation, and values are viewed as irrelevant to the rigorous pursuit of scientific-sociological research and analysis. Moral commitment cannot but be detrimental to scientific endeavors. This syndrome echoes the famous call to scholars by Julien Benda (1955) to disregard whatever stands on their way – and it is values which are explicitly meant – toward scientific knowledge; the sole commitment of scholars, Benda claimed, should lay with the pursuit of pure knowledge. It is accordingly, for instance, that a scholar like Samuel Stouffer could describe the method used in one of his researches in the 1950s as follows:

The probability method eliminates any possible bias of the interviewer in the selection of respondents... The probability method also has important advantages from the mathematical standpoint of calculating margins of error attributable to chance alone. The probability method has disadvantages also. One is its cost, which can be two to five times as high as the quota method... The other is its slowness... (cited in Riley 1963: 259-260)

This quote shows the centrality given to methodology in the investigation and the intention to avoid as far as possible any bias due to the human factor. This syndrome tends to specify the focus of research along precise questions and issues and fosters further specialization and fragmentation of

the subject-area of sociology. A road that leads to the critique of sociology as an accumulation of “*petits savoirs*.” Elias (1998: 231-232) does not hesitate to complain:

In order to be able to use methods of this kind and to prove themselves scientific in the eyes of the world, investigators are frequently induced to ask and to answer relatively insignificant questions and to leave unanswered others perhaps of greater significance. They are induced to cut their problems so as to suit their method.

### **The Engagement Syndrome**

In blunt opposition to the methodology syndrome another syndrome, the *engagement syndrome*, has developed that draws from the original commitment of sociology the imperativeness of deepening the pledge to moral commitment. Though, drawing further this aspect of the original identity of sociology, the engagement syndrome subordinates research to *a priori* moral commitments, creating thereby a confusing uncertainty about the scientific exigencies of the discipline. Here is crossed the line between what is scientific and what is not scientific, although the formal adherence to the importance of science may still be acknowledged. Hence, works belonging to this syndrome share disrespect for the significance *per se* of scientific validation procedures while this engagement syndrome may be motivated by either conservative or radical outlooks; it may aim at either glorifying or reviling nations, races, social classes, ethnic groups or linguistic communities.

One remembers here Cyril Burt who investigated hereditary influences on human intelligence, and the accusations made against him by numerous scholars attached to universalistic egalitarian values, that he probably “faked” his results according to his *a priori* belief in the importance of heredity (see Blum 1978; Kamin 1974; Wade 1976; Block and Dworkin 1976). One also knows about glorifications of given groups or peoples such as in the case of the forgery of “ancient” sagas with the help of Czech medieval manuscripts (Hobsbawm 1983: 7). Other examples are the case of eugenics, in the West, and of race studies in Nazi Germany (see Blum 1978). In a similar vein one acknowledges the tendency of contemporary Afro-American scholars to elaborate on a past dignifying the black population in the US. Some attempt to situate this “glorious past” in ancient Egypt, notwithstanding the staunch denegation of many a mainstream Egyptologist. These attempts depict Ancient Egyptian civilization as a “black civilization,” overemphasizing, in the same mood, the impact of this civilization on the development of Greece and Rome. In contrast to all available descriptions, Cleopatra is even depicted as a black woman. Commenting on this D’Souza (1992: 120) says that

Even if it were deemed necessary for blacks to adopt a mythic view of their past, elaborating such a myth should not be the task of the university. It is rather politicians and theologians who may be expected to comfort and inspire the people in this way. The university cannot engage in such an undertaking without repudiating its fundamental purpose: the disinterested pursuit of truth.

### **The Relativistic Syndrome**

Still, an additional syndrome, the *relativistic syndrome*, confronts, in its own way, the basic tension endemic to sociology, between moral commitment and scientific validation. This syndrome rebukes both any positive and universal moral commitment with regard to social and human issues, and the validity of scientific methods in the area of social sciences. According to this approach, one cannot speak at all of “positive” universal values which are not context-bound, nor of any criterion which would justify that science is preferable to other kinds of reflexion about the world, and that what is scientific should be distinguished from what is not. This perspective waives the distinction between appearance and substance, and sees everything as mere appearance. Hence, distinguishing fact from fiction, or evidence from interpretation is pointless.

Adherents to this syndrome like to refer to “facts” and not to facts (see Fish 1999: 71-77). Thus, Stanley Fish (1999: 71/75) argues that

The ‘facts’ of a baseball game, of a classroom situation, of a family reunion, of a trip to the grocery store, of a philosophical colloquium on the French language are only facts for those who are proceeding within a prior knowledge of the purposes, goals, and practices that underlie those activities . . . the notion of ‘fact’ has been destabilized by the very same process; for since facts are established by means of true-false judgments (is it the case or is it not?) the circumstantialization of those judgments is also the circumstantialization of fact; that is, the question of whether something is or is not a fact will receive a different answer in different circumstances.

Skepticism that is inherent to any scientific work is thus taken here one or two steps further, and becomes an outlook at science itself. The paradox for academic adherents to this syndrome is that the basis of legitimization for their assertions stems from their status in the academy but not from science. Methodology is used to show that what is considered as scientific is itself “infected” by values. Accordingly, it is enough to demonstrate that any scientific endeavor involves value orientations in order to assess that science is but one more manifestation of ideology.

In Hobsbawm's words (1997: 358), this relativist fashion

... throws doubt on the distinction between fact and fiction, objective reality and conceptual discourse. It is profoundly relativist. If there is no clear distinction between what is true and what I feel to be true, then my own construction of reality is as good as yours or anyone else's ... no narrative among the many possible ones can be regarded as privileged...

### The Syndromes Compared

*Grosso modo*, when comparing syndromes according to attitudes toward moral commitment, on the one hand, and scientific validation, on the other, the moral commitment syndrome is positive on both counts; the methodology syndrome is negative regarding moral commitment and positive regarding scientific validation; the engagement syndrome is positive regarding moral commitment but negative on scientific validation; the relativistic syndrome is negative at both respects. From Table 1, one notes that the moral commitment and the engagement syndromes share a positive attitude toward value commitment, in contrast to the two other syndromes. At the same time, the moral commitment and the methodology syndromes are distinguished from the engagement and relativistic syndromes, on the basis of the divergent attitude toward scientific validation.

In a general historical perspective, we know that the moral commitment syndrome has lost much of its predominance among sociologists during the first half of the 20th century. This process has taken place principally at the profit of the methodology syndrome which has for many years – possibly until today – become associated with the notion of “mainstream sociology.” More recently, however, it is undeniable that the moral commitment and engagement syndromes have gained in strength, especially in their narrow radical variants. This trend is reflected on the emergence of a “cultural

**Table 1**

A typology of sociology's different identity syndromes

Syndromes	Attitude toward moral commitment*	Attitude toward scientific validation*
Moral commitment	+	+
Methodology	–	+
Engagement	+	–
Relativistic	–	–

\* The values + or – indicate whether one finds the specific criterion in the basic identity of sociology when it responds to one or another syndrome.

left” which is distinct from the more universal, broadly-minded, economic and political left of previous periods by its focusing on particularism, cultural issues and socio-cultural categories. Kimball (1991: xii) quotes the philosopher Richard Rorty when he says that

a new American cultural Left has come into being made of deconstructionists, new historicists, people in gender studies, ethnic studies, media studies, a few left-over Marxists, and so on. . .

It is in this same vein that one witnesses in the USA, a large profusion of new programs such as women’s studies or Afro-American studies. According to D’Souza (1992: 204)

. . . Beginning as an experiment initiated at San Diego State University in 1970, Women’s Studies has grown to be a separate program or independent department in over five hundred American universities. Similarly, Afro-American Studies has expanded from seventy-eight programs in 1978 to some three-hundred fifty now, and several universities have set up major African and Afro-American research centers. . .

One of the main problems of this growth in Women’s and Afro-American studies is the growing opportunities for sliding into the engagement syndrome. Thus, D’Souza (1992: 210-211) maintains that

In no other area . . . is there a shared orthodoxy for the entire department, indeed the entire field. . . Perhaps nowhere are these pedagogic and ideological premises more strongly and consistently found than in Women’s Studies departments and programs.

Concomitantly, the relativistic syndrome is also gaining in strength under labels like reflexivity, postmodernism and deconstructionism contributing, they too, to the diffusion of skepticism.

### **Comparing National Sociologies**

We may view the development of the various syndromes not only in a general diachronic perspective, but also in a synchronic manner and from specific diachronic outlooks: the different national traditions of sociology indeed endeavor diverse paths of development in different countries while influencing each other in this era of interconnectedness. Hence, while the Founding Fathers who illustrated the moral-commitment syndrome were all *Central and Western Europeans*, the methodology syndrome grew out primarily in the *United States* – it has actually often been labeled “American sociology.” It is from the US that this syndrome radiated throughout the world sociological community, for many years. It appeared both in the broad macro structural-functionalist version and in the narrowly-empirical,



quantitative-statistical, variant. The decline of structural-functionalism in the 1970s and the 1980s left then prevalence to the narrow variant also named “instrumental positivism.” As says Turner (1989: 238):

United States sociological research in the post-Second World War period has developed a highly distinctive character. It emphasizes statistical technique; it relies primarily on surveys; it reveals an individualistic conception of structure (that is, aggregations of what subjects report); it is committed to developing narrow theories of low levels of generality; it advocates an inductive incrementalism in the cumulating of knowledge; and it is concerned with successful grant-getting and team efforts.

In *France*, the strong tradition of morally-committed sociology inspired by Comte and Durkheim enabled it to resist the influence of “American” sociology which was growing parallelly to the increasing internationalization of sociology. Later on, the hold of marxism among French intellectuals will still strengthen this power of resistance to American sociology, though, this time, also at the favor of the engagement syndrome. This resistance power was encouraged by the special importance of the link to philosophy in French sociology. As described by Drouard (1989: 68):

The privileged link which existed in France between philosophy and sociology not only opposed the penetration of United States empirical sociology, but also fostered French sociologists’ preoccupation with conceptualization and sociological theory.

This link stems, for sure, from the same circumstances that also account for the emergence in France of the relativistic syndrome illustrated by scholars like Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida. Hence, all in all, and from a historical perspective, moral commitment, engagement and relativism gained more prominence in France than in the USA where the methodology syndrome remained prevalent for many years.

As for *Germany*, the founders were divided from the very beginning – that is at the turn of centuries – between the moral-commitment syndrome illustrated by Max Weber that aspired to firmly establish the purely scientific goals of sociology aside a wide value-perspective, and the followers of Rudolf Goldscheid who wanted primarily to emphasize, *à la* engagement syndrome, the relation of sociology with social action (Kaesler 2002). Later on, sociologists who invested themselves in making their discipline a respected academic field turned to the methodology syndrome, even though in Germany, this meant emphasizing simultaneously “pure thought” and empirical research. After the decimation of sociology by the Nazis and the leaving of many sociologists for England and the USA, one found tens of sociologists in the FDR as soon as 1945, who were now often under the influence of American sociology, and turned toward an

empiricism tainted by the engagement syndrome. As Weiss (1989: 108) notes

... right from the very beginning West German sociology was oriented towards practical social problems and needs, especially in the form of empirical social research.

In Germany the relativist syndrome remained of little influence even though in the 1960s and 1970s major debates took place – where Adorno, Dahrendorf, Habermas and Popper participated – on positivism in sociology, and as well as about the late-capitalism-versus-industrial-society argument (Adorno et al. 1976; Adorno 1979; see also Weiss 1989; Kaesler 2002).

As to *British* sociology, up to the 1950s sociology was widely influenced by public and wide social concern, in a moral-commitment vein. Later on, one observes a strengthening of the ambition to emphasize professionalism and the methodological syndrome. This orientation became rapidly predominant among British sociologists who tended to incorporate non-academic “practitioners” (Platt 2002), which was closely related to the growth of the welfare state. Albrow (1989: 214-215) says that

Empirical work on advanced societies with a broader scope than the British Isles has been rare... The total weight of intellectual forces ranged against a theoretically focused [sociology while] empirical sociology has been strong and has been expressed both in opposition to and as elements of skepticism within sociology...

The 1970s, however, will witness a strengthening of the moral commitment and the engagement syndromes – especially, via the growing influence of Althusserian marxism and women studies, which will also be beneficial to the relativistic syndrome.

### **Explaining Recent Developments**

In a general manner, we may say that sociology in many places – though along varying profiles – endeavors a growing heterogeneity not only through the diversification of schools of thought, which is nothing new, but also according to the very understanding of what sociology means and is. Its original moral commitment syndrome was to be challenged by the growing presence of the methodology syndrome as well as by the engagement and relativist syndromes. This process adopts peculiar contours in different places and times, but it is essentially determined by the same fundamental *problématique*.

This *problématique* resides in the original ambition of the discipline to combine moral commitment with commitment to science and its

validation principle. It offers elements of account for the changes that took place in the attitudes of sociologists toward their discipline, over the years and in different places. This statement, however, has also to take into consideration changing circumstances and eventual “good reasons” (Boudon 1993) that scholars may find in endorsing given syndromes of sociology at the detriment of others. Hence, the above-mentioned strengthening, about two or three generations ago, in American sociology (but not only there), of the methodology syndrome at the detriment of moral commitment expressed the institutionalization of sociology as a scientific discipline, in the modern university. This process pushed scholars in sociology to establish their academic status on the basis of criteria equivalent to those in vigor in other disciplines.

According to Gella (1976) and Malia (1960), one could expect that following the growing specialization, professionalization and academization, social scientists would, so to speak, loose their intellectual posture by caring more for techniques of research than for the essence of social problems. This, in turn, should have brought scholars to be less eager than in the past to respond to the appeal of ideologies and utopias. Things, however, often turned the other way round as in several centers of sociology it became fashionable among sociologists to assert radical views toward society and sociology. What contributes to explain this turn is the further development of universities – first in the US but also throughout the Western world. “The university”, says Levine (1996: XVII), “is no longer the site of homogeneity in class, gender, ethnicity and race” (see also Richer and Weir 1995). A heterogeneization that represents a drastic change of hinterland as well as new interests within the academe.

These developments do bear numerous consequences. As far as the student body is concerned, the expansion of higher education to new social strata has made the relations between academic studies and job opportunities – especially in an area like sociology the uses of which are more unclear than in many others – quite difficult. This uncertainty of employment perspectives explains the tendency of many students, at all levels, to adopt more radical attitudes toward society as well as toward their own disciplines. Furthermore, Gamson (1971) already showed years ago that those called “children of affluence” were also prone, in the 1960s, to adopt radical views in the context of their own “remoteness” from job considerations. As far as the faculty is concerned, Kimball (1991) contends that, precisely in circumstances where the discipline has been institutionalized in the university and that many academics achieve secure tenured positions, they come to enjoy a kind of life-long moratorium. This moratorium allows them to say almost whatever they want, whenever they want, without carrying genuine responsibility for what they say.

Moreover, for tenured academics, the growing competition among them for renown (Bourdieu 1988) when combined with the not-too-rigid nor unambiguous evaluation criteria of achievements – what makes sociology a “soft” discipline –, may result in an ever stronger appeal of non-academic activity – in the media or in politics – where being “provocative” or radical may enhance one’s popularity – at least in students’ eyes.

Another factor in this picture is that among present-day academics not a few have participated, as students, to the student unrest of the 1960s in the US, France and many other countries. Some of these academics have remained loyal in many respects to the political emphases and cultural claims of the days of their youth (Kelleher 2002), which has still strengthened the longstanding tendency of sociology students and faculty – that could have been expected anyway from the very founding codes of the discipline – to adopt more leftist and liberal positions than scholars and students in other fields (see Lipset 1994). Last but not least, we would also see in the developments of sociology the impact of contemporary trends of globalization and interconnectedness of societies groups and people. These trends, indeed, reveal to all – including sociologists – the crucial issues of misery, poverty and hardships that are the rule in wide parts of the world, as well as the diversity of cultures and the limits of universalistic statements. A climate is created where engagement is encouraged while relativism seems to respond to the reality of the world.

These general explanations for the recent developments within sociology that may be gathered from the literature of the field take on, to be sure, different contours and carry diverse consequences in specific countries, according, of course, to prevalent cultural, academic and sociological legacies. Whatever the relative contribution of the various explanations, reported in the above, to the understanding of the development of sociology we are led by our own perspective on sociology to see in the present disparity of its syndromes nothing else than a crisis of identity.

### **An Identity Crisis**

Many circumstances provide, to be sure, explanations as for which syndromes of sociology become predominant, when and where. These syndromes represent the different possible “answers” to the basic dilemma of sociology and delineate the general space of formulations of its identity. Our contention is, however, that, due of course to those circumstances, today sociology undergoes a genuine crisis of identity as the inner tension rooted in the fundamental dilemma attached to its binary identity – the twofold ambition to express moral-commitment and to comply with the exigencies of scientific validation – has engendered nowadays acute divisiveness. The different syndromes that have stemmed from

this dilemma and which represent as many different approaches to this dilemma, actually imply contrasting assertions of what sociology means to be. Their simultaneous presence in today's sociological world community and the scope of their confrontations have made the discipline a scene of debates where discussions concern not just the stronger and weaker points of respective schools, but, and above all, what sociology itself consists of. They involve nothing less than the most fundamental premises of the discipline that elaborate its identity, and it is in this sense that we contend that they represent a genuine crisis of identity.

This crisis, however, does not necessarily mean the "end of sociology." Sociology, as a field of academic and non-academic activity has never been more solicited. Moreover, one cannot speak either of a crisis of paradigm in Kuhnian terms (Kuhn 1970) as one does not face the exhaustion of any paradigm. What is at stake is rather the competition of contradictory syndromes which not only assert their legitimacy *at the detriment of others* but may also find it difficult to accept the latter's very legitimacy. A contest that questions the meanings themselves of the pursuit of science when referring to social reality, and of the significance of value commitments which it involves.

On the other hand, it may also be contended that by broadening its perspectives and finding new languages and speech partners, sociology is now illustrating a development that indicates vitality and, mainly, a sort of "intellectualization" of the discipline. Though, it also clearly appears that this refreshing takes place here at the cost of fragmentation, not just of fields of interest, but also of terms of references. A kind of crisis where sociology has widely become receptive of, and influenced by, external agendas and ideological exigencies (Fuchs and Ward 1994), experiencing, at the same time, decentralization, de-focalization and dependency on non-sociological texts and conceptualizations (Stinchcombe 1994). From a historical comparative outlook these developments have contradictory consequences. The growing tensions which mark contemporary sociology shake and weaken the scholarly community by confusing its self-justification and opening the way to de-scientific and even anti-scientific tendencies. Such tendencies undoubtedly jeopardize the status of sociology as a scientific and academic discipline (Lipset 1994). On the other hand, it is to admit that the engagement and relativist syndromes do manage new academic environments and thereby contribute to formulate new problems and to open new horizons.

What comes out from the all-above is that nowadays sociology is likening its principal object of investigation, contemporary society, as it is now one more illustration of identity questioning, intellectual fragmentation and identity politics.

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