

American sociology had a strong reformist animus, but this was more congenial to YMCA secretaries than to revolutionaries or preachers of spiritual salvation. Even this mild reformism became, at most, a submerged motif as "value-freedom" and technical proficiency became established as binding norms within the profession.

I have no satisfying explanation for the recent dramatic changes in the conception of sociology. One can point, of course, to certain intellectual sources—C. Wright Mills in this country, the so-called Frankfurt School in Germany, and Marxists-turned-sociologists, such as Henri Lefebvre, in France. This, though, does not explain why these individuals and their ideas have suddenly come to exert such a powerful influence. I strongly suspect that, as is often the case in the history of ideas, there is a strong element of chance in the new affinity between sociology and political radicalism. In any case, I don't intend to devote myself here to speculation about the reasons for this slightly bizarre marriage (not the least reason being that I doubt whether it will last long). Rather than to explore historical causes, I wish to look at the theoretical question at issue, to wit: *In what sense, if at all, can sociology be called a liberating discipline?*

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**"The relationship between sociology and freedom is not as simple, or as cheerful, as the radicals in the profession would have us believe."**

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I shall approach the question by way of two seemingly contradictory propositions: (1) sociology is subversive of established patterns of thought, and (2) sociology is conservative in its implications for the institutional order. I suggest that *both* propositions are correct, and that understanding this entails also grasping the relationship between sociology and freedom, at least on the level of politics. (I should add here that the epistemological problem of how an empirical science can or cannot deal with man's freedom is clearly outside the scope of this paper.)

*Sociology is subversive of established patterns of thought.* This, of course, is today a favorite notion of those who would marry sociology to radical politics. A few years ago most sociologists would have been shocked or honestly bewildered by the proposition. Then, it was those with a vested interest in established patterns of thought who (if the inelegant simile may be forgiven) smelled the rat before those who put it there. I recall a remark made to me in 1956 by a barber in the southern town where I had just started my first teaching job. After I told him what I was teaching, he paused (more pensively than hostilely) and remarked, "Oh, I know about sociologists. You're the guys who wrote all those footnotes in the Supreme Court decision on getting the colored into the schools." He was right, of course, in an extended sense, if not literally. I wonder how many of the sociologists who busily gathered all those data on the place of the Negro in America (some of them Southerners living quite comfortably in a segregated society) imagined that they were providing the legitimations for one of the great so-

cial transformations of our time. Put differently, I suggest that there is in sociology a subversive impulse that strives for expression regardless of the intentions of individual sociologists.

Every human society has assumptions that, most of the time, are neither challenged nor reflected upon. In other words, in every society there are patterns of thought that most people accept without question as being of the very nature of things. Alfred Schutz called the sum of these "the world-taken-for-granted," which provides the parameters and the basic programs for our everyday lives. Robert and Helen Lynd, in their classic studies of *Middletown*, pointed to the same phenomenon with their concept of "of course statements"—statements that people take for granted to such a degree that, if questioned about them, they preface their answers with "of course." These socially established patterns of thought provide the individual with what we may call his basic reality kit (paraphrasing Erving Goffman), that is, with the cognitive and normative tools to build a coherent universe to live in. It is difficult to see how social life would be possible without this. But specific institutions and specific vested interests are also legitimated by such taken-for-granted patterns of thought. Thus, a threat to the taken-for-granted quality of legitimating thought patterns can very quickly become a threat to the institutions being legitimated and to the individuals who have a stake in the institutional status quo.

Sociology, willy-nilly and by its own intrinsic logic, keeps generating such threats. Simply by doing its cognitive job, sociology puts the institutional order *and* its legitimating thought patterns under critical scrutiny. Sociology has a built-in debunking effect. It shows up the fallaciousness of socially established interpretations of reality by demonstrating that the facts do not gibe with the "official" view or, even more simply by relativizing the latter, that is, by showing that it is only one of several possible views of society. *That* is already dangerous enough and would provide sufficient grounds for sociologists to become what the Prussian authorities used to call *polizeibekannt*—of interest to the cognitive if not to the actual police—and, let me add, every society has its cognitive policemen who administer the "official" definitions of reality. But sociology, at least in certain situations, is more directly subversive. It unmasks vested interests and makes visible the manner in which the latter are served by social fictions. At least in certain situations, then, sociology can be political dynamite.

A favorite term of the New Left in Europe and Latin America is derived from the vocabulary of psychoanalysis—*Bewusstmachung* in German, *concientización* in Spanish—perhaps best translated as "bringing to consciousness." This is the process of social critique by which the mystifications of "false consciousness" are demolished and the way is prepared for the demystified consciousness necessary for revolutionary praxis. I shall return shortly to the question of revolutionary praxis. As to the first aspect of the term, the subversive effects of critical social analysis on consciousness, it must be admitted that it pertains to sociology in a very basic way. Anyone who

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