

pursues the sociological perspective to its logical consequences will find himself undergoing a transformation of his consciousness of society. At least potentially, this makes him unsafe in the eyes of the guardians of law and order. It also produces unsafety, sometimes with catastrophic effects, for his own peace of mind.

"Bringing to consciousness," in this sense, does indeed have a liberating quality. But the freedom to which it leads, quite apart from its possible political effects, can be a rather terrible thing. It is the freedom of ecstasy, in the literal sense of *ek-stasis*—stepping or standing outside the routine ways and assumptions of everyday life—and this, let us recall, also includes standing apart from routine comforts and routine security. Thus, if there is a relationship between "bringing to consciousness" and the ecstasy of liberation, there is also a relationship between that ecstasy and the possibility of desperation. Toward the end of his life Max Weber was asked by a friend to whom he had been explaining the very pessimistic conclusions of his sociological analysis, "But, if you think this way, why do you continue doing sociology?" Weber's reply is one of the most chilling statements I know in the history of western thought: "Because I want to know how much I can stand." Alfred Seidel, a student of Weber's who was also greatly influenced by Freud, came to an even more pessimistic conclusion in his little book appropriately entitled *Bewusstsein als Verhaengnis—Consciousness as Doom*. Seidel concluded that the combined critical consciousness of sociology and psychoanalysis was not only politically subversive but inimical to life itself. Whatever other motives there may have been, Seidel's suicide, as a young man in the 1920s, was an existential ratification of this view of the "bringing to consciousness" of sociology.

My purpose is not to suggest that sociologists, to be consistent, should all commit suicide. I have a somewhat more benign view of the existential possibilities of sociological consciousness. Rather, I want to point out that the relationship between sociology and freedom is not as simple, or as cheerful, as the radicals in the profession would have us believe. Yes, there is a liberating quality to the discipline of sociology. Yes, there are situations where sociological understanding can be liberating in a political and (at least in terms of my own values) morally significant sense—as in the service that sociology can render to the liberation of American blacks from racial oppression. But for individual sociologists, the discipline can bring to consciousness aspects of the world that are profoundly disturbing and a freedom that, in the extreme instance, evokes truly Kierkegaardian terrors.

Sociology is conservative in its implications for the institutional order. This second proposition, put differently, means that sociology, far from leading inevitably to revolutionary praxis, actually inhibits the latter in most cases. Put differently once more, fomenters of revolution have as good reason to be suspicious of sociology as policemen have. This point can be made economically by way of three imperatives which, in my opinion, sociological understanding can show to be present in every human community: the imperatives of order, of con-

tinuity, and of triviality. Each of these flies in the face of some of the fondest beliefs of the contemporary left.

After a recent lecture of mine on sociological theory, a perceptive student remarked to me, "You sure have a hangup on order, don't you?" I conceded the description, but I added that my "hangup" was not arbitrary or inadvertent. Behind it is the conviction that sociology leads to the understanding that order is *the* primary imperative of social life. There is the additional conviction (which I cannot develop here) that this fact is rooted in the fundamental constitution of man, that is, that not only sociology but philosophical anthropology must lead to a "hangup on order."

Society, in essence, is the imposition of order upon the flux of human experience. Most people will first think here of what American sociologists call "social control"—the imposition of coercive power upon deviant individuals or groups—and, of course, it is in this sense that radicals will understand, and disagree with, my "hangup on order." Coercion and external controls, however, are only incidental aspects of society's imposition of order. Beginning with language, *every* social institution, no matter how "nonrepressive" or "consensual," is an imposition of order. If this is understood, it will be clear that social life abhors disorder as nature abhors a vacuum. This has the directly political implication that, except for rare and invariably brief periods, the forces of order are always stronger than those of disorder and, further, there are fairly narrow limits to the toleration of disorder in any human society.

"The 'meaninglessness' of so much of social life, currently decried as the source of so-called 'alienation,' is in fact a necessary condition for both individual and collective sanity."

The left, by and large, understands that all social order is precarious. It generally fails to understand that *just because of this precariousness* societies will react with almost instinctive violence to any fundamental or long-lasting threat to their order. The idea of "permanent revolution" is an anthropologically absurd fantasy. Indeed, revolutionary movements can be successful only if they succeed, and succeed fairly rapidly, in establishing new structures of order within which people can settle down with some semblance of social and psychic safety. Mao Tse Tung's cultural revolution can serve as a textbook example of the grotesque failure in store for any revolutionary praxis that fails to grasp this point.

The imperative of continuity is closely related to, but not identical with, the imperative of order. I suppose that, finally, it is rooted in the simple fact that people have children. If one has children, one feels a necessity to explain the past to them and to relate the present to the past. If one loves one's children (and I take it that this is the case with most people who have them), one will want to project into the future whatever good things one has possessed in one's own life—and there are very few people, even among the most oppressed, who have pos-