

sessed nothing good at all. Conversely, if one loves one's parents (the current "generation crisis" notwithstanding, I am inclined to think that this, too, is something of an anthropological constant), one will not finally want to disparage *everything* that constituted the parents' world—especially not if one comes to have children of one's own, who not only ask what will become of them but from where they come. *Children are our hostages to history.* Consequently, to be a parent means (however dimly and on whatever level of intellectual sophistication) to have a stake in the continuity of the social order. As a result, there are limits not only to social disorder but to social discontinuity. Enthusiasts for violent change (most of whom, I have noticed, don't have children) fail to recognize this. Successful revolutionaries find out about the limits of disorder, usually to their dismay, as they must settle down to govern the society over which they have gained control. The experiences of the Soviet regime with the institutions of the family and of religion are instructive in this regard.

"The sociologist has no doctrine of redemption to bring into the political arena."

The imperative of triviality is also, I suspect, rooted in some basic facts of the human condition—namely, the facts that man's attention span is limited and that man can tolerate only a limited amount of excitement. Perhaps the physiological foundation of this is the need for sleep. Be this as it may, social life would be psychologically intolerable if each of its moments required from us full attention, deliberate decision, and high emotional involvement. I would thus give the status of a sociological axiom to this proposition: *Triviality is one of the fundamental requirements of social life.* It is sociologically, anthropologically, and perhaps even biologically *necessary* that a goodly portion of social life take place in a state of dim awareness or semisleep. Precisely for this reason the institutional order "programs" the individual's activity. Put simply, society protects our sanity by preempting a large number of choices—not only choices of action but choices of thought. If we understand this (the understanding has been worked out systematically, by the way, in the theory of institutions by the contemporary German sociologist Arnold Gehlen), we shall see that there are limits not only to disorder and discontinuity but to the frequency of "significant events." We shall then take more seriously "meaningless rituals," "empty forms," or "mere routines" in social life—simply through recognizing that were social life in its entirety to be charged with profound meaning, we would all go out of our minds. 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 currently fashionable left ideal of full participation in the sense that everybody will participate in every decision affecting his life, would, if realized, constitute a nightmare comparable to unending sleepless-

ness. Fortunately, it is anthropologically unrealizable, though the endless "discussion" that goes on in radical groups gives a certain approximation of the horror that its realization would signify. It is one of the mercies of human nature that, finally, all participants and all discussants must fall asleep.

I have tried to explicate the conservative bent of sociology by pointing to some basic imperatives of social life that should make the sociologist skeptical of notions of violent change and hesitant to commit himself to revolutionary praxis. I think that similar conclusions can be arrived at, by way of sociological or historical empirical analysis, for the actual processes of revolution. If all this adds up to a conservative propensity, it should be emphasized that the conservatism in question is of a peculiar kind. It is *not* a conservatism based on the conviction that the institutions of the status quo are sacred, inexorably right, or empirically inevitable. The aforementioned subversive impulse of sociology precludes this type of conservatism. Rather, it is a conservatism based on skepticism about the status quo in society *as well as* about various programs for new social orders. It is, if you wish, the conservatism of the pessimist. The seeming contradiction between our two propositions about the subversiveness and the conservatism of sociology thus resolves itself into a paradoxical but by no means irrational stance: *the stance of a man who thinks daringly but acts carefully.* This, of course, is exactly the kind of man whom our young revolutionaries will call a fink. So be it. It is probably one of the unavoidable blindnesses of youth to fail to see that acting carefully in society may, for some, be the simple result of wanting to preserve their little apple-carts, but for others, motivated quite differently, it may reflect a carefully thought-through concern to avoid senseless pain and to protect the good things of ordinary life. There is some irony, though, in the fact that a generation that has made a culture hero out of Albert Camus should extol his *Rebel* at the expense of his hymns of praise to the ordinary pleasures of ordinary men on sun-drenched beaches.

Sociology, therefore, is a liberating discipline in a very specific way. There can be no doubt about its liberating effects on consciousness. At least potentially, sociology may be a prelude to liberation not only of thought but of action. At the same time, however, sociology points up the social limits of freedom—the very limits that, in turn, provide the social space for any empirically viable expression of freedom. This perspective, alas, is not simple. It requires intellectual effort and is not easily harnessed to political passions. I contend that the effort is worth it and that it will serve well precisely those political purposes that come from a concern for living men rather than for abstract doctrines of liberation.

So much for sociology as a discipline. What about the sociologist? A good case can be made that there is a crisis of freedom in the world today. What is to be the place of the sociologist in this crisis?

While the place of sociology and the place of the sociologist are not identical, they are interrelated. Perhaps the easiest way to explain the difference is in terms of