

SOCIAL PATHOLOGY: SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE RISE OF PSYCHOTECHNOLOGY

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PROBLEMS THEORY IMPASSE

Social problems theory is at an impasse due to its dependency: 1) on fixed and limited ways of viewing social problems; 2) on methods deemed *near-perfect*; 3) on the models and theories of *giants* in the field; 4) on public opinion setting the direction of research.

FIXED VIEWS

Delinquency research has concentrated mainly on the hard-science approach (Gallihier, McCartney 1973), and mainstream sociologists tend to concentrate on the social pathology perspective. The *maladjusted* individual is responsible for his/her own shortcomings. In this there is a failure to consider total social structures or to move beyond a low level of abstraction, with a fragmentary and scattered focus on various milieus (Mills 1969 527). Existing arrangements of power, property and stratification are upheld by not being considered a part of the problem.

The "causes" of the problem are still seen as a failure of the individual to conform to normative standards of society. The "why" of these failures is answered by Mills' *paste-pot eclectic psychology* or by catch-alls of *socialization failure, cultural deprivation, or negative self-concept*.

Here we have an *order perspective* (Horton 1966) which means that social structure is made up of given and generally unquestioned means and ends, which underlay a vast number of theories and research projects in sociology in the United States (Merton 1938). Although liberal sociologists recognize that means are differentially distributed along class and racial lines, there is little questioning of the ends themselves. The ends remain given, if not realizable for all. Analysis of social problems in this functionalist perspective remains confined within the *given*, in a structure which the "good man" strives to sustain (Gouldner 1970 427). With this mode of analysis is that the means become ends. Social scientists only research superficial questions, and social problems thus become *adjustment* problems.

There lacks a critical spirit which would not only analyze historical forces which have

produced the structure within which the "good" man operates, but would critically analyze both the ends, and the impact which these ends have on environment, well-being, and interpersonal relations.

Instead of implying that the individual who does not accept the normative means to society's ends is pathological, five critical questions should be vigorously analyzed. 1) Is human emancipation, well-being, and security enhanced in this society?

2) Is human growth, awareness and potential enhanced? 3) Does this society produce men and women with a sense of purpose, meaning, and happiness? 4) Is work non-alienating? 5) Are families, living arrangements, and communities viable and supportive of meaningful social existence?

This approach implies a radically different epistemological assumption than the *given* of the *order* theorists. As present social problems theory and research stands, we are exposed to an endless series of descriptive, classificatory, common sense approaches to social problems, with a continuing commitment to the positivist method (Frankfurt Institute 1972 11)

DEPENDENCY ON 'PERFECT' METHODS

Part of the crisis in mainstream social science is too-close adherence to a few conventional methods to the exclusion of all others. In social problems research, this crisis is particularly acute in a state of theory which neither explains nor generates scientific answers to problematic phenomena.

By *impasse* I mean that stage in a movement away from a dependency state to one of independence, where new models, paradigms, and theories may be generated with a critical spirit of inquiry. The uncertainty and fear of cutting free from dependence on tradition suggests the Gestalt therapy of *catastrophic expectation* (Perls 1969 34). It is difficult to break through the impasse stage, and easy to cling to the dependency stage, with implicit security of acceptance, employment, and research support. But it may be even more dangerous to depend on existing mainstream models. Those who question the state of

social problems research have moved away from the dilemma of Kuhn's (1970 35) *normal* social science which shows little appetite for major conceptual or phenomenal novelties.

Research on mainstream social science problems depends on the natural science model (Roszak 1969, 1973; Matson 1966; Bakan 1972). Major social science questions revolved on attaining social laws and interpreting the social world. Questions of the foundations and changes of this social world were dismissed as *metaphysical*; the critical spirit atrophied. *Unobservable essences, inner states of being, and absolute truth* are dismissed as "unscientific" (Frankfurt Institute 1972 3).

Comte's positive philosophy stressed that the new science of sociology must avoid intervention in actual political movements, which must remain only objects of observation for it. As such it was appealing to those in power. Such a science could report, classify, dissect and observe forever with the ideological and financial largess of established regimes. Denial of the critical spirit would rationalize, and legitimize existing political, economic and social arrangements.

Thus, the dominant method sociological research is unscientific, even using the criteria of mainstream sociology of what is and what is not scientific. This dependence on existing established method makes for trivialization of social research, distrust of philosophy, rejection of a historical approach, neglect of social structure, and refusal to examine the underlying assumptions and social forces which lurk behind this so-called *objective approach*. Findings are not contaminated by other more critical approaches. Established methods often prescribe the subject matter, instead of being adapted to it. This produces "knowledge of domination, not knowledge of cultivation" (Frankfurt Institute 1972 125)

MODELS ON 'GIANTS' OF THEORY

Texts dealing with juvenile delinquency and social problems are monotonously similar in setting forth the same theories and the same causes and the same solutions, with no variety of approach. The recognized *giants* of juvenile delinquency theory are Short, Shaw, Cloward and Ohlin, Nye, and Cohen, where hard data positivists are overrepresented, and others, such as conflict theorists are underrepresented (Galliher, McCartney 1973 81).

These theorists tend to reduce causation to individual characteristics or those of narrow, specific milieux. These rather shortsighted solutions revolve around *adjustment definitions*, stressing control above all (Horton 1966 702). Alternative interpretations to delinquency and the rising crime rate rarely appear.

Crime rates among the oppressed may be only one movement in the process of liberation: a movement from horizontal to vertical aggression, as when blacks riot and rebel in North Africa and magistrates are confounded by astonishing crime waves (Fanon 1963 52).

DEPENDENCY ON PUBLIC OPINION

Reliance on public opinion greatly facilitates definition of social problems simply as *social pathology*. Social problems research has been based on expressions of small town and rural bias (Mills 1943). The focus of social problems research is largely determined by bureaucratic social science as a service to prevailing authorities, and in service of administrative liberalism of the welfare state (Mills 1959 129). Both *value-free* and *democratic* definitions of social problems take on a public opinion interpretation which is dubious for supposedly "neutral" social science, with a congeries of scattered categories difficult to relate to theory, or method or social significance. It focuses sociology on trivial, superficial or spurious topics (Manis 1974 305).

This is the critical point, especially when we consider the elaborate funding policies and all the strings attached. It seems clear that social scientists would echo society's opinion makers in what they investigate, how they investigate, and solutions to the problem based on such investigation. The *public* is a democratic-sounding euphemism to manipulate content and direction of research.

CONCLUSION

A sociologists have failed to deliver their promises of solving problems of the 1960's when serving the liberal establishment, and many social scientists became less confident as urban renewal, and the poverty issues addressed by the Office of Economic Opportunity collapsed. Instead of generating a new paradigm for mainstream sociology in response to these failures, the great "American resignation" prevailed, with a principal theme that many social problems are unsolvable because they are rooted in immutable

individual characteristics. Such resignation is evidence of failure to transcend the established mode of studying social problems. If social pathology is to be blamed on the victim, we can see how completely the giants have internalized the four dependencies which we have reviewed. The reaction is almost perverse: "We can't be wrong. The problem is with sick people." The response is to deal with these social problems by techniques collectively labeled *psychotechnology*, which includes neurosurgery, drug therapy, and behavior modification.

Many writers have noted the resurgence of psychosurgical techniques, and the parallel of this resurgence with rising crime rates, violence, alienation, and radical social movements (Restak 1973; Miller 1972; Breggin 1972). The movement to reinstate these techniques, including implanting electrodes in the brain, drugs to deaden or destroy brain tissue, and laser beam treatments, began when several scientists advocated brain surgery for ghetto rioters (Breggin 1972). And a complete program of screening was advocated to detect violence-prone people. Prime candidates for psychosurgery include: 1) old people; 2) women; 3) blacks; 4) those in simpler occupational categories (Breggin 1972 3381). Other *pacification* programs are under way in prisons, schools (control *hyperactive* children), mental hospitals, homes for aged, and drug and alcohol treatment programs.

The success rate of these programs is low, and often, more problems are created, such as intellectual deterioration or convulsive seizures. However, for psychosurgeons, this is interpreted as success.

If psychosurgery is an extreme example, it illustrates the resurgence of the social pathology assumptions. The medical model is now moving from theory to application, and deviants literally can be rooted out. Little concern has been given to stratification, class, property, and power arrangements. The rise of psychosurgery is a two-pronged attack on social problems: 1) social scientists can provide the theory framework for the social pathology model, providing concepts which veil existing patterns of oppression and domination, and supporting the illusion that existing social arrangements are immutable. 2) Technicians trained in the medical model,

and armed with trained incapacity to see alternatives, can state without reservation that rioters, delinquents, and criminals are brain-damaged and pathological. Such an arsenal of psychotechnology, with drugs, electric shock, surgery, and behavior modification aimed at the "deviant" would have been a dream come true for the the eugenicist.

The social pathology approach to social problems has not been dead, but only sleeping through the liberal period of the 1960's. With the failure of proposed solutions to social problems, an individual approach is reappearing, forcibly to "adjust" the "unadjusted." Sociologists, depending on limited ways of viewing social problems, and allowing a few "giants" and "public opinion" to set the direction and focus of research, have contributed to this trend.

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