

## THE THREE CULTURES OF SOCIOLOGY: ON CRISIS AND SUFFERING

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The United States has been comparatively hospitable to the development of sociology. Even there, however, sociology remains primarily an academic subject. As Don Martindale observes (1976:204):

The primary audiences for sociological works of all sorts, thus, are academically anchored as undergraduate students, graduate students, or other professors. Sociology presents the rare spectacle of a discipline with no other task than to work out its own salvation, enjoying complete freedom from external obligations in search for its self definitions. In an age in which everything is a speciality, sociology is a speciality in search of an identity.

For American sociology the quest for identity is not new. From its inception as a self-identified discipline, the nagging question of the nature of sociology has hovered about. Albion W. Small (1903) pointedly addressed this concern in an article entitled, "What is a Sociologist?" Since that time the concerns over sociology and sociologists have become a preoccupation in sociology, explored in a subdiscipline appropriately enough identified as the sociology of sociology (Tiryakin, 1971).

**THREE CULTURES OF SOCIOLOGY** In that the search for identity within sociology, the strategies or cultures of sociology are probatively reviewed. For heuristic purposes three such ideal-type cultures are identified and discussed: the above the ground, the on the ground, and the under the ground. Each features a distinct attack on the problems of identity within the discipline of particular interest is the under the ground culture, which centers on undergraduate experiences. This is highlighted because of growing doubts experienced within the two, more offi-

cially recognized cultures of sociology and because the experiences and anticipatory socialization of the undergraduate is considered quite critical, particularly in a period of academic retrenchment. With increasing frequency, bolstered by political events in the community at large, many new graduate students, fresh from undergraduate training, reflect characteristics a counterculture, an oppositional culture to official sociology while simultaneously questing for a "professional" credential. It is a strain of some standing. Now its significance may be more critical.

The first culture of sociology, the above the ground, is represented by Marvin Bressler (1973), and Parsons and Platt (1973). It is an official culture stressing the need for the legitimacy of the discipline. Critical to the achievement of this goal is the graduate school, the "core" of the university and central to professionalization. In graduate school the critical distinction between knowledge and intelligence is made. According to Parsons and Platt, knowledge is fundamentally a free commodity. The critical difference is intelligence. Intelligence plays a fiduciary role in the educational complex, as a means of exchange, as a means of accounting, and a storehouse of value. Elite institutions and core graduate programs create as well as sustain the integrity of the intelligence currency by monitoring the users, developers and applications of transacted knowledge.

The cognitive concerns in above the ground sociology are with sustaining intelligence. Doubts and misery, or what we term suffering, are either unrecognized or treated as "natural" constraints having little bearing on the nature and form of inquiry. The place to express intelligence is principally the fiduciary system of the college or university. Sociologists, beget sociologists. The process is considered cognitively and politically logical. Trained to be stars or prima donnas, the initiates are committed to perform on the stages provided in colleges and universities.

Some problems do not confront the above the ground strategy. The under-standing many participants have of

their role and purpose in the fiduciary complex of higher education is however muddled. The search for understanding proceeds through remarkable intellectual feats such as projecting the systemics of cognitive ordering onto reality, believing that the means of sustaining sociological intelligence is similar if not identical with the world that the sociologists purport to study. Hence, there is little place for the marginal unless there is some direct utility involved. Otherwise, marginality, expressed in self-doubt, and in alien intellectual procedures, is ruled out of order; marginality is deviant and therefore is not a part of the fiduciary complex. Vehicles exist to handle deviants. Deviants can be isolated, discouraged or openly rebuked. This is sometimes expressed in terms of the "standards" of the profession.

The above the ground culture in sociology has been a major official culture. Another official culture, serving as a loyal opposition, is what is termed the on the ground culture. Among its spokespersons are sociologists such as Erving Goffman, Karl Mannheim (1936) and Alvin Gouldner (1973). The knowing individual is recognized as playing a pivotal role in human affairs. Such individuals may suffer but often this is a matter of personal style. For the sociologist as knower, there is a concern over how one is known as a knower. The quest for this may involve logical argument, but often the result is polemical, if not moralistic, becoming indignant about opposition forces within the community or within the profession. Though the process of understanding stresses some of the creative dimensions of humans, when marginality is encountered, it is most often advanced as an identity, one serving to identify the self or others. Hence a distinct style of marginal sociologists studying marginal life situations and people becomes a hallmark of this culture of sociology.

The under the ground culture in sociology has no luminaries with academic credentials in sociology. It has its origins in undergraduate experiences which are carried over to graduate study study. It is characterized by an engaged suffering, the value of which

is derived from the experience of being marginal to the world. The conditions of the world and the knower merge as they do with Dostoyevsky (1961:277): In Notes from Underground the story begins with the line, "I'm a sick man ... a mean man." The cognitive concerns in the under the ground culture are indeterminant. Whatever importance there is centers in the acting and reflective person although this is frequently a highly private experience. Without a clearly identified purpose, sickness and indecision are omnipresent. And there is no need to explain either the self or others, much as Dostoyevsky observes (1961:116):

... man always and everywhere, prefers to act in the way he feels like acting and not in the way his reason and interest tell him, for it is very possible for a man to feel like acting against his interests and, in some instances, I say that he positively wants to act that way - but that's my personal opinion. I agree that man is a creative animal, doomed to strive consciously toward a goal, engaged in full-time engineering, as it were, busy building himself roads that lead somewhere never mind where.

The under the ground culture is of increasing significance at a time when the legitimacy and purpose of sociology as well as education are being questioned. In the shifting climate of higher education the market for highly centralized intelligence has become depressed. Suffering is experienced by many participants, but logic and analysis do not console. Indeed, many agents of the official above the ground and the on the ground cultures cultivate despair, expressing ritual sadness over the loss of "golden" years, and provide no exit for those who have yet to find a niche within the educational complex.

**RETRENCHMENT AND THE QUEST FOR THE PRACTICAL** The quest for identity in sociology has become more attenuated with the current retrenchment in higher education, particularly in the United States. Ironically, rather than confronting the nature of the subject as well as the unfolding reactions such as the growth in the under the ground culture of sociology, the first re-

sponse has been to extract "practical" lessons, particularly for those entering the field. Such an effort reaffirms a commitment to the officially recognized cultures, particularly the above the ground culture. Appeals to fixed ontologies and logic are made even though it seems clear that such appeals have no authority inside or outside the discipline.

While for those concerned with the collective character of sociology, the contemporary events may signal a kind of winter of discontent, it might be well to reconsider not only the quest for the practical, but the challenge the presence of a thriving under the ground culture has for the discipline.

**IMPORTANCE, EXPRESSION, UNDERSTANDING AND SUFFERING** Sociology has long had a relationship with philosophy which can be renewed by examining the problematics in sociology and the responses to current professional concerns in terms of Alfred North Whitehead's (1966) *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead advances three key notions: 1) importance, 2) expression, and 3) understanding. These assist in probing the experiences and concerns centering in sociology over the quest for identity and response to contemporary discontents. "Importance, generates interest. Interest leads to discrimination." "The more general notion of importance is presupposed by expression." (1966:31) Expression founded on the finite occasion, is constituted by a multiplicity of experiences which in turn is systematized in language. "Language is expression from one's past to one's present. It is the reproduction in the present of *sensa* which have intimate association with the realities of the past." (1966:33-34) To express is to be engulfed in an array of pasts.

In speaking, importance is asserted as matters-of-fact are both discriminated and alluded to. This discrimination, this probe for meaning, is clearly in opposition to expression. Such an opposition results in two epistemological questions: 1) What is the locus of expression? and 2) How (possibly what) do we understand?

In Whitehead's view, living organisms express themselves. Often, how-

ever, the locus of expression is transmitted to an abstraction as exemplified for our purposes by terms such as "graduate school" or "the profession of sociology." Such projection commits the search for messages among nonhuman agents although the "message of the search" was human in origin. When this is pointed out to those who consider themselves "practical-minded" and desirous of practical guides to conduct. They often make a demeaning response, that such criticism is merely "philosophic." Yet they often express a need for a metaphysics for their own expression.

The contemporary doubts over the identity of sociology and sociologists may be critically highlighted by Whitehead's distinction of two types of understanding, the logical and the aesthetic. "Logic starts with primitive ideas and puts them together." Although it starts with high abstractions, often identified in the methodological directives of above the ground sociology, "(t)he characteristic attitude of logical understanding is to start with the details, and to pass to the construction achieved," much as one might encounter in the on the ground culture. With aesthetic understanding or enjoyment, a distinctly different process is identified. "The whole precedes the details ... There is a totality disclosing its components," (1966:62) more like the mood-engulfing marginality of those suffering within the under the ground culture of sociology.

The conflict in sociology, one endemic and characterized by the search for identity and the other accentuated by contemporary developments in higher education, reveals an unresolved dilemma. Whitehead's discussion aids in highlighting the conflict.

The intellectual and identity concerns of sociologists are aesthetic. The under the ground culture of sociology serves as a stage to dramatize the depth and extent that this can take. However as those who represent the official cultures, the above the ground and the on the ground, attempt to grapple with these experiences and expressions they attempt to reconstruct the experiences, advancing logical understandings. Expression becomes en-

tailed in concerns over importance, hence discrimination. The resulting emphasis on importance and logical understanding are transformations of aesthetic experiences to non-aesthetic, and to preoccupation with matters-of-fact. One can witness increasing concerns for the practical approach to professional life, graduate training and the like, all treated as factual matters. In the process knowing is ignored. Formalism comes to dominate. But inasmuch as importance cannot be felt by those seeking importance in matter-of-fact fashion, the resulting style of official claimants in sociology is that they can only form and formalize (1966:22-23).

When those in the official cultures of sociology undertake to explore importance in the name of matter-of-fact, the result is a morality of reality. This takes the form of expressing in a pontifical what is and what isn't sociological, what should and should not be sociological. This is done frequently without any appeal to logic nor methods nor considering how understanding enters into expression. The resulting expression proceeds while denying the claimed mandate for official sociological expression, logical understanding. This paves the way for the under the ground culture of sociology and the effort to languish in the embrace of aesthetic understanding.

There is a major problem in the expression and understanding of dilemmas facing the identity of sociology and sociologists. The under the ground culture of sociology constitutes an expression of this current suffering. How do we persist without being so engulfed in the suffering of the underground that we are unable to speak? We have no clear response to this, but we propose to systematize the concern for suffering in terms of thirteen propositions.

Proposition 1. Some sociologists and would be sociologists suffer. In Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, Leonata, Governor of Messina, observed:

For there was never yet a philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently, however they have writ the style of gods and made a push at

change and suffrance.

Proposition 2. Suffering can be bearable and unbearable. There are times when suffering is understood, aesthetically. At times it is expressed. When it is expressed, people, including sociologists, howl. However, not all howling represents unbearable suffering; some of it is a matter of public relations and the ritual expression of powerlessness.

Proposition 3. Suffering changes from being bearable to being unbearable and visa versa.

Proposition 4. Sociological knowledge of changes in suffering does not relieve suffering.

As Sartre observes:

Whatever one may say or think about suffering, it escapes knowledge to the extent that it is suffered in itself, for itself, and to the degree that knowledge remains powerless to transform it.

The same can be said of sociological knowledge as applied to suffering sociologists.

Proposition 5. The importance of sociology cannot be determined by looking at abstractions called matters-of-fact.

Proposition 6. Expressions about sociology occur in finite occasions (conventions, classes, seminars) which vary.

Proposition 7. Expressions about sociology involve more than the explorations into the importance of sociology and graduate school.

Proposition 8. The more circumstances in which expressions occur about sociology the greater the role of non-situated appeals to grammar.

Proposition 9. With increased appeals to grammar, the greater the appeal to meanings which lie "behind words, syllables and order of succession".

Proposition 10. The more appeals to

meanings lying "behind words, syllables and order of succession" the greater the conflict between commitments to fables about underlying realities.

The conflicts between various modes of social praxis amplify not only conflict and uncertainty, but herald a time when appeals to "deeper," hidden, latent, structural meanings (e.g., new interpretations of the past, often a "classical past") are being forwarded. Sociologists and would be sociologists are very much a part of this process.

Proposition 11. The greater the conflict between claims and commitments to fables about underlying realities involving numerous "words, syllables and order of succession," the greater the personal vulnerability of those who are sociologists.

Because the conditions of graduate school and sociology cannot be known sociologically, only experienced (or suffered, if you like), increasing efforts to attach as well as protect character are observed (Becker, 1969).

Proposition 12. The greater the conflict between claims and commitments to fables about underlying realities and the greater the personal vulnerability, the more likely that the type of understanding advanced will be aesthetic rather than logical.

Proposition 13. Aesthetic modes of understanding can accommodate suffering, especially unbearable suffering.

Discourse involving mood, expressing intense, foreboding mood is favored over flacid, objective, value-free presentations. Even the "practical" will be conveyed imperatively! The notion of discourse may be shunned for an involvement with the totalizing being-in-itself.

**CONCLUSION** Sociology has long been in a crisis. Central to the crisis have been questions over the identity of its subject matter and its practitioners. This has become acute in recent years, particularly in the

United States where the fate of sociology has been inextricably tied to the fortunes of higher education. Whether as a corporate activity sociology can rechart its course by examining some of the behavior that confronts and confounds the discipline, some of which is of sociologists' own making, is difficult to gauge. Clearly other tools are required. If this paper provides a refocus to the concerns of these troubling times, it will be well worth the suffering it has exacted from its readers.

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