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SOCIOLOGY'S PROGRESS TOWARD SCIENCE*

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The roots of sociology include nineteenth century concerns with the social, economic, and political problems generated by the industrial revolution and the accelerating pace of urbanization. These problems include extreme manifestations of hopeless poverty, degrading slums, hazardous health environments, high general and infant mortality, sweat-shop working conditions, abuse of female and child labor, social unrest, and political oppression and corruption. Critics of the industrial order, philanthropic and utopian efforts to deal with the acute problems, the emergence of Marxist socialism, and the literature of anarchism all combined to provide the reformist climate during the developmental period of sociology.

Early recruits to sociology included, in disproportionate numbers, advocates of social, economic, and political reform who viewed sociology as a means to the achievement of a better society rather than as a scientific discipline. In at least part of the popular mind, including the mass media, sociology is still regarded as a form of social welfare advocacy rather than as a science. Moreover, to this very

day, some, but a shrinking number of sociologists, are more prominent as advocates of reform than as practitioners of social research.

It may be declared at this 75th anniversary of the American Sociological Association that perception of sociology as a science is gaining in ascendancy at an accelerated rate, both among professional sociologists and in the popular mind. Furthermore, this perception has gained ground as the number of sociologists has increased and it has been strengthened by the exponential growth of research publications in the expanded number of professional journals and in proliferation of research monographs. Eminently satisfactory also is the fact that sociological research publications over the years have been characterized by increasingly sophisticated and rigorous methodologies whether in quantitative or qualitative form.

It is not as necessary today as it was in 1949 (Hauser, 1949) to make explicit the role of science in respect to values and to social, economic, and political goals and their implementation. But in celebration of this 75th anniversary, it is in order to engage in some reminiscences—especially if one has reached emeritus status. Yet another reason for repetition of the

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themes I have stated a number of times in the past lies in the August 1980 issue of *Footnotes*, in the statements of ASA President Rossi and President-Elect Whyte. Rossi expresses concern about diversity in sociology and the inability of the ASA "to speak authoritatively on most substantive issues;" and President-Elect Whyte suggests a reorientation in the direction of sociological research that would not only advance science but "also strengthen the capacity of sociologists to discover the solutions to human problems." Rossi also makes a plea for more applied research as a way to ameliorate the dangers of existent sociological diversity and his perceived decline in the status of the discipline.

My observation that sociology has, over the past 75 years, become more a science than an advocate of social reform is based on what sociologists are doing—more precisely, publishing—than on what they are saying at meetings devoted to discussing what sociology is or should be. In marking its 75th anniversary, the membership of the American Sociological Association can claim to have moved closer to Max Weber's conception of "Science as a Vocation" (Weber, 1946) than was the case at the founding of the Association. Weber recognized that science as an endeavor could produce only existential and instrumental judgments, not value judgments. Moreover, Weber, in considering the role of the scientist in a classroom, held that it was the task of the faculty member to illuminate rather than to exhort, to analyze rather than to prescribe, to delineate problems rather than to attempt to solve them.

Sociology as a science is not to be confused with social engineering. The latter has as its objective the solution of social problems, including what President-Elect Whyte refers to as "social inventions." As a science, sociology has as its objective the funding of knowledge with the goal of all science of achieving predictability and explanation through research. Research can be either "basic" or "applied." The difference between basic research and applied research does not involve any difference in the objectives, theory, methodology, or product. It is applied research

if it happens to be focused on a problem confronting an action agency engaged in social engineering. The role of the sociologist as scientist is identical in either type of research—to expand the frontiers of knowledge. The product of either type of research may be useful in problem solution. Applied research, since it is addressed to a perceived action program problem, may be more immediately related to problem solution. But this does not change the role of the sociologist as a scientist. The sociologist, engaged in either type of research, is not a social engineer. Moreover, given the restricted framework of sociology, as holds for each of the social sciences, the product of either applied or basic sociological research is not likely to provide all the knowledge needed for problem solution. Problems characteristically do not necessarily parallel social science disciplinary boundaries. This is becoming increasingly apparent in respect to what are viewed as "economic problems" that the knowledge of economics alone is inadequate to resolve. Certainly this has become clear in economists' efforts to become social engineers in dealing with economic development in the less developed countries or with "stagflation."

The distinction between the scientist and the engineer has been quite evident in the realm of the physical and the biological sciences. It still is quite blurred in the realm of the social sciences. There is no ambiguity in the distinction between a physicist and an electronics engineer or a biologist and a surgeon. But there is considerable ambiguity in the role of the sociologist as a scientist and as a consultant, for example, in crime-prevention programs. In the realm of the social, social engineers have yet to emerge with separate identities to parallel engineers who apply the knowledge provided by physical and biological scientists, respectively. In consequence, social scientists, including sociologists, often are called upon to play both roles, that of the scientist and that of the social engineer. It is for this reason that it is especially incumbent on a social scientist carefully to distinguish between these quite different roles and to recognize that value judgments made as a social en-

gineer are not the product of scientific endeavors even though they may be in part based upon them. That is, existential and instrumental judgments derived from sociological research may play a part in the choice of the values or goals espoused by the sociologist in the role of social engineer; but the values or goals are not a product of the methods of science.

All this does not mean that the sociologist must remain a social, economic, or politically neutered person. The sociologist is not a scientist in all roles. When called upon to serve as a social engineer, the sociologist is required to adopt value judgments and to decide upon goals. But this is not the only realm in which the sociologist explicitly identifies with values and goals. The sociologist is also a citizen, a husband or wife, a father or mother among multiple roles. And in all roles other than that of scientist, the sociologist, of course, is obliged to make

value judgments and to act upon them. But sociologists delude themselves as well as others if they hold that their value judgments are the product of scientific endeavors.

I predict that the trend towards Weber's conception of science as a vocation will continue, and that by the Centennial Anniversary of the American Sociological Association, the concerns of the Association's President and President-Elect will be quite different.

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SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF IT*

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When the Editor invited me to contribute to this issue of *The American Sociologist*, commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of organized sociology in the United States, my first thought was to review my credentials for such a task. I first joined the American Sociological Society (ASS), as it was then named, in 1946. For almost 20 years thereafter I, like most members, paid little attention to the organizational aspects of sociology. I paid my dues, received the *American Sociological Review*, voted for officers (sometimes), and attended the Annual

Meetings. After I had acquired a modest reputation in the field, I often was asked to organize and chair sessions at the meetings, but that was about it. Certainly I was not an "active" person in either the political or organizational affairs of the ASS.

Then, in 1965, through a variety of circumstances I will not detail here, I became the second full-time, salaried Executive Officer of the now renamed American Sociological Association (ASA), with offices in Washington, D. C. This lasted until 1970, the longest term in that office, I believe, since it was established in 1963. Also, I will not dwell on the experiences in office ("They were the best of years, they were the worst of years," to paraphrase Dickens), for that would require a much different, and much longer

* With apologies to E. A. Ross, who titled his autobiography *Seventy Years of It*, and who was elected twice as President of the American Sociological Association. [Address communication to: Edmund H. Volkart, Department of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu HI 96822.]