

## EDITOR'S REMARKS

### B. T. WASHINGTON AND R. E. PARK FIND *THE MAN FARTHEST DOWN*

One of the lingering pleasures of the scholar's existence resides, for a while yet, in gliding among the shelves of a large library, and finding by the grace of Mertonian serendipity a volume that should by virtue of its quality and utility be remembered and consulted, but is not—the bookish equivalent to shopping in Filene's Basement or the local Goodwill store, uncovering a genuine preciousness amidst clutter, awaiting its rightful attention. The rediscovered book's glory lies in its ability to shed light on matters of continuing concern, to contextualize debates that have not subsided, and perhaps most importantly, to illustrate yet again that social analysis has been carried out with great skill and subtlety long before anyone still alive was involved.

So it was that *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe* ("The Struggle of European Toilers") authored "by Booker T. Washington with the collaboration of Robert E. Park" recently came to hand by happy coincidence in this, its centenary year. It was copyrighted in 1911 by The Outlook Company, then issued in 1912 by Doubleday, Page and Co. in Garden City, New Jersey, and reprinted once, in 1984. Booker Taliaferro Washington remains famous through his autobiographies for being born into slavery in 1856, then miraculously achieving international celebrity as a champion of the oppressed. He vigorously disagreed with W.E.B. Du Bois concerning the most effective political and economic means for liberating the American "Negro," a debate Du Bois recalled vividly in 1963 shortly before dying (McGill 1965). By 1910 Washington was enduring morbid hypertension (at twice the normal rate), was "forced" by his nervous Tuskegee Institute staff to vacation in Europe, turned 56 when the *The Man Farthest Down* appeared, and died three years later from exhaustion—nearly 50 years prior to Du Bois's death (who once said that some people assumed that he, too, had died in 1915).

Robert Ezra Park, eight years Washington's junior, lived a life not unlike Du Bois', and so unlike Washington's, who worked when young as a miner in West Virginia. Park, who was the ASA President in 1925, was educated at Michigan with Dewey, practiced journalism for twelve years in five major cities, won an MA at Harvard with William James, then pursued his doctorate in Germany under Simmel, Windelband, and the like. He spent 1904–05 at Harvard teaching philosophy (at the time his mentor, W. James, met with Max Weber), and eventually became a stalwart of the Chicago School (from 1914 to 1933), finishing up at Fisk prior to his death in 1944.

He left Harvard to work for seven years (1907–14) with Washington at the Tuskegee Institute as his ghostwriter and publicist: "Park would say that he learned more about human nature and society with Booker than in all his academic study" (Norrell 2009, p. 372). "These seven years were for me a sort of prolonged internship during which I gained a clinical and firsthand knowledge of a first class social problem....I gained some adequate notion of how deep-rooted in human history and human nature social institutions were and how difficult, if not impossible it was, to make fundamental changes in them by mere legislation or by legal artifice of any sort" (Odum 1951, p. 132). From this work he created the four-stage race-relations cycle still taught to undergraduates.

This unlikely pair, who became close friends, toured Europe from August 20 through October 9, 1910, "less than seven weeks...but it seemed to me that I had been away for a year" (p. 377). Park had done all the preparatory work for the trip, and had a large hand in writing up their report. Each day after seeking out the most exploited laborers in a given region, while traveling by train to the next stop, Washington would dictate their "findings" to his stenographer,

Nathan Hunt, who would type up the results and give them to Park for reworking into publishable form (Mathews 1948, p. 260). Thus, Park's long experience as a journalist served the project well. Their goal was simple: to ascertain the conditions of laborers throughout Europe and compare what they found with the plight of "Negroes" in the United States. It was widely believed, especially among whites, that blacks could "never" ascend the U.S. achievement ladder, and Washington made it his mission to destroy this prejudice by any means possible. The trip to Europe was but one small part of his lifelong campaign. Park later feared that Washington found abroad what he wished to find, to prove his case rather than perceiving what actually was before them, as they dashed through the least savory segments of European societies (Norrell 2009, p. 274). Nevertheless, and despite Park's uncertainty, the book reads convincingly and is full of remarkable "data."

According to a detailed itinerary map (between pp. 8 and 9 of the book, though not available in the Googled version), they landed at Liverpool, visited Andrew Carnegie at Skibo Castle in northernmost Scotland, then to London, Belgium, Bremen and Hamburg, Copenhagen, Berlin, Breslau, Budapest, Prague, northern and southern Italy, Sicily, then back north, departing from Germany. In his typical self-abnegating fashion, Washington insisted that they avoid all tourist traps and focus instead on work sites of the laboring class. They carried out a worker-oriented ethnography far removed from museums, castles, concert performances, libraries, and all the usual sites which attracted intellectuals. Washington had already visited Europe as a tourist, and this time had no patience for sight-seeing.

Instead, he and Park learned a great deal about the "lower orders": that in London, he found "the human waste of a great city" (p. 22), those 52 people who had starved to death on the city's streets in the preceding year (p. 29), and worse, those more than 100,000 in the East End, out of 2 million, who "are living on the verge of starvation" (p. 38). After carefully documenting widespread misery, he comes to the crux of his argument: "Not infrequently, when in my public speeches I have made some reference

to the condition of the Negro in the South, certain members of my own race in the North have objected because, they said, I did not paint conditions in the South black enough. During my stay in England I had the unusual experience of being criticised in the London newspapers for the same reason, this time by an American white man. . . I have never denied that the Negro in the South frequently meets with wrong and injustice; but he does not starve. I do not think a single case was ever heard of, in the South, where a Negro died from want of food. In fact, unless because of sickness or some other reason he has been unable to work, it is comparatively rare to find a Negro in an almshouse" (p. 31).

If this sounds preposterous to our ears, trained to imagine black life in the South c. 1900 as mercilessly oppressive, there is more: "Another thing in regard to the Negro: although he is frequently poor, he is never without hope and a certain joy in living. No hardship he has yet encountered, either in slavery or in freedom, has robbed the Negro of the desire to live. The race constantly grew and increased in slavery, and it has considerably more than doubled in freedom" (p. 26). At many turns throughout the book, and particularly where the travelers encountered the most desperately poor and oppressed (as in Bohemia or Sicily), Washington and Park consistently remark that the farthest man down in Europe is not only a woman, but that both she and her spouse are far worse off by most measures of physical or mental health than the Negro of the American South: "I believe there are few plantations in our Southern States where, even in the small one-room cabins, one would not find the coloured people living in more real comfort and more cleanliness than was the case here" [in Bohemia] (p. 62). Or "No one who has not seen something of the hardships of the average workingman in a great city like London can understand the privilege that we in the Southern States have in living in the country districts, where there is independence and a living for every man, and where we have the opportunity to fix ourselves forever on the soil" (p. 52). Such repeated observations must have irritated many politically alert blacks of the time, and because the book was published so near Washington's death, he was not around to defend his

ethnographic accounts. And yet when he died, his most famous and respected antagonist, Du Bois, said this: "He was the greatest Negro leader since Frederick Douglass and the most distinguished man, white or black, who has come out of the South since the Civil War. His fame was international and his influence far-reaching. Of the good that he accomplished there can be no doubt (*Chicago Post*, December 13, 1915; quoted in Mathews 1948, p. 302).

There is a great deal to be learned from this forgotten study, some of it startlingly contemporary. For instance, Washington noted on several occasions that "the man farthest down in Europe is woman" (p. 20), whom he observed doing physically demanding work with small reward, in addition to carrying grueling family responsibilities. But just as vital as those thousands of keen observations about workers and the poor in Europe, one learns that many of our comfortably maintained notions of the past are only half-right when not entirely wrong. Washington had no reason to whitewash conditions in the American South regarding the lives of its former slaves, yet he was an honest observer whose message comes through in *The Man Farthest Down* with undeniable clarity: the Negro, given education and a chance to work, would surely climb to the top of the social pyramid in a way that the European peasant could not.

## References

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## About This Issue:

Someday a scholar with tremendous energy and perspicacity will decide to write a biography of Irving Louis Horowitz, who died on March 21 at 82. Abundant archival materials for such a work are housed in the Special

Collections unit of Penn State's Paterno Library, and are also digitized for long-distance use. As many obituaries have noted, Horowitz was larger than life, a protean force of nature, and any other cliché one might like to invoke when describing someone whose grasp of life and of intellectual matters so far exceeds the norm that ordinary descriptors will not do. The scope of his scholarly, political, and publishing contributions to the social sciences—as "controversial" as they so often were—will not be matched in the imaginable future, not only due to his intrinsic qualities, but because he came into sociology and political science at "just the right time" given his interests and skills.

When he was not writing social science, he was publishing someone else's, and would proudly display to visitors the thousands of volumes which Transaction Publishers under his guidance had given printed life. (After reading an original printing of *The Man Farthest Down* and declaring in my remarks above that it had not been reprinted since 1912, I discovered that in fact Transaction Publishers had reissued the book in 1984, and with a new introduction by St. Clair Drake, no less. As in so many things, Horowitz had already been there.) It is both corny and accurate to observe that he lived "for" scholarship rather than "off" of it, to borrow from both Max Weber and Alvin Gouldner, two thinkers who were never far from Horowitz's imagination. Perhaps anticipating fate, he sent to CS not long ago his concluding observations about C. Wright Mills, with whom he is so strongly linked, a speech he was to have delivered in Norway in May to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Mills' death at 45. There is nothing one can say that is adequate in measuring the loss of this scholar and publisher, so we will allow him to speak his last words for himself.

Some time ago it seemed apposite to publish in CS the occasional analysis of a so-called "classic work" from the social sciences which today's practitioners might not know, or have forgotten. Given the wisdom required for such a work, it made sense to invite Charles Lemert to take it on. That he chose a work composed between 400 and 420 CE (or AD by the original author's assumed preference) is not too surprising

given Lemert's unique training in theology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the social sciences. His essay, like its predecessors in this series by Andrew Abbott on Morris Janowitz (November 2009) and Julia Adams on James Coleman (May 2010), illustrates the great virtue of looking back with intelligence and discernment as one considers the most fruitful paths into our collective future. We hope to offer more essays of this quality and detail as they become available.

Lastly, and not at all less important, with this issue *CS* begins what will become a regular feature, what we are calling "retrospective-critical essays." As explained in my *Remarks* for March, the Editorial Board puzzled over how to increase the intellectual

and professional legitimacy of writing for this journal, and at the Las Vegas meeting we came upon the idea of asking notable specialists to canvass the most important works in their area published since about 2000. Many such essays have since been commissioned, and several have already reached us, including the two—by Daniel Lee Kleinman and Christine L. Williams—which inaugurate what will surely become an honored and useful resource for scholars, junior to senior, who wish to know which books they might most fruitfully consult when pursuing a new area of research, or while refreshing an old one. Responses from readers concerning the series will be taken seriously, of course.

## FEATURED ESSAY

### C. Wright Mills, 1916–1962: Bright Lights and Dark Shadows

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“The follies of mankind are too obvious and too repetitious to make for utopian faiths.”

Ruth Benedict (December 20, 1939)<sup>1</sup>

#### I. Dark and Light Brews

There is a moment in time when specialist authors, whether they are physicists or sociologists, become publicists, and pass from the realm of science to that of literature. There is a strange but inevitable process that denotes a passage from the empirical to the imaginary, or more accurately, from a search for truth in a personality to one of meaning in the world. And that is where Mills now stands and where I stand in relation to his memory.<sup>2</sup> His foibles and follies have now entered our professional lives as the stuff of serious biography at its best and flimsy hagiography at its worst.

Such types of writing—high caste or low estate—help explain how he wrote what he did, or ignored producing what he might have. In the long pull of culture what remains are glimmers of meaning as to the nature of the social system. Curiously, those who write desperately about the social system rarely provide the sort of insights that inspire meaning, whereas those who take the stuff of everyday reality seriously sometimes inform us of the larger images that guide us in moral judgment; albeit not always wisely. C. Wright

Mills was smart enough to recognize this distinction. He appreciated how the vagaries of taste and the need to move beyond the present moment in cultural time dictate memorials. Mills had the honor of being one such person.

Part of the requirement of analysis from a distance in time and space—of fifty years—is clearly a measure for defining significance. It is fair to say that we in the social sciences are short of heroes, and perhaps while also given to a priori animosities toward declared villains. In part this is so because so much of our lives are spent examining gray cats and mangy dogs operating between good and evil, that we crave our social scientists to have some touch of literary class—and that signifies extreme opinion about individuals designated as iconic figures.

The great dilemma comes when we recognize that our icons are made up of the stuff of earth—and that means clay feet as well as heavenly discourse. A recent and disturbing but quite pointed essay by Stanley Weintraub on “George Bernard Shaw and the Strongman” in *The Times Literary Supplement*, illustrates the point with brutal frankness.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Weintraub, “Shaw and the Strongman,” *The Times Literary Supplement*. Whole Number 5652, July 29, 2011. pp. 13-15. While there is little evidence of a personal relationship between Shaw and Mills—at least that I know of—reading the litany of antagonisms to which Shaw was drawn; what Weintraub calls the “authoritarian wizards,” reads as follows: Democracy is flawed and irreparable. Conflicting interests curdled reforms and impeded efficient government. Money cynically manipulates the economy. Class interests command society. Prejudice poisons morality. Media proprietors muddle minds. Elitism and ignorance impact elections. The professions conspire in their own interests.” It is hardly a stretch of the imagination to entertain eccentric parallels.

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, “The Natural History of War,” in *An Anthropologist at Work*, edited by Margaret Mead. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011 (originally published in 1959) pp. 369-370.

<sup>2</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz, *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian*. New York and London: Macmillan/The Free Press, 1982.

The great playwright, critic of music and culture—founder and leader of Fabian socialism and everything nice in British social welfare thinking, on closer inspection (to be sure not too close) turns out to be blinded by politics on the ground and mythologies in the culture.

It turns out that Shaw viewed democracy as a “putrefying corpse,” and wrote “in defense” of Benito Mussolini. He was esteemed to be a ruler who brought competence and discipline to a feeble government. Shaw himself referred to Oswald Mosley, the head of the British Union of fascists, as “the only striking personality in British politics.” In Shaw’s singular meeting with Joseph Stalin, he said “I expected to see a Russian working man, and I found a Georgian gentleman.” Despite Shaw’s abhorrence of Adolf Hitler’s anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism, he found the space to speak of the Nazi Fuehrer “as a man to be taken very seriously.” Indeed, George Orwell saw this dark side of Shaw as “little else than a love of cruelty and wickedness for their own sake.”<sup>4</sup>

While this may appear to be an unusual digression from the topic at hand, a retrospective on C. Wright Mills, it remains sorrowfully relevant. In my biography of Mills I dealt very lightly with issues that, in my opinion, prevented him from reaching his full stature, or as it sadly did, a sense of self-esteem. But the fact is that on issues of gender, race and religion, Mills had his own demons that he paraded about with a furious if highly personal belligerence. He chose instead to bury exaggerated beliefs and biases by ambiguous judgments in public statements. Such prejudiced sentiments were not unusual in the Waco, Texas of the 1930s, from whence he originated, but even in that time frame, courageous figures from those environs moved against the ideological, gender, and racial grain of a still recovering post-Civil War South.

It must be said frankly that there is an historical argument that in Mills’ early years, issues of women’s rights and African American claims were not on the table, and such matters as racial bias were not only tolerated but bandied about. The problem with such

historical claims is that they are simply untrue: issues of women’s rights crested through the early part of the twentieth century resulting in equal voting rights, and high (if unequal) participation of women in the work force. The Secretary of Labor under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Frances Perkins was a woman in power long before the decent critique of Mills about women like Simone de Beauvoir. In a stinging, and I believe accurate, critique of early feminist writings, he noted that De Beauvoir “often confuses the condition of women with the generic human condition.” And to emphasize this point of departure, Mills adds that “in writing about the second sex, she really ought to have thought more systematically about the first sex and human beings in general.” As for activities relating to racial equality, some of Mills’ best friends and colleagues participated in campus struggles throughout the South while Mills was an undergraduate at Texas—activities in which Mills categorically refused to participate in for reasons that hardly need to be elaborated.

On political issues, Mills lined up squarely with Dwight Macdonald, the editor of the journal *Politics* to which Mills adhered. He saw the struggle between Hitler and Roosevelt as simply between two variants of imperialism, which was the official position of the Trotsky wing in the Fourth International.<sup>5</sup> The support for this position, became the alliance of the Communist party with the Nazi-tinged America First Committee during the Molotov-Ribbentrop Period of 1939 and 1941. It says something about Mills’ position that he retained the idea of World War Two as a conflict of branches of imperialism, even after Stalin joined Roosevelt and Churchill in revising the notion of warfare as a struggle for the salvation of democracy. Curiously, this plague on both houses of imperialism characterized Mills’ thinking throughout the Cold War.

Wright had no trouble going to work for the Small Business Administration during the War, and hanging his hat in Washington during his brief period at the University of Maryland. He became enough of a paid

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Bowker, *Inside George Orwell*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1983, 495 pp.

<sup>5</sup> Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain*. New York, NY: Random House, 1962, 427 pp.

research functionary to understand how best to enlist the aid of business in the war effort! During his self-imposed visiting stints in England, he longed for the daily dose of *The New York Times*, and the joys of America. Even at the end of his career, after returning from Russia with a critical and indeed cynical appraisal of the post-Stalinist system, he concluded life with a utopian phantasm that the Marxists were the new Pragmatists thus linking up his first and last efforts, his dissertation and the causes of World War Three. Indeed for Mills, Premier Tito of Yugoslavia served as the model in Europe and Fidel Castro in Latin America of a new wave of Marxism-Leninism that would transcend or at least put aside the horrors of totalitarianism, and influence the process of American social democracy. How this was to be achieved by a writer for whom Congress and the judicial process barely grazed his horizon, and in which the military-industrial complex rode high, mighty, and virtually unchallenged was to be curbed, simply was never made clear by Mills.

It might be asked, and quite properly, what then is Mills' heritage. The answer is everything else that mattered! In this, we have a true parallel with George Bernard Shaw—whose plays and musical commentaries stand the test of time even as the regimes which he praised with such unstinting flimsy apotheotics perished long ago. Those who have written of Mills as some sort of political liberal, or better, a prophet of the Left movement of the 1960s that he did not live to even see, much less participate in, have a serious problem on their hands. They are trying to manufacture out of whole cloth, a pure moral soul committed to unstinting warfare with the forces of absolute evil. Mythology does not mix well with sociology. Camus had it right: "myths have no life of their own. They wait for us to give them flesh."<sup>6</sup>

## II. Jewels in the Crown

My view is that Mills was one of those gray cats whom we all *think* we know. My book *C*.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Camus, "Prometheus in the Underworld," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, edited by Philip Thody. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968. p. 141.

*Wright Mills: An American Utopian* did not lambaste the poor man, nor lionize him, as if *The Sociological Imagination* was some sort of professional manifesto that one could wave about as an American equivalent to Mao Tse Tung's *Little Red Book*. It was no such thing. It was a collection of literary essays—some brilliant, others pedestrian—that permitted the profession to engage in the sort of self-analysis that too few people in the sociological positivism of the 1950s were prepared to engage in. True enough Pitirim Sorokin made a similar effort, but it was so laden with moral judgments and psychological mysticism that it could not penetrate to the heart of the issues raised by the dominant tendencies toward empiricism. Sorokin in his own distinct way, like Parsons, became captive to generalizations that were so rich in tautology and platitudes that we forgot how often devoid they were in specific reference points.

What made Mills' *Sociological Imagination* important was less the declared criticisms of major players in the field, so much as the notion that sociology possessed some divine power, a specific imagination! In his effort to assault the bastions of the establishment, Wright succeeded in the reverse: reinforcing the idea that there was something special and something important about the field! The volume served as a guidebook to common sense in social science: make sure to dot the lines between empirical facts and general theories, keep in mind the place of history in the analysis of current events, methods of work should be attuned to the goals of the research being undertaken, and finally that Weberian cultural values were rooted in Marxian economic interests. What must now appear as simple homiletics, were in fact a coming-of-age to a field. It was an appeal for a public philosophy rather than a professional framework. That a half-century later such a framework for many has become a demand for ideological purity and correct thought indicates how far down the Millsian canonical text has come. It helps explain how a discipline had become a curiosity rather than a source of serious discourse.

The most overlooked work of Mills is his co-authored text with Hans Gerth on *Character and Social Structure*. This is truly a shame. The work is bypassed not just by the general

public, which may be understandable given the circumstances in which we live, but it was self-consciously ignored by the profession as well. In an otherwise quite decent essay honoring Robert K. Merton, the esteemed Talcott Parsons speaks reverentially of how the very notion of social structure is a product of the work of himself, Merton, and grudgingly, of the efforts of Marion J. Levy, Jr.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, throughout this entire festschrift, the work of Mills remains the ghost in the closet, but it was precisely the enormous erudition in that work that presaged what came in the final decade of Mills' brief life. It was the sense of history as a sourcebook, and culture as the embodiment of civilization, that served to give succor to that forgotten text. The field at the time—at mid-century—was so busy proving its worth and creating a sense of the uniqueness of the field of sociology—that it left out of the reckoning the notion of character.

In *Character and Social Structure*, Mills (and to a greater extent, Gerth) understood how individualism is linked to collectivism, which is to say how the person exercises a magisterial place in the structure of society. So much nonsense of how the "Chicago School" embodied actions and the "Columbia-Harvard Axis" was the source of structures ignores the most obvious relations of the two in the course of everyday life. As I have tried to make clear, the very trail of sociology from the North to the South incorporated elements of both the East and the Midwest styles of work. Places like the University of North Carolina at one end of the core South and Texas at the other were recipients of this cross fertilization. Mills was the quintessential embodiment of such varied tendencies. As a result *Character and Social Structure* expressed a broader, more humane and inclusive type of sociology. It is something of a tragedy that the two authors of this text, Hans Gerth and Wright, went their separate ways—to the benefit of neither. Mills in particular became fixated on issues of stratification, which, while fertile, separated him from the pragmatic tradition in which he was embedded as a young

scholar, and alas, from the European tradition that extended from Herbert Spencer to Max Weber and Karl Mannheim. The co-optation of the notion of social structure by "establishment" figures at one end, and characterized by social psychologists who transformed Freudian categories into a world view put closure to what might have been, but was not quite to be, a synthesis of sociology as a science. The field gave way to the battles of the day in the later, so-called mature work of Mills.

For my taste and proclivities, the trio of his books in social stratification: *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar*, and *The Power Elite* are the most significant and lasting contributions of Mills to American social history no less than professional sociology. Indeed, the fusion of history and sociology, which was much sought after and proselytized by Mills, is fulfilled in that trio. It should be noted that when Mills started out, he did not view this as a trilogy. That is entirely my deduction as expressed in my biography of Wright. But what we have is a trio of works that summarizes the class formation as it evolved in post-World War Two America. It is not a pretty picture, but it is a truthful picture as far as it went. To be sure people like David Riesman challenged many of the hypotheses in *White Collar*, Sidney Lens did the same for *The New Men of Power*, and Talcott Parsons properly took on the task of criticizing *The Power Elite* in the cordial and gentlemanly fashion that was not Mills' style, but nonetheless elicited his great respect for Parsons. This respect was something others denied to Parsons—an old fashioned liberal, castigated and demonized as some sort of reactionary by those academic revolutionaries who should have known better than to substitute fulmination for explanation.

Mills developed a populist appreciation of American life and a utopian approach to its proximate future. The first of the trio, *The New Men of Power*, saw labor leaders of unions as a source of political energy, not so much to engage in class warfare, as to bring about a redistribution of wealth. He recognized the truths of union corruption, parasitism in the leadership, and the limitations of trade union ideology as an impediment to government bureaucracy. *White Collar* offers a psychological profile of ordinary people

<sup>7</sup> Lewis A. Coser, editor. *The Idea of Social Structure: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Merton*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1975, 556 pp.

who comprise a broad new base of people who are powerless. At that time, and now as well, few had the protection of unions or for that matter courts. There is a grim sadness in ordinary people locked into routine jobs often located in offices, retail sales organizations, and secretarial positions that are gender specific with nowhere to go. Whether in fact the phrase "white collar" fully expresses social class interests was never defined by Mills. He came close to a Lloyd Warner anthropological vision of stratification within the American class system, and hence dooms this vast economic force to sentimental support, sometimes disguised as serious analysis.

The work on *The Power Elite* was unquestionably the most significant reformulation of the Italian School of Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca, and Vilfredo Pareto. In so doing Mills took on the near dogmatic acceptance of the Weberian formulas that accepted economics as a source of interests and religion as a source of values, but left unaccounted the political system and the military forces—in short the stuff of government as it evolved over the centuries in Europe and exported to America. The force of Machiavelli and Hobbes was sharply etched in *The Power Elite*. And while Mills' critics noted that his theory of government does not properly account for legislative and judicial limitations to executive power and uses of force, it did refocus American political theory from patterns of voting and redistribution of electoral districts. The arguments adduced against his work that there are a whole variety of psychological as well as sociological variables that interfere with, frustrate, or limit the exercise of raw political power may be true in concrete circumstances, but Mills' response merits serious consideration, to wit that in the big picture, the large issues, the animosities, and even antagonisms expressed within people of power are put aside if not entirely overcome when the survival of the elites as such is placed in jeopardy. This idea, taken from Paretan notions of elite rotations, may not overcome the primary objections in which the power elite do manage to form a consensus, even if it is left unanswered as to the very existence of an identifiable power elite, especially the ambiguity that goes into the heart of the political

economy. The trilogy gave voice to Mills as a great analyst; it also gave evidence of his serious limitations as a synthesizer. In a nutshell: Mills properly appreciated the existence and dynamics of the concentration of power. At the same time, he failed to understand that such political stratification did not stimulate or even allow for any unity of socio-economic purpose and policy.

Mills was thus led to a point in his brief career that many have tread, but few have mastered: how to bridge the all-too-human gap between the analytical and the ideological. More simply, how does the person of ideas carry on with the tasks of understanding the world and the far more complex task of changing the world. From Plato to Marx such a dilemma has plagued even the best and the brightest. Part of the problem might well be that the issue has been framed in such either/or terms that no authentic answer is even feasible. One need not choose between options. It is far more reasonable, albeit rare, to deal with the world as a series of both/and. But Mills' growing commitment to criticism of American life, which started with class and power imbalances, increasingly moved to foreign policy considerations. As with the work of his older colleague, Dwight Macdonald, criticism of established orders morphed into defiant opposition. It was often fueled by anger self-perceived as courage in an academic environment of cowardice.

The works of Mills that followed the completion of the great trilogy on organized labor, the middle classes, and the power elites, fell into a far more bellicose and militant posture. From a compilation of essays to briefer polemical opinion-editorial pieces, Mills shifted ground. Empirically-grounded efforts dissolved in an onslaught of commands to a field that had moved beyond him. The anomaly is that it was precisely such works that gave him the fame he quite openly craved. There is a question whether his more substantial works would provoke such post mortem festivals. They certainly would remain part of the staple of professional reading matter. But there is a question on the other side: what would he have done had he continued to live? I have addressed this in part in my biographical work. Its subtitle, "An American

Utopian" is indicative of a long-standing hope for a more perfect future, hamstrung by an entirely imperfect present.

The search for the *good* society in place of the study of the *true* society became a powerful pre-occupation for Mills. He already had written in broad outline his critique of the USSR, entitled *Confronting the Enemy*. Mills clearly was dismayed by what and whom he met in Soviet Russia. The adulation with which he was received notwithstanding, he understood that communist Russia was an unhappy place. His observation, instinct, and imagination made him displeased with Soviet power, or the Soviet ideologists cum sociologists with whom he met. But ever the utopian, and in tune with his intellectual background, the realities of social orders only intensified his search for alternatives in nation-building and preferences in theory constructions.

Mills started thinking of a trilogy on international development, with a heavy emphasis on prospects for a Third World that would embrace places as far apart as India, Yugoslavia, and Cuba. Although he did not do any writing on the subject, he was engaged in heavy reading in international affairs—with a special bow to *Foreign Affairs*, which he felt to be the quintessential voice of American power, hence fit to be read by critics. My own feeling is that the themes and the ambitions were simply too great for him to carry off in literary terms. Wright did put a down payment on the project with an anthology on *The Marxists*. I was helpful to him in developing sources and orientations for that work, a subject with which he was not entirely familiar. The idea of pluralism, borrowed from his early days as a pragmatist, combined with a search for some unifying as well as liberating framework that could extend far beyond the sociological. This directed his efforts to see multiple forms of Marxism gripping the world. The collapse of East European democratic communism, and the growing divide along religious and economic terms in Asia, put a cap on the Millsian vision by the close of the 1950s. Once again reality trumped utopianism. But for Wright the search for political options continued.

There were a series of aborted efforts, like a proposed volume on African American

identity tentatively called *Nigger*. A black comedian, Dick Gregory later co-opted the title, and for all we know the organizing premise. Neither in black nor white were we faced with a serious challenge to novelist Ralph Ellison's classic, *Invisible Man*. As in other areas, Mills had a keen sense of public appetites, but not necessarily the limits of taste, or for that matter, what he could carry off with some sense of the subject at hand. That was left to Gunnar Myrdal, the Scandinavian giant who gave honor to the subject of *The American Dilemma* of race and ethnicity, while not neglecting hopes for a better future that indeed have partially been realized. Just what a fugitive from south Texas would have to say on the subject of race would have been interesting, but I suspect not especially novel. He was after all trading on turf well explored by others.

With the sociological imagination turning into psychological grandiosity, Mills finally met his match—his own huge aspirations. He was a smart man. He knew the game was up; that delivering on a host of pledges and promises was not really in the cards. A long-standing heart patient, with personal energies and habits that could fell an oak tree, his life was cut short at the age of 45, and the New Left in America had its first professional icon—an early victim of the Cold War and the Military-Industrial Complex. I suspect that he could have lived through the Cold War, communes, and libertarian confusions. But I suspect that he would have had a more difficult time living with academic indifference to his searches.

### III. From Sociology as Science to Politics as Passion

Let me note what should be apparent: what is good for the goose is fit for the gander. In serving as advisor and supporter of Mills during his lifetime, and editor and biographer after his death, harsh criticisms were made of my own position. To start with, when I wrote a piece on "The Stalinization of Fidel Castro" in 1964 for *New Politics*,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Stalinization of Fidel Castro," in *New Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1965, pp. 61-69.

I was reminded in quite frank terms (and in the publication as well) that whether I was right or wrong in my evaluation of Mills on Cuba, it was considered disgraceful that such political differences should be made public—especially at a time when the Castro regime was at the pinnacle of its ideological assault on the bastions of American imperialism.

Several years later, a rather influential piece in a political science journal highlighted the “contradictions” of my writings—the attempt to champion the causes of democracy and the free market at one and the same time. Why this should be a contradiction instead of simply a fusion of political faiths and economic systems was never made clear. What was made clear by the writer was that a true believer in the work of Mills would never fall prey to such an impossible fusion. Finally there was a spurious allegation that I had taken files from Mills’ home in 1962, and worse refused to share them in 2009 with an historian wishing to extract English language versions of my second volume (in Spanish) of the papers of Mills. In point of fact, the final Mrs. Mills assisted me in moving three massive filing cabinets to my auto. She clearly appreciated the fact that these were necessary to maintain the legacy of Mills. Later on she or a designated heir imposed draconian restrictions on accessing them much less than utilizing his main archives.

Each of these attacks was painful, made more so by a jagged edge which presumed that any serious study and criticism of Mills was essentially subversive of his legacy, and hence beyond the pale of good taste and academic manners. I mention these really small blips not to excuse errors or shortcomings in my intellectual position, but how, when confronting the work of someone declared to be an icon free of error by rabid followers, one becomes himself an enemy of the people, and no longer the defender of the faith.

Encountering the weakness of the literary tradition or in broader terms the cultural framework of a nation with so many figures as the United States, one must develop a thick skin in order to survive. For the new media age demands of its major figures not simply talent and integrity, but a moral purity given

the very few, and bestowed on them by the dark practices of the many. Mills might well have liked to absorb debates and arguments that devour pages of writings in literary journals. For in truth, it was precisely the sense of Mills as a polemicist, essayist, and blunt writer of prose often untouched by literary figures that made him so popular in literary circles. He was, after all, a free-wheeling intellectual in the Mannheim tradition, a figure that could be read and enjoyed by people outside the profession of sociology, one of the first “public intellectuals,” a phrase now so much in the vogue. Like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus in France, Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in England, or Guenther Grass and Herman Hesse in Germany, he was measured not by the ordinary canons of professional life, but by his public expression. He was a singular voice who could somehow capture the mood of the times and the spirit of the people. I hold that Mills should be seen and judged in such broader terms.

The task of social science, insofar as its claims to be a science are valid, is to focus fairly on its real achievements in extending knowledge; and appreciate the fact that even the most talented individuals come stained with the curse of being human, that is of making mistakes or simply having shortcomings. Moreover, mores change and so too do human preferences. Measuring such changes becomes a dismal science unto itself. To avoid such a clear reckoning of scientific talent apart from ethical shortcoming is itself a form of academic suppression of the truth we all possess: the truth of the lows as well as the highs, the perils as well as the rewards of high cultural recognition. In my work on Mills I have attempted to do just that. If differences remain on assessing Mills, then so be it. That is inevitable. By the same token, a clear sense of our humanity is improved in a recognition of how weakness no less than strength, co-exist in mind as in body. The democratic heritage and scientific method will benefit by such remembrances of those we respect in life and cherish in memory.

*The Decomposition of Sociology* was rooted in the abandonment of the field itself by its best and brightest. With Mills’ death the field had a choice to make: the road taken

in the collection known as *The New Sociology*<sup>9</sup> by means of which empiricism was linked to criticism; or the abandonment of sociology as a science in favor of the enthrallment of moral posturing. It should be appreciated that Mills himself did not live to see, or therefore personally provide leadership, to end this battle of a decade. Indeed, Mills himself could sing the praises of Castro's Cuba at its birth, while at the same time, embark on work to define post-Stalinist USSR at the sure signs of its death. Mills returned to his World War Two stance: a plague on both varieties of imperialism—capitalistic America and communist Russia. How easy it became an option for the actual study of nations and systems. The ideology of the Fourth International became the organizing premise at the end of Mills' life. The small comfort of radicalism without empirical redress became home to Mills, much the way the securities of the past became home to the new conservatism then sprouting its wings. In the process, the new sociology became the new radicalism. Egalitarian models displaced empirical realities as the sourcebook for doing sociology. Dogmatic teleology replaced experiential causality.

Wright himself helped to bring about the end of the sociological imagination as a self-contained field. It became an encumbrance. Its warnings and reservations could scarcely lead to the charge in arguing and opposing the dangers of World War Three or the American military-industrial establishment. Mills served as a progenitor of a new politics rather than a new sociology. There was a certain luster in the media limelight—one that he thoroughly enjoyed. But in the process he surrendered a place in the professional crevices; those hovering ghosts in the academic closet basically prevailed. The new politics became part of the exaggerated mannerisms and the culture of the sixties, while the new sociology became a lost professional standpoint in a world of political causes of a profession that changed the nature of a field for a generation. That we are now, a half century later, returning to a consideration of what

sociology can contribute to the social sciences at one end and to public discourse at another indicates that there remains hope. Still the decomposition of a small field is not the end of the struggle for a kinder or more compassionate world. Innovation and new fields arise and will continue to do so. To some degree Mills helped define the parameters of a world constantly being reborn in struggle and with human reason as a normative framework.

With all of his urgings that a broader, more humane usage of the sociological imagination be undertaken by his colleagues, Mills reserved for himself an ever-increasing reliance upon political instinct and media messaging. And in many times and issues this served him well. His coworker Rose Goldsen, a fine sociologist at Cornell and person in her own right, said Wright could go through Spanish Harlem in a fast-traveling auto, and make judgments and venture opinions on the status of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York that were more insightful and accurate than those made by policymakers studying ethnicity in the city for decades. He could do the same with respect to struggles between military personnel in Los Angeles and Mexican American immigrants during World War Two. This capacity to make insightful and often proper urban judgments was a characteristic of Wright that did not exactly endear him to his colleagues and project directors. At times, as in the Decatur Project this talent caused Wright difficulties, such as demands for evidence that were hard for him to locate or produce. The wartime and postwar period in America was one in which paid-for-hire research became an important part of the rise of sociology to a new status as such. But the driving forces were often not so much imagination as the capacity to produce quick policy results. The need to satisfy terms of grants did not fit easily with the desire to serve as the clarion of the people writ large and presumably being served.

This duality was, to be sure, hardly Wright's personal problem. Much of the profession, in particular those marching under the brand name of political sociology, faced that issue with equal discomfort. The final years of his life, from 1958 to 1961, in which *The Causes of World War Three* and *Listen*

<sup>9</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz, *The New Sociology: Essays in Social Science and Social Theory, in Honor of C. Wright Mills*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1964, xv +512 pp.

*Yankee* were produced, made it plain that a certain rock-bottom friction existed between the sociological and the political. The American public and the great majority of foreign policy gurus were not quite prepared to cast equal blame for the Cold War on a democratic capitalist society like America, and a totalitarian communist society like Soviet Russia. And while that same public was fascinated, even enthralled, by the story of the guerrilla insurgency that triumphed in Cuba, there too expert opinion was at best divided on the implications of such a dictatorial regime in the Caribbean. Wright was not prepared to debate or for that matter argue with other people with equal passions and probably greater credentials, so his primary tactic was simply to ignore or dismiss critics—at least not in public discourse. The famous debate arranged by the National Broadcasting Corporation between himself and Adolf A. Berle never came off, not because such a debate was impossible to emerge victorious—indeed his substitute for the evening, Robert J. Alexander, more than held his own. But then again, that was a debate between two scholars who knew Latin America well; two men rooted in the realities of social science far more than the urgings of personal ideology and utopian longings.

The closer Wright came to the issues of moment in the Eisenhower decade, and the first flush of political change in the Kennedy presidency, the further he strayed from what gave him his self-declared strength: the sociological imagination. He was gripped by media appeals to large publics as readers, agents promising a future lined with fortune and fame and a capacity to become part of the media world he did so much to uncover. This was, after all, a time in which media studies and communication research was at best a panel at an American Sociological Association meeting, not an independent branch of social research now ten times the size of the sociological profession and still growing. Political sociology became a tug of war between two worlds that seemed to be headed in profoundly radical directions: political science as the study of law, order, and systemic legitimacy adopted by elites and endorsed by masses, in contrast to sociology which increasingly has come to consider

politics as a vital instrument for those seeking to change or redirect the world.

It is as if Wright the sociologist saw himself as providing utopian voice to those amorphous but volatile masses. He called on the public space to make sociology a special instrument of social reconstruction. But in consequence, he found himself at unbridgeable odds with those who viewed the political research field as a place of increasing professionalism and self-satisfaction. This was not a contradiction Mills could possibly resolve in social science terms, since it was part of the fabric of contradictions that laid claim on an America that even fifty years later has yet to face much less resolve: the relationship between a nation of enduring political stability and the quality of social life for those caught up in a variety of class, racial, religious, and gender instabilities. The oft-heralded emotional make-up of the man from Texas only accentuated these larger divisions within American life.

To reflect on Mills a full half-century after his death is to review the fate of a profession no less than a person: inherited values moving in opposite directions among its practitioners. What was and still remains the policy charge for those of who care is the emergence of a sociology of knowledge of a particular sort, a sociology of sociology. Self examination was never a strong suit in Mills, and with the exception of a precious few, nor is it now in the profession as such.<sup>10</sup> Thus to take the time to examine the life and work of this extraordinary figure is a worthwhile ongoing chore. In so doing, arguably, a semblance of the sociological imagination as it plays out on a broad

<sup>10</sup> The honor roll of books on sociology by sociologists is small, but well worth examining. They include Larry T. Reynolds and Janice Reynolds, *The Sociology of Sociology: Analysis and Criticism of the Thought, Research, Ethical Folkways of Sociology and Its Practitioners*. New York; McKay, 1970, 438 pp.; Robert W. Friedrichs, *A Sociology of Sociology*. New York: The Free Press, 1970, 429 pp.; Joseph Lopreato and Timothy Crippen, *Crisis in Sociology*, New Brunswick and London, New Brunswick, 1999; and Stanton C. Wheeler, *Sociology of Sociology: How the Discipline is Being Taught Today*. London and New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006, 151 pp. would do for starters.

political canvas will help us recapture the lost glories of a discipline that this unusual man helped us all to advance.

### Note

This text was prepared for presentation as a plenary address for an International Conference on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of C. Wright Mills in March 1962. The event was held at the University of Bergen in Norway, May 23–25, 2012. Rights reserved and assigned by the author.

### Major Works of C. Wright Mills

*The items written by C. Wright Mills that herein follow are for generic identification purposes only—and not therefore page specific. They are listed by the year of first publication, and the initial publisher.*

C. Wright Mills and H. H. Gerth (editors), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, xi, + 490 pp.

C. Wright Mills, with the assistance of Helen Schneider, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948, 323 pp.

C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants*. Russell & Russell: New York, 1950, xi + 238 pp.

C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, xx + 378 pp.

C. Wright Mills and Hans H. Gerth, *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953, xxi + 490 pp.

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, 423 pp.

C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958.

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, 234 pp.

C. Wright Mills, *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1960, 192 pp.

C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists*. New York, Dell Publishing Company, 1962, 480 pp.

C. Wright Mills, edited with an introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz, *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1964, and Ballantine Books, 1963, 657 pp.

C. Wright Mills, edited with an introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz, *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America*. New York: Paine-Whitman Publishers, 1964, and Oxford University Press, 1965. 475 pp.

C. Wright Mills, edited with an introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz, *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Políticos*. [Social Men and Political Movements] Mexico-Argentina-España: Siglo Veintuno Editores, 1969. 321 pp. [in Spanish].

## SPECIAL ESSAY

### Sociology's Third Problem

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Sociology is a numeric art. Its work is to measure differences, of which, in social arrangements, there are many, few of them visible to the naked eye. Sociology's aesthetic pleasure, when it takes it, is to imagine how they—these innumerable differences—come together, when they do. For all practical purposes, everything social is measured against everything else; hence the art.

The question to be asked of sociology, therefore, is what is its base number? It is commonly assumed—given the ubiquity of the Cartesian coordinate system with its  $x/y$  axes—to be two; which is to say 2. Yet 2-fold schemes and their multiples rest on the least stable of all prime numbers. Even 5, for example, is more stable because, putting its 2 aside, there is left over a 3—probably the most stable of all numbers. A 2, by contrast, is nothing but two 1s, wherein twoness (so to speak) encounters the risk that one of its 1s could be negative, in which case, the remainder is nothing. Since, in social life, we know that negatives are everywhere at once, then common sense would require that, sociologically speaking (and contrary to almost everything we believe), social things cannot survive as they have if they are essentially binary. *We survive; ergo: 3 is our prime.* No one has put it better than Charles Sanders Peirce: "By the third I mean the medium or connecting bond between the absolute first and last. The beginning is first, the end second, the middle third. The end is second, the means third. The thread of life is a third; the fate that snips it, its second" (Peirce 1931 [1875]: 170).

Yet, as is well known, and to an increasing extent much discussed, sociology, its necessary obligations to numeric work notwithstanding, remains improbably committed

*De Trinitate*, by **Augustine of Hippo**. Carthage, North Africa: Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage [de facto publisher], 400–426? CE; *The Trinity*, translated by **Edmund Hill**. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991. 471pp. O.P. paper. ISBN: 9780911782967.

to binary thinking—as in, for example, micro/macro or agency/structures and so on and so forth. The sociological dilemma with binaries of this sort, and their kin, is that they allow, at best, for extreme differences, hence immutable distinctions, such as micro-sociologies versus macro ones or actions versus their limiting structures; thereby, they fail to resolve the problems for which they were conceived in the first place. Given structures, pure and simple, then actions must be external to the pure primary; and vice versa. Hence, without further comment on the obvious, the reason to explore the concept of the third.

Peirce was both a founder of pragmatism and of an American line of social semiotics. Yet, his value to sociology has been relatively neglected with some notable exceptions (from Wiley 1994 to Cossu 2011, for examples). One of the stumbling blocks to sociology's use of Peirce is the seeming oddness of his trinitarian theory of signs and meanings. Where sociologists have taken an interest in classical semiotics they have tended to select such binary concepts of meaning-making as signifier/signified, speech/language, or performance/competence derived from Ferdinand de Saussure (and, often without acknowledgement, Roman Jakobson). Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues in and beyond his Yale workshop on Cultural

Sociology are well known for their persuasive applications of a politically robust simulacrum of Saussure's binarism to civil cultures and related matters (in, *inter alia*, Alexander 2006: 48–67). Yet, again, pleading the severe constraints of time and space, I will forgo further comment on these lines of development with the stipulation that a relatively recent writer like Peirce, familiar to moderns by his originating influence on pragmatism, offers at least a hint of the productive value of trinitarian over binarian approaches to a whole range of topics from meaning and culture, to sign making, thus even to agency and structure. Famously, Peirce's triad of the sign, its object, and its interpretant is an intriguing resource not least of all because of its eerie similarity to a key passage in the principal book of this review. Peirce, like Augustine, argues that explanatory values ascribed to binary couplets are ultimately ruined without a third, more active, and practical force that navigates the straits between the endless sands of particulars and the hard rock of absolutes:

A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its object; that which it conveys, its meaning, and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant. The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind, may be conceived to have an absolute object at its limit (Peirce 1931 [1875]: 171; compare Kockelman 2005).

Simply put, the Third (here, the interpretant) never stands alone yet is always tied to the string of what sociologists might prefer to call actions, thus to suggest that practical actions on the plane of performance can never be conceived (nor, in fact, can they be meaningfully thought) apart from this third factor that links the agent to an (absolute) structure.

Peirce was a true polymath in the sense that he seemed to have a clear grasp of every branch of science, mathematics, and philosophy in his day (1839–1914). His

idea of the Third arose from mathematics and philosophy, still he did not miss the point that one of the (to him) endless instances of thirdness was the Christian doctrine of God as a trinity to which he made passing reference (Peirce 1935 [fragment, n.d.]: 501–02). It is hard for anyone—even those numbed by ritual acquaintance with this doctrine—to overlook the salience of the closing words of the lines, just quoted, summarizing Peirce's theory of signs, as lodged in a series of representations “each representing an absolute object at its limit.”

Peirce aside, the common sociological practice of overlooking religious ideas as a source of sociology's conceptual work (as distinct from their being objects of its study) is very probably a *sequela* of the field's culturally normal disposition to favor binary methods which, unfortunately, short-change the historical evidence. The idea of structural and structuring wholes (whether social or otherwise) would very likely have been unthinkable had it not been for the long Western history of entanglements with the cultures of gods, in particular with monotheistic absolute deities as in the three Abrahamic faiths. For absolutes of any kind (even socially structured ones) to be thought they must be mediated and mediations of whatever kind can never be achieved with the blunt instrument of 2s. A 3 is necessary. While versions of a dominant yet mediated god are present in many modern and pre-modern world religions, the monotheisms with their system of special god-like prophets (Moses, Mohammad, Jesus the son—not to mention Abraham himself) have been consistently preoccupied with the other-worldly/this-worldly dilemma. Yahweh, Allah, and God the father were so starkly transcendent that they made some principle of historical mediation necessary; hence, the threeness problem: sign, object, interpretant. The spirits and traditions of the god-like prophets are the interpretants that keep the whole thing moving along over time—much as, more abstractly, sociology employs mediating concepts like practices, rules, norms, socialization, habitus, recursivity and the like as interpretants between structures and actions. Without them, all would be lost between a sea of particulars and an unreachable horizon.

In the early fifth century of the common era, Augustine of Hippo's *De Trinitate* (hereafter, *The Trinity*) is, among other of his works, the first, and until Peirce, the only full-blooded attempt to work through a trinitarian social psychology of cultural and historical meanings. All the more surprising is the fact that the famous Bishop of the Roman Church in North Africa was first and foremost a theologian, then a philosopher by background and training, and a social thinker only by accident of circumstance. Augustine was born in 354 CE in Thagaste, then a Numidian town, soon to come under the administration of Rome, but destined to be overrun by Vandals in 430, the year of his death. Today, Thagaste is Souk Ahras in northeastern Algeria.

Augustine's parents were of modest means yet committed to their son's education. As a result, his primary language was Latin rather than the local Numidian. As we know from his *Confessions* (397–398), Augustine, the boy, felt himself to be at loose ends—tempted by lust, drawn to vagrant philosophies, and repulsed by the harsh pedagogical methods of his secondary studies away from Thagaste. He quit the school in Madaura, to return home before studying further in the Latin language in Carthage. As a result he failed to learn Greek, a fact that is variously offered to explain the depth of his learning (focused deeply on Latin literatures, Roman and Christian—among others: Virgil, Cicero, Tertullian, Pelagius, Jerome, and his mentor in Milan, Ambrose); or, in the view of others, the ease with which in his youth he succumbed somewhat uncritically to philosophical ideas then current in the Latin-speaking world. Of these the most influential to his early formation were Manichaeism in his early years in North Africa and Neo-Platonism later in his Milan years (384–387). Thus, in the still impressionable years of adult life, he had given himself over to two of the more binarian philosophies. Whatever the truth of Augustine's mono-lingual limitations, just as important were the circumstances of his times in the last years of the Roman Empire.

Augustine's most important cryptosociological writing is *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (Concerning the City of God against the Pagans) or, popularly, *The City of God*.

This enormous, sprawling book was composed over a decade and a half from 413, just after the sack of Rome by Alaric to 427, on the eve of Augustine's death and the collapse of Christian North Africa. Augustine lived through and wrote about one of the most important historical conjunctures in human history. It would be a stretch to describe Augustine as a sociologist before the fact; yet, it is not an exaggeration to describe *The City of God* as a work of social history of the moral troubles of Rome in its declining years. Thus the reader finds such pithy condemnations (in Henry Bettenson's lively and much admired translation) as: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale" (Book IV: 4). Which is followed by the near-famous parable which Augustine poached from Cicero:

For it was a witty and truthful rejoinder which was given by a captured pirate to Alexander the Great. The king asked the fellow, "What is your idea, in infesting the sea?" And the pirate answered with uninhibited insolence, "The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I'm called a pirate, because you have a might navy, you're called an emperor." (Book IV: 5)

These are but samples of Augustine's sociological attentions to this-worldly matters of justice, evil, and politics—in respect to which his writings led recent writers to theories of social and political realism (notably Reinhold Niebuhr 1941–1943; compare Lemert 2011; also Elshtain 1995, Wolfe 2012).

Yet, the justification for a long review of *The Trinity*, a hugely more obscure book than *City of God*, rests not on the clues that, had he been ours, Augustine might have been a sociologist. Rather, *The Trinity* merits our attentions because it engages riddles that still beset our field—from the near-oxymoronic confusions of the concept of a social self to the impenetrable dark space between structures and practical actions. How can a self, the most interior of human aspects, be social? How does the individual alone or, even, in concert with those near at hand, act in measurable consistency with

immeasurable structural forces? Augustine's *The Trinity* does not, to be sure, answer these still troubling questions, but it does set a cairn along the path to a vantage from which we might see them amid the lowland brush of binarian thinking. Plus which and curiously, Augustine may in fact expose the theoretical benefits of threeness even more cogently than did Peirce (Manetti 1993).

*The Trinity* (like *The City of God*) was written over a prolonged time (399–c.426) which in part accounts for its strange organization into fifteen books, of which the first seven are, unsurprisingly, concerned with the Christian doctrine of the trinity. This first section can be and has been (Matthews 2002) set aside as less interesting to the general reader. On the other hand, Edmund Hill, the translator of the edition I chose to review, offers that the first half (Books I–VII) are essays, first, on the trinitarian texts in the Christian scriptures; thence of the theological, linguistic, and logical elements in the doctrine of the trinity. Though the material alluding to linguistic and logical considerations (Books V–VII) anticipate what is to come in the latter half, they are written in the manner of scriptural proof texting. By startling contrast, the second half (Books IX–XV) is an explicit exposition of what today we might call the social psychological and cultural elements of a philosophy of (in Peirce's word) the Third. In Hill's view, Book VIII serves as a short transitional essay that folds the two parts back over one another (Hill 1991: 21–27). I would emphasize that the first half of the book, while as charmingly translated as the entire book, is of lesser scientific interest (which is not say that it is of no interest).

The second half of *The Trinity* is a brash statement of theories of the trinity that not only anticipates Peirce but in certain ways improves on his modern semiotic of meaning, language, and sign making. For example, the following astonishing lines appear in the crucial Chapter X on mental images:

Now, let us put aside for the moment the other things which the mind is certain about as regards itself, and just discuss these three, memory, understanding, and will. . . . These three then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, nor three minds but

one mind. So it follows of course that they are not three substances but one substance. When memory is called life, and mind and substance, it is called so with reference to itself; but when it is called memory it is called so with reference to another. I can say the same about understanding and will; both understanding and will are so called with reference to another. But each of them is life and mind and being with reference to itself. For this reason these three [memory, understanding, will] are one . . . with reference to self. . . . But they are three in that they have reference to each other (Book X: 4, 17–18; Hill: 298).

To be sure, the skeptic would recoil from mention of three substances in one (*nec tres substantiae, sed una substantia*) which has all the glamour of a creedal recitation. Even so the religious code here fades before a secular purpose. Not only that but the memory-understanding-will conceptual series retains superficial traces of Platonic subdivisions of the *psychos* (or today, the psyche; then, mind or soul)—these no doubt leakages from his Neo-Platonic days in Italy.

Yet, appearances aside, there is one key difference from anything that had appeared to that point: memory. "When memory is called life, and mind and substance, it is called so with reference to itself; but when it is called memory it is called so with reference to another." (*Memoria quippe, quod vita et mens et substantia dicitur, ad se ipsam dicitur; quod vero memoria dicitur, ad aliquid relative dicitur* [emphases added].) Any who remember their high school Latin better than I do can judge the friendliness of Hill's translation. Still, anyone can see through the English words to Augustine's original and subtle meaning. Where some interpreters claim that *memoria* (memory) is a simple cognate for *mens* (mind), Augustine (and here Hill) spare the difference both in the locution "is called" (*dicitur*) and in the plainly stated exception that memory can be called life or mind when the reference is the one remembering but memory as such must refer to another.

It is also plain enough that Augustine's trinitarian concept of the self as three dynamic actions in one embraces or, at least,

allows for a distinctive social element. Memory, understanding, and will are each themselves but also each and all in social relations to the others. This to be sure is no more an unambiguous sociological trinity than is Peirce's concept of the Third. Still, it may, like Peirce's Third, serve us well. For one, it exposes the futility of binarism. The self (to use a term unique to our times and unavailable to Augustine) is not and cannot be a straightforward "I" / "Me" dialogue (in George Herbert Mead's vocabulary) or, more generally an Ego/Other relation (in William James' formula. With rare and arguable exception, all of the classical formulae (even W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of the double consciousness of the two souls of the American Negro) lapse into overly strong discriminations at the crucial point. To speak of the "Me" or more generally of a social self as the social factor in the formative process of an individual's identity is to create a distinction that cannot breathe in the suffocating binary—neither by Mead's airy dialogic in which the Me of one moment is the I of the next nor by Freud's more abstract theory of introjections as it was adapted by Talcott Parsons (1952). At a stretch, among thinkers at the turn of the previous century, the sole (if unselfconscious) concept of thirdness would be Freud's tripartite taxonomy of the psyche, if the Ego is taken as the interpretant of the conflict between Superego and Id. Only Peirce nearly a generation earlier stands alone as, if not heir, at least latter day apparition of Augustine's social psychology.

Augustine's theoretical method in *The Trinity* transposed a theological doctrine into a formal trinitarian theory by inserting memory as the active *tertium quid* in the self/other, inside/outside, individual/social couplets as in the following:

So too we absorb the images of bodily things through the sense of the body and transfer them somehow to the memory, and from them we fabricate images with which to think things we have not seen, whether differently from what they actually are or by a chance in a million as they are; but whenever we correctly approve or disapprove of something represented by

such images we have the inescapable conviction that we make our judgment of approval or disapproval within ourselves by altogether different rules which abide unchangeably above our minds (Book IX: 2, 10).

There could not be a better, more succinct, if abstract, statement of the pragmatism Peirce and others were inventing a good millennium-and-a-half later in North America. At the same time, Augustine broke the hold of doctrines that had flourished in his time—notably the Neo-Platonic ideology that the mind is real even as in this life it is trapped in the body. For Augustine, by contrast, the mind uses the body to imagine the body without strict philosophical rules of necessity. For us, just imagine how much more useful C. Wright Mills' *sociological imagination* slogan would have been had he, Mills, read more Augustine, less sociological pragmatism. For Augustine the genius of freedom from material proof is gained not by mental discipline but by memory, hence: imagination. Memory thus is far more than interior consciousness. Memory, he argues, is history:

Thus when I call to mind the ramparts of Carthage which I have seen, and also form a picture of those at Alexandria which I have not seen, and prefer some of these forms in my imagination to others, I make a rational preference. The judgment of truth is shining vigorously from above, and it is firmly supported by the wholly unbiased rules of its own proper law, and even if it is somewhat veiled by a kind of cloud of bodily images still it is not entangled and confused by them. (ibid.)

We require the embodied things we have seen to imagine those we have not. Familiarity is the interpretant of the abstract. Thus in Augustine's Roman world, references to ramparts familiar and unfamiliar to him illustrate *both* the denotative value of the sign "rampart" or any other object represented in language *and* also the connotative value of a prominent figure in the Roman world, then teetering on the verge of ruin. In our days, these ramparts are memorials

(so to speak); in his, they were already representations destined to endure as mental and cultural repositories of worlds that would be remembered long after Rome and Roman North Africa would disappear. Signs, thus, carry forward their meaningful objects by becoming interpretants of what came before. Historical truth, like all social structures, resides not in the data but in the imagination, where memory joins the past, thus to make history possible.

Charles Norris Cochrane in *Christianity and Classical Culture*—which, long after its publication in 1939, remains the greatest study of religion and classical cultures—cuts quick to the undiminished importance of Augustine's trinitarian thinking: "The discovery of personality was, at the same time, the discovery of history" (1939: 457). Hence, correlatively, since history is collective memory, then memory is identity. To which, in our time, Julian Barnes, the novelist, in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, remarks: "You are what you have done; what you have done is in your memory; what you remember defines who you are; when you forget your life you cease to be, even before your death" (2008: 138). Equally so, of the one and the all. Barnes adds, thus, that identity is memory; as memory is identity.

Correlatively, even William James' axiom on personal identity entails, if implicitly, both memory and a robust social sensibility. "I am the same self I was yesterday" (James 1981 [1890]: 316). To be a self, one must recognize one's self—in the most intimate of social relations, that between the self as other to ego. Yet, for James and those among American pragmatists who followed him rather than Peirce, memory was never regarded for its necessary function as the interpretant of any and all recognitions. Without memory, there is no history; without history, collective society has no identity. Yet, James was, in a certain sense, still caught in what had been, since medieval scholasticism, an Aristotelian psychology of memory.

Among sociologists, it was Goffman in *Stigma* (1963) who, more analytically even than Maurice Halbwachs in *La mémoire collective* (1950, posthumous), decomposed the centrality of memory as the necessary third force linking social and individual life. Many will balk at the suggestion that

Goffman's method was trinitarian. Yet in the early works, his ideas of face work and self as presentation clearly required the notion, if not a formal concept, of an interpreting mediator. Otherwise, the front/back stage figure would have remained an abstraction when it was clearly a framework for an essential and omnipresent social process. Most explicitly, *Stigma* offers a trinitarian theory of identity as a dynamic social process by which information in respect to discrediting personal identity markers is controlled or not. For Goffman, the active third aspect between social and personal identities is ego identity—decidedly not a faculty of the interior self but *the* effective affective element by which discrediting personal information is managed. Not incidentally the affections are on Peirce's list of thirds as "that by which I feel my neighbor's feelings" (Peirce 1931 [1875]: 171; compare Peirce 1934 [1903]). Still, in Goffman, ego identity, more than either social or personal, is that identity learned and remembered from social experience (Goffman 1963: 106). Goffman, whose University of Chicago years are too often taken as a reason to assimilate him to the weak pragmatism of the Symbolic Interactionist school, was in his day the single most important American trinitarian theorist. In its own way perverse, Goffman's theory of identity is, first, necessarily social but, second, something quite beyond the binarism found in Durkheim (Goffman's one acknowledged classical resource) and American social theory down to the present time.

Naturally, one is exposed to embarrassment upon attempts like this one to redraw the map of intellectual history in order to align Goffman, possibly Freud, certainly Peirce, and Augustine. In defense, the line from Goffman back through James to Peirce is not so hard to imagine. At the least, it brings Peirce's third into the relative present. What then of the leap in time back to Augustine?

These days, to refresh is to click a button that for an invisible instant dims the present screen to offer who knows what in its place. We hope it will be a version of what we know. Hence, for starters, Augustine's theory of memory is, if not a refresh button, at least a flash stick that stores the familiar by

which we are able to recognize the unfamiliar. Even the universe of digital notations is, first, storable, and second, decodable. The mediating code is the third by which the concrete and abstract are put to practical uses they can only effect together. Operating codes are always trinitarian. If so, then too theories of all kinds; not to mention the operating rules by which we individual ordinaries navigate the strange, intrusive world of structures.

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