



## Social Analysis as a Sociological Vocation

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## COMMENTARY AND DEBATES

### Social Analysis as a Sociological Vocation<sup>1</sup>

Elephantiasis, an abnormal enlargement and thickening of tissues, occurs in both the animal and the plant kingdoms. The term, it seems to me, might well serve to point to a highly similar sociological phenomenon: the abnormal expansion of one role into the action-space normatively allotted to others. There are two kinds of role-elephantiasis: In the first, time, energy, and means normatively defined as belonging to one role are used up by another, as when executives take their work home for the weekend in contemporary suburbia. Socially even more debilitating is the second kind in which norms of behavior proper in one role are applied in another where they are not proper. Treating one's wife as one's secretary, or one's secretary as a wife, that is, being functionally specific where one ought to be diffuse, or diffuse where one ought to be specific, are cases in point.

*Role-elephantiasis* can be measured in several ways. For instance, a sample of a particular population might be taken to determine what is seen by it as the proper allotment of time, energy, and means to various roles, and what norms the population expects actually to guide behavior in the roles under study. Then one can compare the actual allotment of time, energy, and means among these roles by conforming and deviant actors. The norms the deviant actors believe in, and those they adhere to, can be ascertained through depth interviewing and participant-observation. It is advisable to determine whether the deviant actors have a sense of guilt

when they are afflicted with role-elephantiasis. Otherwise, statements about the intrapsychic effects of the violations of norms will not be supported by evidence but will be assumed on the basis of the existence of social censure. The problem of measuring the distribution of energy among roles (as distinct from that of time and means) poses some severe problems, as does the distinction between significant and insignificant transgression of the role-boundaries. Future research, it is hoped, will clarify these matters.

Many a sociological article opens with such a definition of a new concept and a discussion of methods to be employed to measure it. This is then frequently followed by presentation of some data relevant to the new concept and relating it to familiar sociological variables (e.g., "the distribution of elephantiasis by age and sex in cities with a population of over one hundred thousand"). Most sociologists, the author included, feel that such combination of theory and methods is the very foundation on which sociology as a science ought to be built and is in fact being constructed. But many of us also feel that something is lacking. This article is not devoted to conceptualization or measurement of what is lacking, but to outlining a suggestion of how to add the lacking ingredient, to make a fine mix even better. This is only in part a question of adding a new substance; more important are changes in institutions in which sociological training is provided, where the new spirit is to be given flesh and blood. Hence this brief discussion necessarily combines some "high-level" comments on the nature of sociology with some "low-level" ones, touching upon the mundane questions of

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for comments on an earlier version of this article to Martin Wenglinzky, Ethna and Edward Lehman, Charles Kadushin, and in particular to William J. Goode.

sociological training and curriculum. Sporadic outcries for a sociology different from the prevailing one will leave little impression unless the trouble is taken to chart the course through which reform is to be made.

What is lacking is *social analysis*, the *systematic* exploration of societal issues, that is, concern with the methodological questions of sociological analysis of the great issues of our age, which invariably involves the study of macroscopic units. The subject of social analysis, though, is the issues, not the sociological units or building stones; the focus is on the instruments to be utilized to elevate the analysis of societal issues, to improve on amateur, intuitive, or journalistic sociology. Traditional training in sociology is no more a preparation for social analysis than training in biophysics or biochemistry is a substitute for medical training. Social analysis requires special training as well as distinct methods, knowledge, and a professional tradition. Social analysis requires more than a simple application of an existing body of knowledge to the study of a set of problems; it is also a question of studying the problems that application of sociology engenders. When sick, one would hardly exchange treatment by one M.D. for that of two Ph.D.'s in biology. Hence, the call for social analysis as a new element of sociological training is a call for *the professionalization of sociology*—for adding to sociology as a science, as the institutionalized desire to know, the systematic concern with application of knowledge, the institutionalized desire to help.<sup>2</sup>

Social analysis is not applied sociology; it differs from applied sociology in the way second-order concepts differ from first-order ones. The focus of applied sociology is, as a rule, a low-level, concrete social problem. Social analysis should concern itself (a) with the problems applied

sociology raises, and (b) with the *systematic* application of sociology to societal issues, desegregation for instance, not excluding but hardly focusing on how to improve the management of a supermarket or a marriage.<sup>3</sup> The "client" is society.

The *subject matter* of social analysis is all of substantive sociology; but social analysis as a discipline is not to replace the fields of political sociology, race relations, or the study of stratification, but is to deal with *the generic methodological, intellectual, and professional problems which the substantive sociologies raise*. Each of the substantive fields combines—in addition to information about the subject matter—three and not two essential elements. To study politics one had best know something about politics, draw on a general theory and methodology, and be prepared to handle the generic problems of substantive analysis. The same problems would reappear if you were to study other substantive fields, for example, the sociology of religion or criminology, but would not arise if you were engaged in sociological theory per se or pure methodology.

What is the substance of social analysis and what generic problems does its study raise? The focus of social analysis, and its *raison d'être*, are the problems of the age, the application of sociology to the understanding of society, its major subcollectives, and a society's place in more encompassing communities. Biochemistry views the blood as having varying chemical compositions; medicine sees it as infested with illnesses. One day—when our knowledge of hematology is much more advanced—the distinction might disappear; meanwhile somebody had better be concerned with how to cure illness, using the very partial biochemical information available. *The meth-*

<sup>2</sup> Talcott Parsons, "Some Problems Confronting Sociology as a Profession," *American Sociological Review*, XXIV (August, 1959), 547-59.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the concept of social analysis to that of "informal sociology" advanced by Herbert J. Gans, "Informal Sociology": A Proposal for a New Publication," *American Sociological Review*, XXIII (August, 1958), 441-42.

odological question of medicine is hence how to act under partial information. Similarly, sociological theory and research slice society into social systems, role sets, and reference groups; social analysis is concerned with applying such concepts to the evolution of a world community, the redistribution of social wealth, efforts to advance the growth of civil rights, the development of "have-not" countries, etc. Sometimes the transition from sociological theory to social analysis is fairly straightforward and simple, often it is not; but always the problem of applying our fragmented knowledge to social action needs to be systematically studied.

Our purpose here is to call attention to the need to explore the distinct methodological and conceptual problems of social analysis rather than solve them. It will take a decade of efforts, by many members of the profession, before much can be said on the subject. Meanwhile, what might be referred to as the "methodology of first approximation" illustrates the kind of special training social analysis requires. In general, we quite correctly train students to achieve higher levels of precision by drawing better samples, using more refined measures, etc. As a consequence the trained sociologist often shies away from major segments of social data because for one reason or another, be it security considerations or budgetary ones, he cannot obtain the kind of precise data we taught him to look for. The field of analysis of societal problems is thus often left wide open to social commentators who have no methodological training at all. We should develop and teach the methods to be applied when information is fragmentary and vague, as it so often is, because the trained sociologist can still do much better—especially when he is trained to face this problem—than the uninitiated social observer. (Training in the use of first-approximation methods will include instilling in the trainee a commitment to his future clientele, to warn him of the limits of the

data and the tentativeness of the conclusions.)

Obviously I do not share the feeling, expounded by C. Wright Mills in this context, that our investment in methodology was largely wasted or that our bets on general theory are misplaced.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, it seems to me, our efforts are starting to pay off handsomely and that *hence* we are more ready than we ever were to apply our theories and methods to major societal issues and be systematically concerned with the problems such application raises.

A hardly novel historical approach to sociology serves to emphasize this point.<sup>5</sup> We started with grand social theories, formulated in emotion-laden terms (e.g., progress), covering no more and no less than all of history and all of mankind; we began by flying so high on the verbal trapeze that most of our propositions could not be pinned down; and those that could be often did not withstand empirical tests. Our grandiose designs collapsed.

Then, we foreswore high-jumps; we preferred to advance step by step, even if it should take us a hundred years to learn to walk firmly, rather than engage again in breathtaking but also neck-breaking gymnastics.<sup>6</sup> We sharpened our tools on the radio listening of housewives and focused our concepts by observing small groups of college sophomores chatting before a one-way mirror. *Such a concentration was essential for a transition period*; but behavior which is quite suitable for student days becomes an adolescent fixation when it dominates the behavior of a mature man. Sociological theory ought to be further extended and methods of col-

<sup>4</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), esp. p. 50 and pp. 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ralf Dahrendorf, "Toward a Theory of Social Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, XI (1958), 170-83.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Anthony Dexter, "A Note on Selective Inattention in Social Science," *Social Problems*, VI (Fall, 1958), 176-82.

lecting and analyzing data improved, but our wings have sprouted; we are now ready to fly. It would be an overreaction to our earlier misadventure to remain earthbound to a restrictive interpretation of our discipline, to delay a new test flight of social analysis.

Another reason we, as a profession, shy away from social analysis is our fear of value judgments which, we sense, are more rampant in social than in sociological analysis. Weber's bequest to us, we keep telling generations of students, is the separation of understanding from criticism, which is the basis of all rational, and hence scientific, analysis. But—we do not always remember to add—Weber carefully distinguished between a *wert-frei* and a *wert-los* approach (between one free of values and one without values or literally valueless). A *wert-frei* sociologist holds his values in abeyance while he follows the guidelines his data reveal, allowing them to speak rather than imposing on the data the findings his heart desires. Thus he is "free" from values while engaging in the procedural act of science. But this is not to imply that the work of the very same sociologist needs to be *wert-los*, either in his professional or his citizen role.

In his professional role, the sociologist, like any other scientist, must choose his research topic by non-scientific, normative criteria. I say "must" because there are no intrinsically scientific criteria for this selection. One might say we are out to fill in the lacunae of sociological theory, chart the unknown areas left on the map; we do not know what we shall find, but we know where the uncharted areas lie. But our map has more unknown than known spots, and how is one to tell, on what scientific consideration, which to chart first? Moreover, since so much of our charting is tentative, rechecking the known is as important as exploring the unknown. Hence the list of topics a sociologist can legitimately choose from for his study is as long as the list of

topics there are. Our selection is thus invariably determined by intellectual curiosity, aesthetic values, fads, career interests, availability of funds, leadership of senior colleagues, and what not. But there is nothing intrinsic in sociology as a discipline that makes the study of macroscopic units less respectable than microscopic ones, now that we are equipped with the basic skills and tools necessary to handle both kinds of units.

But social analysis requires macroscopic analysis. Most of the problems of the age are those of large collectivities or are directly affected by them; in issues such as accelerated desegregation, redistribution of the national income in favor of the underprivileged, or averting nuclear war, the federal government and the national society play a critical role. The infrequency with which social analysis topics are selected derives not from any inner light that sociology sheds on research but from largely extrinsic shadows. It arises in part from the tendency to award more status to basic than applied research, and in part from the hangover of poor social analysis, the pangs of which are still with us. Actually by now social analysis could be fully respectable; the taste of past generations' brew should no longer hinder our distilling a new one.

Two more arguments in favor of sociology as it is (and the status quo in sociological training) need to be examined. It is said that sociologists, by learning to walk, will find out how to fly. You can learn from the fruit fly, it is correctly suggested, new laws of genetics that apply to all animals and plants. Similarly, we can derive from sophomores' chitchat universal laws of interaction which enrich our understanding of social behavior in general. But while it is true that in this way we can learn the "universal" elements of our theory—all the universal chemical characteristics of water are represented in any drop—we cannot study the emergent properties of com-

plex units in non-complex ones.<sup>7</sup> We will not learn much about the anatomy of elephants by studying that of fruit flies. Hence, while we ought to continue to study small groups for their own sake and for the light they cast on social behavior in general, *we ought to invest more of our resources in macroscopic sociology.*

But, it is said, as a second line of defense in favor of our present low investment in social analysis, you cannot direct scientists and tell them what to study. If sociologists find race relations an unrespectable subject, unless it can be used to perfect survey methods or to redefine the concept of prejudice, what can we do? What we can do is to realize that the distribution of scientific resources is not random, does not follow a laissez-faire pattern, and is "interfered with" regularly anyhow.<sup>8</sup> The distribution of sociological manpower is directly affected by the advantage of required courses, which as a rule include theory and research techniques over optional courses; by Ph.D. committees that approve and encourage some subjects and discourage others; by foundations and federal agencies—which we advise—who support some subjects to the neglect of others; and by space awarded in our journals, as well as attention granted at regional and national professional meetings, to some subjects over others. All these are occasions where theory and methodology are celebrated while social analysis is given, at best, second-class citizenship.

The institutions of sociology are lagging in this matter far behind many leading sociologists. Our journals are a case in point. They are the major windows through which, month after month, we display our

hardware before prospective clients, competitive stores, and one another. Even a brief perusal of the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology* of the last decades will show that theoretical and methodologically oriented articles are predominant; social analysis is little dealt with. Not that sociologists have not written outstanding essays on the issues of the day, without using them to redefine concepts or demonstrate correlations. But these essays did not find their way into our professional journals. Thus Parsons' article on McCarthyism was published in the *Yale Review*; Riesman's "Abundance for What?" in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*; Gans's studies of our urban problems in *Commentary*; Shils's insights into the role of intellectuals in new nations appeared in *World Politics*; Merton's classic "The Self-fulfilling Prophecy" in *The Antioch Review*; etc., etc.

One might ask, are not these journals precisely the place where such articles ought to be presented? Is it not the function of publication in these journals to bring sociology to the attention of well-educated segments of society? While this is of course true, the almost exclusive publication of such articles in lay journals puts them in danger of being lost to sociological tradition and training. They are not readily available to most members of our profession and are not easily encountered by new students or members of other disciplines who skim our journals. Nor are the disciplinary problems raised by these essays systematically explored; in short, they are only indirectly a part of sociology, rather than in the front row.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This point is elaborated in my *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. xii ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Robert Gilpin and Christopher Wright, *Scientists and National Policy-Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). See also my "National Guidance of Science," *The Moon-Doggle* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), pp. 42-70.

<sup>9</sup> My practical suggestion is that some space in our journals be given to social analysis essays; there is really no danger that the non-professional publications will be deprived. Similarly, social analysis books written by sociologists (or on subjects sociologists ought to write about) should be systematically reviewed, and review essays—dealing with the generic problems they raise—be invited.

Probably the loyal sociologist will find it hard to accept, as I do, that our discipline devotes less energy, time, and means to social analysis than do other social sciences. Industrial development, for instance, is a major preoccupation of economists, while sociologists, who have at least as much to contribute to this field, have devoted comparatively little attention to it. Similarly, psychologists have made major contributions to the study of war and peace (see for instance the work of Charles Osgood, the recent president of the American Psychological Association). We have at least as much to give to this vital area as our colleagues in psychology, but here again we have given little.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, sociological scientism is revealed in the aloof attitude toward social action of many members of our profession. This is a severe case of elephantiasis in which the professional role of the sociologist has made deep inroads into his role as a member of the educated elite of the community. This is not just a question of being a bad citizen but of not living up to a special social obligation we have as persons who know society expertly. To indicate more clearly what I have in mind, let me point to another helpful (for social as well as sociological analysis) term, that of role pairs. Role pairs are roles which appear frequently together in a society, in the sense that they are carried out by one and the same actor. The importance of such combinations is that they provide the most effective means of communication known between two roles—personal union. They also allow economy of resources, such as that found in the housewife-mother pair, security and elevator-boy combination, teacher-researcher, doctor-medical professor, etc.

The role pair of sociologist-intellectual is a particularly effective one. Not that all sociologists were ever intellectuals or vice versa, but there seems to have been a much

higher degree of overlap in earlier generations. The growing tendency to disassociate the two roles is particularly regrettable because the virtue of such role combination is greater now than it used to be in the days when it was more common, for now we command a body of theory and methodology as well as a store of validated knowledge about man-in-society which can provide much-needed background for speculation about society.<sup>11</sup> The social analysis of Daniel Bell, Lewis Coser, Nathan Glazer, David Riesman, Dennis Wrong, and other contemporary sociologists who fill this role pair is much more hardheaded, soundly based, and politically sophisticated than that provided by earlier generations of social analysts or by their former college mates who majored in English literature and still interpret the American scene in the light of moods revealed in *Moby Dick* or "understand" the Soviet Union because they suffered with Dostoevsky and Pasternak.

As a discipline we do not encourage, or at least do not train for, the sociologist-social-commentator pairing of roles. In earlier days the clergy and radical movements provided the sparks that fused sociological training with social concern. Today, in the age of specialization, more and more sociologists feel that what is proper behavior in their role as scientists is the proper behavior in their community role as well; the only way they face a social problem is through the lenses of the-

<sup>11</sup> For discussion, from various perspectives, of how the role pair of sociologist and social analyst operates, or fails to operate, see Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Myth of a Value-free Sociology," *Social Problems*, IX (Winter, 1962), 199-213; and Alfred R. Lindesmith, "Social Problems and Sociological Theory," *Social Problems*, VIII (Fall, 1960), 98-101.

For discussion of how the two roles inform one another, see Robert K. Merton, "Social Problems and Sociological Theory," in Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (eds.), *Contemporary Social Problems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), pp. 697-737, and Robert K. Merton, *Mass Persuasion* (New York, Harper & Bros., 1946), pp. 185-89.

<sup>10</sup> Marvin B. Sussman, "The Social Problems of the Sociologist," *Social Problems*, XI (Winter, 1964), 215-25.

ory and methodology. Civil defense, for example, becomes a subject for a study of attitudes ("people who fear war more are also more in favor of fallout shelters") or an occasion to try out a new computer program in mass dynamics.<sup>12</sup> The sociologist's scientific role is pre-empting time, energy, and resources that belong to his role as intellectual, as one who is committed to societal issues and expresses his concern about them more effectively than other observers since he knows more than they about the society he is commenting upon. Thus he not only is against nuclear war, but applies his knowledge of society to understand why nations become inflexible in the face of such a danger and freeze rather than act, and shares his analysis with those who seek to reduce the danger through political action but lack the benefits of the sociologist's training and expertise.

Finally, as part of the liberal arts tradition, social analysis can broaden the horizons of the undergraduate student and prepare him more adequately for life in modern society. Sociology on this level should contribute to the development of the skills and understanding necessary for the student as citizen and not use the college mainly as a recruiting ground for professional sociologists.

How can social analysis be restored to its due place? How can we repair the roles of sociologist and intellectual? How can one advance the discipline of social analysis? Answering these questions requires a somewhat detailed examination of the way sociology is taught on both undergraduate and graduate levels and an outline of a program for modifying these teaching patterns. To this end, a number of suggestions are offered here. However, the detail of what follows is not crucial; it serves mainly

to illustrate what institutional cloak social analysis might wear. One might find one of these suggestions or even all of them unsuitable and still persist in the search for institutional foundations for social analysis. What one cannot forego is the search to cast new molds to hold the new content, and the effort to bring the collective forces of the profession to bear where departments, set in their ways, are not engaged in enough innovative drive on their own.

On the *undergraduate level*, what first needs revision is Sociology I, both in terms of the material used for teaching and the way it is taught. Judging by the textbooks most commonly used, sociology is still introduced as a set of theoretical perspectives and concepts around which some substantive material is arranged as illustration. Thus many textbooks open with such concepts as role, norms, and interaction, or personality and social system. The social issues behind these conceptualizations are, as a rule, most successfully concealed; sometimes even the writer himself seems unaware what these concepts have been molded for. We rarely speak up and tell the student that what we are really talking about when we distinguish among ends, means, norms, and conditions is man's freedom: that man's action is not determined by forces beyond his control, whether they lie in the relationship between his parents, his genes, the shape of his head, or the texture of his hair; that hence man is ultimately responsible for his conduct, though society, by prescribing the proper behavior (or norms), makes it painful for him to follow his inner voice when its suggestions do not coincide with the expectations defined by his "role." Similarly, we introduce the student to the difference between primary and secondary relations, as if the distinction were the main point, and discuss the historical transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* as though it were but one illustration among many of the usefulness of two basic concepts, and not a key to understanding the development of

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1939), and Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1963), esp. chap. iv.



modern society. We tell the student that social structures are composed of actors who have similar, superior, or inferior statuses, as though the essence of stratification is that people are stratified; the inability to produce an egalitarian society and the difficulties raised by efforts to approximate it become marginal, if they are mentioned at all.

Most students who take "Soc. I" never take another "Soc." class, and even fewer become professional sociologists; thus to most of those who take our introductory classes, we tell little about the society they live in or about the essence of sociology. For many of them sociology will remain forever largely a distasteful conceptual machinery which one masters for the exam and forgets soon after.

The situation is further aggravated by the way introductory classes are frequently taught. While there are many exceptions, the tendency is for it to be taught in "sections," by graduate students or young instructors who tend to be, though by no means always are, in a stage of their professional development at which their respect for the conceptual framework they so recently mastered is greatest, and their willingness to question the tradition followed by the majority of their senior colleagues—by engaging in social analysis—is particularly small. Moreover, since the number of instructors needed for introductory sociology is large, and the number of sociologists who are not just scientists but also social analysts is small, most introductory classes are more classes in an esoteric language than channels for the communication to students of new ideas expressed by this language. Thus teaching further divorces the textbooks from social issues to make more room for a technical apparatus that will serve largely the very small minority of students who will become professional sociologists.

What is needed is a different kind of textbook and a different mode of teaching. The textbook should be built around issues,

and the concepts should be introduced "in passing." Thus once we tell the student about the emergence of the modern society from the traditional one, we might call attention to the terms that sociologists use, when speaking technically, to refer to these types of societies and to their components. Once we have analyzed the social foundations of justice, we might consider the concept of "status inconsistency," and after we have explored the ways man learns to control himself, we might call the process "socialization" and mention "affective neutrality," etc. In this way we shall leave a much richer inheritance for those many students who do not pursue sociological careers, rather than continue to train generations of students alienated from sociology.<sup>13</sup>

Another approach to the same problem might be a course on American society to replace "Introductory Sociology" or supplement it, as Soc. II. But again care is to be taken to see to it that this is really taught as a course in social analysis, distilling for the students what sociological research and analysis have found about American society and not just presenting

<sup>13</sup> To be successfully applied, such an introductory text will have to be used by one of the leading members of the faculty, who has had a chance to see in his own work the limitations of overemphasis on methodological subtleties and conceptual hair-splitting; and the importance of the problems sociology ought to help us to understand. (The student will be fully introduced to the distinctions between a "cohesive" and a "primary" group, and to the many mistakes one can make in drawing a sample, and similar trade secrets, in more advanced classes.) The more committed the teacher himself is to social analysis, all other things being equal, the more natural appeal will he have to the undergraduates. Since there are not too many such faculty members available for introductory teaching—each year probably only one can be found even in larger departments—they might give one weekly lecture to all the introductory students, while teaching assistants would serve as discussion leaders of small sections, into which the class would break for additional meetings during the week. These teaching assistants should sit in on the grand lecture.

the material on life in America as illustrations of the pattern variables, or of distinctions between social and cultural systems, and the like. (It might be a good idea to have such a course, repeated on a higher level, for first-year *graduate* students.<sup>14</sup> We produce too many sociologists who know their discipline better than their society. Not that every student of biology should know some medicine, but he should at least have handled a warm body, not just slides and skeletons.

Second, the graduate course in American society would serve as the introduction to the substantive sociologies, so that a student planning to specialize in political sociology or stratification, education sociology, or some other field, would know more about those areas in which he will not specialize without having to take a course in each. Hence, it seems desirable that the course in American society (or social analysis) enjoy the same status as courses in general theory and methodology should; that is, it should be required. At least it should be offered as an optional substitute for the second (often third and fourth) methods and statistics courses which departments of sociology tend to require. The special importance of this will become evident immediately.

The introduction to the social analysis course (and/or the American society course) might well serve as an introduction to a sequence (or specialization) in social analysis, much as a first-year course in theory provides both a general background for all graduate students and can be taken as a first step in a theory specialization. At present, most departments of sociology are not systematically concerned with training and nourishing the talent that could assume the sociologist-intellectual role pair, which includes newspaper and magazine editors, journalists, commentators, non-fic-

tion writers, political advisers, social critics, and teachers of social analysis. To be sure, most departments have several substantive courses, but these are usually geared to the application of theory or methodology to some substantive area and hence best serve sociologists who wish to become specialists in a particular field. But little attention is given to analysis of social issues, especially not to the generic problems social analysis raises. As a consequence, we do not train the editors, journalists, political advisers, etc., of tomorrow, though of course it does happen that a sociologist—despite his training (or often interrupting his training)—becomes one of these. As a consequence the role of editor, journalist, etc., is largely taken over by English literature majors, political scientists, and lawyers. At the same time, we do not hold on to the talent that has such a political, social-analytical potential. While I am not aware of a nation-wide study to support my impression, it seems that students with such a potential are not attracted to sociology as a graduate major, and if they choose it are not likely to stay with it, and if they stay with it are not likely to realize their social-analytical potential. Since at the same time students who are attracted to more quantitative fields increasingly choose "harder" ones than sociology, we are losing at both ends of the scale and are, it seems, drawing an increasingly poorer quality of new students.<sup>15</sup>

The methods courses are often the symbol of the screen that keeps the potential social analyst from sociology. Our methodology requirements have become more and more expansive and exacting, which is fine. But we ought to distinguish more sharply between training in methodology that provides the necessary background for being able to *consume* sociological products—for

<sup>14</sup> Such a graduate course is especially important since many students who take graduate sociology have taken little or no undergraduate sociology.

<sup>15</sup> See Elbridge Sibley's discussion on the "Calibre of Students" in his *The Education of Sociologists in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963), pp. 23-25.

example, learning to read a multivariable table—and that needed to labor in those sociological vineyards that involves the command of quantitative methods. A social analyst must be able to “consume” quantitative sociology a taste which can be acquired in a one-semester course; beyond that he should have the option of pursuing subjects closer to his heart and more in line with his specialization than quantitative methods.

A sequence of social-analysis courses would include (beyond a methods and a theory foundation) a large number of substantive courses, including a greater than the usual number of credits in other departments, such as philosophy, literature, or political science.<sup>16</sup> Finally, we will have to develop a disciplinary course in social analysis, which will pay special attention to the qualitative methods and distinct problems of studying macroscopic units, and the problems of inference from

partial information. Here the student will learn to face the problems of evaluation (or value judgments) which a social analyst is likely to find more difficult than other sociologists, and the ethics of advising and consulting. The social analysts are thus in essence those trained to apply the tools and findings of sociology to society, a task now left to outsiders, neither trained nor equipped to crack our codes, or to insiders with little systematic training in the methods of application in general and of social analysis in particular.

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<sup>16</sup> It might be necessary to require that a student who takes an introductory course in another department will also take another, more advanced course in the same department to provide a deeper understanding of the sister discipline and to prevent accumulation of “easy” credits by taking several introductory courses in various departments, without probing in depth any one discipline.

### Comment

With Etzioni's central thesis and much else besides it is easy to agree. He is sensitive to a potent trend in contemporary sociology and gives renewed and vigorous expression to it. He has observed that the practitioners of our discipline, excellent as they are, have often contended themselves with trivialities and have not taken into their purview the larger problems that surround them. Like Isaac Newton—but unlike him in impact—they have been picking up an occasional pebble or shell on the seashore while the great ocean of society lies all undiscovered before them. Etzioni does not doubt the importance of the pebbles and shells—they can be fused together into an edifice of science—but he reminds us that the ocean is still there, clamoring for attention.

Etzioni has, in fact, great faith in the current condition of sociology and even more in what it promises for the future. As

good as it is, something is missing that would “make a fine mix even better.” Indeed, it may even be said that some reform is needed. The answer is something he calls “social analysis,” which would add application to knowledge and institutionalize “the desire to help.” Knowledge, in short, is not enough. We must discover high-level applications for what we know, we must take seriously Robert S. Lynd's famous question—*Knowledge for What?*—and we must bring our resources to bear upon such general social problems as desegregation, the development of a world community, the redistribution of wealth, and the growth of civil rights. Otherwise our activities are sterile and our instruments useless. One is reminded of Lotze's remark about logic: that the constant whetting of an axe is apt to be a bit tedious if it isn't proposed to cut anything with it. Etzioni wants to terminate the tedium and begin to cut.