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Sociology and Progress: Worldview Analysis of Modern Sociology

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In fact, one may—this simple proposition, which is often forgotten, should be placed at the beginning of every study which essays to deal with rationalism—rationalize life from fundamentally different basic points of view and in very different directions. Max Weber¹

Worldview and Rationalism

Questions about the relationship between worldview and sociology are as old as the discipline itself. Do the worldviews of sociologists—their personal values and interests—penetrate their scientific thinking? To what extent can such influences be eliminated by accurate conceptual analysis and methodological procedures? In what respects are they unavoidable? These are recurrent topics in the philosophy of the social sciences. In mainstream sociology, worldview issues arise primarily with respect to their deleterious effects on sociology as a gradually maturing science. The goal is to improve sociology by making it an objective and value-neutral science.

The relationship between worldview and sociology may also be considered the other way around. The central point here is what a distinctive worldview is or should be. How does sociology as a science affect this vision of life and the patterns of behavior built upon it? In what respects is such influence acceptable? In what respects should it be opposed? The primary purpose of such questions is to defend and articulate a worldview in contrast to sociology.

But don't these questions presuppose a somewhat abstract and dis-

torted picture of the actual relationship between sociology and worldview, one might ask. Can't sociology itself as a science become part of a worldview? Isn't modern culture deeply permeated by such a "scientific" or "rationalistic" worldview? Of course, no one will deny that science shapes the spirit of our times and affects both thought and action. Precisely because this is so overwhelmingly obvious, we should be very careful in characterizing this process, in our analysis or our critical evaluation, as the *realization* of a scientific or rationalistic worldview. This is the somewhat provocative thesis which I hope to defend.

What is the meaning and motive originally included in the concept of worldview? Answering this question seems a necessary condition for making appropriate use of the concept today. Dilthey has elaborated the formal meaning of the concept of worldview. He points out that people always give answers to ultimate questions from a subjective and changeable perspective. Answers to questions such as "What is reality all about?" or "What is my place and destiny in it?" are never a matter of merely contemplative wisdom. Worldviews are systems of ideas that are at the same time sources of action from which people build "their" worlds.

It should be recognized, however, that Dilthey's elaboration of the meaning of "worldview" was influenced by his historicist and relativistic philosophy. It could be said that, because of his philosophic framework, Dilthey in a sense betrayed the critique of classic or philosophical rationalism implied in the concept of "worldview" as articulated within Romanticism. In Romanticism, the concept of worldview arose in order to legitimize the rich variety of cultures within human history against the levelling impact of classic rationalistic philosophy represented by Descartes and Kant. Despite their differences, the classic rationalists sought to convince people that they should overcome social and cultural plurality by establishing a unified human society built on the absolute and general truths of philosophical reason. It was thought that cultural plurality always implied suppression and violence within and between different cultures, whereas a society built upon the universal truths of philosophical reason would be characterized by freedom and peace. This was the implicit promise of progress offered by classic rationalistic philosophy. In justifying a plurality of worldviews, then, Romanticism was nothing less than a counter-revolution against rationalism.²

Between the classic rationalistic ideals of a good society and actual prevailing worldviews there existed a complex relationship. Built on

compelling logical arguments, universal rationalistic ideals invariably outshone all actual worldviews, which, by contrast, displayed narrowness in knowledge and ideas. Yet from the angle of social and political practice, abstract rationalistic ideals were inferior to prevailing worldviews, for in the latter the fusion of ideas and human action was self-evident.

What value does the concept of worldview have for us today? I suggest that our point of departure in answering this question should be Dilthey's elaboration of the meaning of worldview. In particular we must do justice to the critique of rationalism implied in the Romantic use of this concept, which requires that we take into account developments in the nature of rationalism itself. Has rationalism changed since the concept of worldview was first raised? If so, what is its relation, from both a logical and a historical point of view, to prevailing worldviews in modern society? To answer these questions we must pay attention to the history of modern rationalism and its effects on social reality. A main theme of this paper is that modern rationalism is represented supremely by the modern science of sociology. As a result, we must gain insight into the history of modern sociology and its effects on our society. After that, we may be able to understand what value the concept of worldview may have in relationship to today's world.

Sociology and Progress

Although the Enlightenment was a broadly European movement, the course it took in France exerted the most distinct and far-reaching influence. In France, the Roman Catholic Church, together with the nobility and an absolute monarch, provided a model of authority that demanded submission and patience. In sharp opposition to this state of affairs, the French Enlightenment was outspokenly anti-clerical and rejected all power and authority. Its stirring ideals of freedom and equality were manifest in the French Revolution.³

The Revolution's aftermath made it clear, however, that the overthrow of the old regime was considerably easier than the establishment of a free and peaceful society. First there was the Terror, and then the establishment of the Directorate and the Consulate on the morrow of the 18th Brumaire, when Bonaparte declared himself First Consul for life. To one segment of French society, it seemed obvious that these events were but new embodiments of the old oppression. Accordingly, these people continued to reassert the old ideals of liberty and equality.

To another segment of society, the events that took place after 1789 revealed the inherently wicked nature of man, showing beyond all doubt the need to re-establish the absolute authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Yet a third reaction argued that both the Jacobean slogans and the cries for traditional authority were inadequate guides to the proper realization of the good society. Proponents of this third view were Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, two of the most prominent "Prophets of Paris."⁴

Comte's guiding principle was that the new social order about to begin should be built upon sociology as a positive science. Until that time, reflection on society had been deeply permeated by religious commitments or metaphysical speculations. This, according to Comte, was the main reason conflicts and violence had pervaded human history. From Comte's time on, the exact nature of social reality would be revealed through the basic concepts and methodology of the natural sciences (particularly biology). Then, in accordance with the universal laws of social order and social change, a rational and harmonious society would be established.

Comte himself was firmly convinced that both France and Europe in general were ready for his appeal. Progress would be guaranteed only when the nations put their fate into the hands of positive sociologists. A great distance remained, however, between his prophetic appeal and the reality of everyday life. Social contrasts and conflicts continued to tear the fabric of European society.

Then it dawned on Comte that his rationalistic ideal of a "good society" was not in itself sufficient to bring about a new and stable social order. A curious turn took place in Comte's thought. He supplemented his concept of sociology-as-a-positive-science with a system of positive politics and positive religion. This religion would be built upon universal sentiments of love and altruism, the psychological counterpart to the social organism. Comte proclaimed himself "High Priest of Humanity" and from then on devoted all his attention to elaborating the rituals and symbols of this positive religion. He insisted emphatically on the continuity between such religious activity and his earlier ideas about the "good society" based on sociology as a positive science. He was convinced that only the religious practice he prescribed would succeed in bringing about the new rational social order which he had proclaimed in his philosophy of human history. His rationalistic admirers were embarrassed. "Others could laugh," wrote John Stuart Mill, "but we could far rather weep at this melancholy decadence of a great intellect."

Most people's acquaintance with the heritage of the founding father of sociology is often incomplete and therefore false. Comte's name is generally connected with his three-stage philosophy of human history, ending in a new society built on sociology as a positive science. I think we should take more seriously Comte's own suggestion that we treat his work as a whole. Only then does it become clear that during his lifetime Comte recognized that his idea of a "good society" built merely upon sociology as a positive science was an abstract construction and was, in a way, inhuman. His conclusion was that sociology can make a real contribution to progress only when its insights are given flesh and blood in a non-scientific religious practice. Of course, the religion Comte had in mind was purely immanent and humanistic. Nevertheless, he made a notable and significant concession within his own rationalistic philosophy of progress: positive sociology by itself can not bring salvation to mankind.

Official histories of sociology often ignore this radical turn in Comte's thought. Sociology textbooks are often permeated implicitly with Comte's early notion that sociology is the sole or primary source of progress in society. The fact that Comte later raised serious doubts about this notion is rarely mentioned. Instead, full attention is given to making progress within sociology itself, either through developing general theories of social systems or through perfecting social research methodology and techniques—both of which were already present in Comte's sociology as a positive science.

Pragmatism and Historical Materialism as Practical Philosophies

The increase in sociological knowledge appears in itself, however, to be no guarantee for a better society, for the question can always be asked: knowledge for what?⁵ To what end? Suggested answers to these questions appear in two highly influential varieties of modern sociology: Merton's problem-solving sociology and Habermas's critical theory of society. Both sociologies seek to pursue consistently Comte's original ideal of a "good society" built on sociology. The central motive of both sociologies, and their principal standard of self-evaluation, is effective contribution to progress toward this ideal. Both distinctly represent modern rationalism, and are built on two outstanding practical philosophies: Merton's on the pragmatism of John Dewey and Habermas on the historical materialism of Karl Marx.

A significant similarity between pragmatism and historical materialism is their rejection of classic rationalistic philosophy as rep-

resented by Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. Classic rationalism sought absolute and general truths about reality as a whole and about man's place in it, and these philosophic truths were proclaimed as the standards for a free and just society, leading to progress. A great distance remained, however, between such abstract and speculative truths and the social and political realities of everyday life. According to Dewey and Marx, the failure to close this gap between theory and action is the tragic fate of mainstream Western philosophy.

In setting out their own proposals on how to close the gap between theory and action, Dewey and Marx rejected classic rationalism's concern for absolute and universal truth. Both pragmatism and historical materialism start from specific situations in everyday life in which human actors are provoked to reflect on how to reach the goals they hold. Human thought is perceived not in principle as master but as servant to human action, a means for realizing specific, culturally determined goals. Dewey and Marx then seek to uncover the general or formal structure of these situations in order to provide a "logic" that would reveal how to connect thought and action effectively. In building their cases, however, pragmatism and historical materialism both contradict their own points of departure. In the end, human actors are subjected, in the name of progress, to the general dictates of practical reason and their own specific, culturally determined goals are neglected.

Dewey's Logic of Social Problems

According to Dewey, inquiry occurs in specific situations that raise doubt and questions, when the natural environment confronts man with unexpected events for which his habits provide no answer. Inquiry is the means by which man transforms the problematic situation into one in which man is more in control of nature. Proceeding from what he calls a "natural history of thinking," Dewey develops a "logic" of how to define and solve problems in general. In doing so, he interweaves two points of view. On the one hand, he emphasizes that problematic situations and their solutions are always specific, differing because of the specific, culturally determined perspectives from which persons make sense of their environment and which direct and set limits on their control of nature. On the other hand, Dewey develops his "logic" from the supposition of biological Darwinism. Man is conceived as an organism whose primary aim is to control nature, i.e., to remove obstacles to the satisfaction of his needs. Thus, the basis of

Dewey's "logic" is the general or formal structure of control, shared by all specific problem situations and their solutions. According to Dewey, it is in the methodology of the natural sciences that this logic is most adequately worked out. Within the framework of Dewey's logic, every specific problem situation that prevents man from reaching his goals is necessarily reduced to an obstacle, i.e., to an objective condition that can be removed by scientific knowledge. Dewey ignores the possibility, logically implied in his starting point, that the cultural perspectives in which these problem situations have their primary ground could restrict or even reject such a reduction.⁶

Dewey argues that social evils should likewise be defined as social problems to be solved by the same logic. He explicitly rejects any interpretation based on an ideal, on the nature of the good society. As he says, "Wholesale creeds and all-inclusive ideals are impotent in the face of actual situations."⁷ In his logic, specific social evils merely come in view as objective social conditions which deviate from prevailing value-standards and require, in a moral sense, a solution. Scientific explanation of the causes of these deficient conditions will demonstrate the most effective solution, and thus this is the approach that ought to be taken. In effect, Dewey's "logic" implies that the scientific method itself is the highest standard for defining and dealing with social problems. It ignores the possibility that the cultural standards against which specific social evils are defined resist efforts to reduce these evils to mere "problems," to objective social conditions which can be solved by the social sciences.

Marx's Logic of Class Conflict

A similar train of thought can be discerned in Marx's work. Marx develops a "natural history of thinking" along these lines: capitalist society produces in man self-alienation. In other words, man sees himself as in the grip of powers that threaten his bare existence (poverty, hunger), and that he is unable to oppose. This compels man to criticize capitalist society. Much of his criticism, however, takes the form of an impotent protest: e.g., the Christian hope for a better life hereafter.

Marx then develops his own "logic" for an alternative criticism of society that will be effective in removing self-alienation. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."⁸ Marx is not denying that the world—the capitalist society of his time—needed to be interpreted; what he is stipulating is that this interpretation must contribute primarily to chang-

ing society. In elaborating his logic, Marx, like Dewey, interweaves two points of view. On the one hand, in his critique of society Marx points out the "subjective" basis of the distribution of commodities among his contemporaries: it is built on class suppression. Official Christianity plays an important role in masking this fact by providing an ideology. The primary purpose of Marx's critique of ideology is to mobilize the working class politically: the proletariat must rise up and demand from the rich, who own the productive forces, living conditions more in correspondence with current standards of human dignity. (It is important to note that this critique of ideology leaves room for the possibility that, as a result of critique, Christianity may become aware of its own responsibility to improve the conditions of the poor. Indeed, this is what actually happened.)

On the other hand, Marx develops a philosophy of human history which portrays it as a series of class conflicts, driven by the accumulative development of the means of production. The penultimate phase in human history is a capitalist economy, which will inevitably collapse due to the so-called "iron" laws of nature. Because of this objective development, the proletariat is almost necessarily bound to revolt against the owners of the productive forces, establishing a radically free and equal society. Marx's philosophy ignores, however, his own earlier critique of ideology which was intended to rouse the political consciousness of the poor so that they were able to demand living conditions more in correspondence with current standards of human dignity.⁹

In both Dewey's pragmatism and Marx's historical materialism, human thought is first conceived as a servant to the realization of specific human goals determined by specific cultural standards. Thereafter, a general logic meant to lead to an effective connection of thought and action is developed, built on naturalistic and deterministic presuppositions (in pragmatism, biological Darwinism, and in historical materialism, technological economism). Such a logic implies, however, that actual social and political action become the means realizing a society built on the dictates of practical reason. In pragmatism, specific social evils are reduced to the scientific definition and solution of social problems. In historical materialism, specific situations of economic repression are explained in terms of the objective development of human history toward the revolutionary establishment of a society according to radical ideas of freedom and equality. Hence, both pragmatism and historical materialism are active forces in bringing about in the name of progress a thoroughly rationalized society.

As we noted earlier, pragmatism and historical materialism were sources of inspiration for two varieties of modern sociology: Merton's problem-solving sociology and Habermas's critical theory of society. We will now consider these modern sociologies.

Sociology as Social and Political Practice

Historically, the central motivation behind different types of sociology has been the search for general and abstract truths about society, whether we consider Pareto's thesis on the "circulation des elites," Simmel's formal sociology, Parson's general social system and theory, or several others. Although sociological knowledge can be useful for human action, this has not been seen as its primary purpose. Merton's problem-solving sociology and Habermas's critical theory take the opposite point of view. Both are *practical* sociologies: the knowledge they pursue reveals its truth primarily in the effective realization of the dictates of practical reason. Building on the presuppositions of pragmatism and historical materialism, their motivating impulse was to reconstruct society on the basis of sociology, which was the heart of Comte's original ideal of social progress. During the Sixties, in the so-called *Positivismusstreit*, much attention was paid to the methodological differences of these two approaches and this point of fundamental agreement was ignored. Let's examine it here in detail.

Merton defines a social problem as a "substantial discrepancy between widely shared social standards and actual conditions of life." He draws a distinction between manifest and latent social problems. The former are conditions people in society regard as undesirable. But there may also be other conditions at odds with declared values that are not recognized as such by members of society. These latent conditions should also be raised by the sociologist as social problems.¹⁰

Merton's distinction here is somewhat misleading in that it suggests that the value-judgments of subjects within society can be independent sources for defining social problems. Because it follows Dewey's logic, however, Merton's approach necessarily implies that the sociologist's definition can be accepted as the only legitimate basis for identifying social problems. This implication becomes clear when Merton argues that identifying social problems in terms of "social disorganization" is a technical judgment concerning inadequacies in the workings of a social system. Such inadequacies can be improved technically so that the collective purposes of that system become more fully realized. What does this mean in principle? From shared value- standards, mem-

bers of society may subjectively define social evils such as drug abuse and poverty as social problems. However, they may be called real social problems whose solution is imperative only when the sociologist has diagnosed these phenomena in objective terms of social disorganization as dysfunctional, i.e., as impairing the full realization of a social system's needs. Merton's sociology of social problems may be interpreted in principle as a sociology of social conditions within the general framework of functional analysis.¹¹

Merton's critics frequently point out that his natural science methodology does not allow him to make verified statements about the objective needs of a social system,¹² so that his approach by itself is unable to identify real social problems. People in society must still first subjectively define, by their own specific value-standards, the social evils that need to be removed with the professional support of sociology. However, this does not alter the fact that the sociologist will necessarily tend to reduce these evils to objective (i.e., scientifically identifiable) social conditions. These social evils then come into focus only as objective social conditions that impair the effective realization of current value-standards and which should be removed by social engineering. Dewey's logic for defining social problems has deprived problem-solving sociology the capacity to question how far it can justifiably define specific social evils in terms of objective sociological knowledge. Thus, problem-solving sociology is characterized by an inherent tendency to rationalize institutionalized patterns of behavior within society. This process of rationalization is technical and partial in nature. Questions about the nature of society as a whole, its basic structure and developments—the main themes of classic sociological analysis—are left out of consideration. Does that mean that modern society already deserves to be called a "good society"? Habermas answers emphatically in the negative. That is why he summons modern sociology back to the classics, especially to Marx.

Habermas's relation to Marx is not the same as Merton's to Dewey. Merton's problem-solving sociology directly accords with Dewey's logic, wherein specific social evils are reduced to objective, scientifically defined social conditions. Habermas, however, aims to do justice to the "subjective" side of Marx's logic, which was neglected by Marx himself. Habermas dissociates himself from Marx's objective philosophy of history which viewed history as determined by inevitable laws. Marx's historical prognoses appeared to be falsified by the stabilized capitalist economies; moreover, his historical determinism also legitimizes party-sponsored terror in Communist societies. Haber-

mas believes that a radically free and equal society can be realized only by a consistent elaboration of Marx's critique of ideology.¹³

According to Habermas, the most characteristic feature of human beings is their use of speech. Language is the medium through which man communicates his norms and values. Because the pursuit of wealth has become dominant in capitalist Western society, the transmitted norms and values regarding human dignity have lost their influence. Habermas's hopes for change are built on the dispersed groups which, according to their specific value-standards, still protest the repression of important qualities of life. He himself tends to encapsulate these specific criticisms of society in his own critique of ideology. For Habermas, the destiny of man is emancipation from all authority. Authority that is objectively indicated in the formal structure of language. As a result, he elaborates his model of a radically free and equal society in terms of an "ideal speech." Habermas argues that in modern capitalist society, man is further away from his destiny than ever before in history. The ideology of science and technology has so deeply permeated his mind that he has completely forgotten what real human communication is. On the other hand, man could be liberated from the burden of labor and the oppressive human relationships it creates precisely through the advanced material and social technology in this society. For the first time in history, man is presented with the objective possibility of fulfilling his destiny. The critical sociologist's task is to take every specific protest against modern welfare society and transform it into political action which will result in a thoroughly rational society emancipated from all power and authority.¹⁴

Both Merton and Habermas tend to use requests for help to remove specific social evils pre-eminently for the purpose of realizing their own radical ideas of progress, i.e., a society thoroughly built on emancipatory reason. But this logically immanent tendency of modern sociology must be clearly distinguished from the actual influence this sociology has on the history of modern society, which is what we will discuss next.

The Dutch Post-War Welfare State: A Model of Social Progress Through Sociology

What real influence have these varieties of modern sociology actually had? To answer this question we will take the Dutch post-war society as our point of reference: this society can provide us with a clear understanding of the impact modern sociology has had on social and

political life.

Before World War II, the position of sociology in Dutch universities was marginal. Either it was a part of academic philosophy, which was rather speculative and normative, or else it was purely descriptive research on the life-styles of local communities throughout the country, more or less like social geography. Yet within ten years after World War II, nearly all Dutch universities and high schools had developed separate educational programs for modern sociology. Students showed enormous interest. As a result, by the end of the Seventies, about 4,000 fully educated sociologists were active in Dutch society, the highest per capita ratio in the world. Parsons's observation that the post-war decades in Western society were a "sociological period" is certainly true for Dutch society.¹⁵

How can we explain this explosive spread of sociology in the Netherlands? Dutch society had become completely disorganized and seriously impoverished because of the economic crisis of the Thirties and because of the Second World War. After the War, the principal political parties, together with social and religious organizations, agreed that Dutch society could be reconstructed only through common effort. A national state planning program was developed in order to set up health organizations, housing projects, the educational system, etc. In this way, a satisfactory social and economic standard of living was guaranteed. Underlying this planning program was a growing tendency in Dutch society to define social evils as problems to be solved with the help of the social sciences. Merton's functionalist research sociology, in particular, provided the kind of knowledge and information required. Over a period of twenty years, Merton put an unmistakable stamp upon Dutch post-war sociology.

It is important to note that, although the adult post-war generation was working diligently to make Dutch society prosperous again, its basic motives were not materialistic. The energetic and collective efforts directed toward the reconstruction of Dutch society were actually built on a heritage of traditional values and norms, some deeply founded in the Christian faith: a calling to labor, a sobriety of life-style, social responsibility, and the belief that rights and duties were correlative. The continuity of this normative framework had not been fundamentally affected by the Second World War. It continued to direct, as well as limit, the growing tendency in Dutch society to define social evils in terms of social problems to be solved sociologically.

During the Sixties, protest movements in Western countries challenged the role these countries played in the international community

of nations. The movements claimed that the high standard of living in the Western world had been achieved by exploiting the powerless Third World and by exhausting nature. Moreover, they maintained that the exaggerated pursuit of wealth had undermined human dignity in Western countries themselves.

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, protest was most vehement among a generation of students who had not themselves worked to build the welfare state, but who enjoyed its blessings. They formulated their protests in the language of Habermas's critical theory. This ensured that their analysis of the influences of economic and political powers, and their campaigns to enlarge participation (especially within the universities), was highly regarded and effective. In the late Sixties and Seventies, critical theory became the most prominent stream of thought within academic sociology.

The result has been an increasing polarization within Dutch society. In order to understand this process of polarization, one must realize that during the Sixties the positions of power and authority were still filled by the older post-war generation. This generation tended to preserve established social relations, holding to a covert moral and political conservatism. With the support of critical social theory, the rising protest movements stimulated many social and political leaders to begin reflecting on the moral and social implications that the way of life in Western countries have on the Third World. Within many sectors of Dutch society (universities, enterprises, churches, etc.), opportunities for participation were provided for young opposition groups.

We must admit that substantial progress took place in post-war Dutch society. First, the older generation did succeed in liberating itself from the poverty, unemployment, and social insecurity which they had experienced bitterly during the global depression of the Thirties and the Second World War. Problem-solving sociologists gave professional support to this process of social liberation. Later, a younger generation successfully broke through rigid institutional frameworks, gaining participation in decision-making processes from which they were formerly excluded. Critical theory was an important stimulus to this process of political liberation.

Recognizing these elements of progress in post-war Dutch society necessarily means acknowledging the substantial contribution of modern sociology. Throughout, sociology enjoyed the status of socially and politically valuable science.

The Crisis in Modern Sociology as a Crisis in Modern Society

It was Comte who linked the idea of progress to sociology in the early stages of its development as a science. He taught that after the religious and metaphysical phases in human history, the time was ripe for a “good society” built on sociology as a positive science. Later, Comte came to see that the “good society” he envisioned could be realized only through the social practice of a positive religion built on universal sentiment. This insight not only contradicted his own rationalistic philosophy of progress, it was also socially and politically ineffective. Yet modern sociology—built on pragmatism and historical materialism—remains committed to Comte’s original point of view.

Both historical materialism and pragmatism are practical philosophies: thought is the servant of human action, a means for realizing specific, culturally determined goals. In this respect, these philosophies differ radically from classic rationalistic philosophy, which submitted human action to the universal and speculative truths of theoretical or philosophical reason. However, the general logic of effective relationship between thought and action contained in the practical philosophies finally results in an inherent tendency to mobilize social and political action for the realization of the dictates of practical reason, and thereby to bring about a thorough rationalization of society.

Pragmatism and historical materialism can be traced in the sociologies of Merton and Habermas. Merton’s sociology tends to be actively involved in technically reorganizing society by reinterpreting specific social evils by a functionalist- objective definition and solution of social problems. Habermas’s theory of society, by reinterpreting every specific protest against suppression of human dignity in modern society by his critique of ideology, tends to be actively involved in bringing about a society emancipated from all power and authority.

As we noted, both varieties of modern sociology made a substantial contribution to progress in Dutch postwar society, which is illustrative of what took place in Western society in general. However, this is only half the story, for during the expansion of the Dutch welfare state, a fundamental change took place within Dutch society. The essence of this change was a steady erosion of the traditional normative and institutional framework, within which the elements of progress had been directed and limited. The result was that social progress itself became the primary motive for behavior in Dutch Society. The Dutch began to focus their efforts solely on increasing collective wealth in order to

guarantee a maximum of social welfare, understood as the unobstructed satisfaction of personal wants and needs. As a matter of fact, the continuously expanding economy, built on high technology, fostered the belief that increasing collective wealth would be guaranteed far into the future. This belief led a multitude of groups to look to government for all kinds of provisions to enable them to realize their immediate pleasure, legitimizing their claims in terms of the right to emancipation and self-development. The government repeatedly complied, in order to prevent social tensions. Strictly speaking, this increasing emphasis satisfying emotional and material needs lead to a dehumanizing "naturalization" of the dominant behavioral motives within Dutch society.

This change of perspective affected the relationship of modern sociology to society. The naturalistic presuppositions of pragmatism and historical materialism, on which their logic for rational social and political change was built, had become a reality in modern society. The necessary counterpart of this change was a growing and insatiable need for the kind of knowledge modern sociology provided. Problem-solving sociology and critical theory, for their part, strengthened this process with their tendency to rationalize society at the cost of its traditional institutional and normative framework. From this angle as well, a slow but unmistakable change took place. Instead of contributing to progress by offering professional support and alerting political consciousness *within* a normative and institutional framework, sociologists began to develop a thoroughly professionalized and politicized society. Due to these mutually reinforcing trends—the naturalization of its basic behavioral motives along with the rationalization of its structure—modern Dutch society tended to leave its traditional normative and institutional framework totally behind. It is worth mentioning that many young people in this society, as it became dominated by sociology, sought refuge in the sentiments of modern religion: alcohol, drugs, etc. Within the limits of his own philosophy, Comte had already had the vision to see that life is not livable in a society built on rationalism alone.

During the late Seventies, Dutch welfare society came to a crisis.¹⁶ The social security system could no longer be financed and the movement for participation entangled itself in its own complex rules. Progress stagnated. At first glance, this crisis seems to be simply the result of a development which has gone too far. Should we not ask people to be satisfied with less progress, both in terms of wealth and in terms of democratic claims for self-development? But this interpretation over-

simplifies what has been going on in Dutch society. Progress can only be restrained when people live by standards other than progress itself. Yet, as noted, other value-standards have eroded; progress itself has become the primary aim of life. Because of its naturalistic foundation, this drive for progress lacks any measure or standard of its own. It can only be stopped when it reaches external limits—as it actually has in the crisis of the Dutch welfare state. Experiencing a limit to progress, sensing restrictions on what was believed to be a never-ending extension, brought about a radical collapse of the basic hopes and securities of the Dutch people. This is the cause and nature of the crisis in the modern Dutch welfare state, and perhaps in Western countries in general.

This crisis within our over-rationalized society leads to rather irrational reactions. Reaction sometimes takes the shape of aggression against the whole idea of progress as such, and against the idea of the malleability of society on which it is founded. This reaction also leads to an aversion toward, or even rejection of, modern sociology as the most important exponent and stimulus of the progress ideal. The crisis of modern sociology is a crisis of modern society and vice versa.¹⁷

Worldview and Progress

How can we find a way out of the crisis of sociology, and more importantly, of society? On the one hand, modern sociology has convincingly proven itself capable of contributing to progress in contemporary society. On the other hand, sociology is now perceived as the cause of modern society's crisis and is sometimes completely rejected. I believe this dilemma provides the strategic arguments for introducing the worldview concept in sociology today. Although it is a hero of social and political liberation, modern sociology must itself be liberated. It must be liberated from the grip of naturalism within contemporary society, as the first step toward liberating society itself. Only by reintegrating sociology into worldviews, can it be saved from irrational rejection. However, the relationship of worldviews to modern practical rationalism is just as complex and contradictory as its relationship to classic abstract rationalism.

Classic rationalism aimed at submitting man and society to the universal and absolute truths of philosophical or theoretical reason. However, this remained to a large extent an abstract ideal. As shown above, pragmatism and historical materialism reject the autonomy of theoretical reason: thought is to be the servant of human action, not its master.

Indeed, because of this, classic academic philosophy often denied pragmatism and historical materialism the title of "philosophy." In this sense, the practical philosophies—and their resulting sociologies (the most representative forms of modern rationalism)—are modest in nature.

On the level of reality, however, modern rationalism cannot be considered modest at all. Built on the underlying process of a naturalization of the basic motives of behavior within contemporary society, modern rationalism has actually become "the world," sweeping away nearly all transmitted worldviews. It could be said that we are living in a worldview-less society. Although not the sole cause of this development, modern sociology was an important stimulus and is to some extent responsible for it.

Any re-establishment of modern rationalism must be connected with worldviews on two different levels. On the level of principle, the concept of worldview must be philosophically articulated from a positive attitude toward modern rationalism. This is justified because modern rationalism does not aim at the destruction of transmitted worldviews; indeed, it could contribute to a more effective realization of the goals implicit in them. On the level of reality, however, what remains of transmitted worldviews needs to be aggressively strengthened against omnipresent rationalism. Recognizing the modesty of modern rationalism on the level of principle is a necessary condition of fighting its dominance on the level of reality. Worldviews, then, can be used both to effectively counteract modern rationalism and to provide the basis for its reintegration.

Without omitting these two directions, modern sociology should now also develop in a third direction. Recognizing our contemporaries' ignorance of their own cultural heritage, sociologists should help them become more conscious of it. For this purpose, a purely historical description will not be sufficient. Rather, the essence of a cultural heritage should be creatively translated into normative frameworks for actual social and political action. A strong consciousness of their cultural and historical self-identity is required to enable people to decide what elements of progress are acceptable.

These suggestions comprise a somewhat atypical approach to the relationship between sociology and worldview. Currently, most approaches to worldview and sociology begin with the development of an anatomy of worldviews, the structure and function of worldviews in general. Then, within this formal framework, a Christian worldview is articulated in contrast to varieties of the non-Christian worldview of

rationalism.¹⁸ I draw attention to some questions that may be overlooked using this approach: is the worldview concept as such a value-neutral and timeless concept, with an exactly symmetrical relationship to both Christian and non-Christian worldviews? True, in defending transmitted worldviews, the concept of worldview was itself a weapon against classic rationalism and its abstract and universal truths. But classic as well as modern rationalism have served to undermine transmitted worldviews—the first on the level of principle and the latter on the level of reality. This is why I hesitate to call rationalism (classic or modern) just another worldview. If these questions raise valid concerns, what consequences do they have for us who try to be Christian social scientists in the tradition of the Reformation?

The basic motive of Reformational philosophy was to fight against the principle of the autonomy of philosophical reason—the main presupposition of classic rationalistic metaphysics—and its directions for human life. As an alternative, Reformational philosophy revealed the normative structure of God's created reality which should be the frame of reference for Christian social and political action. One could ask if this search for relatively abstract normative principles in Reformational philosophy indicates the influence of classic rationalistic metaphysics.¹⁹ As long as social and cultural reality was more or less in accordance with these principles, they could be effective as meaningful frames of reference for a Christian life. This was the historical situation from the 1930's to the 1960's in the Netherlands. But modern rationalism, built on the practical philosophies of pragmatism and historical materialism, has fundamentally rearranged this reality. Seen exclusively from the standpoint of normative principles as articulated in Reformational philosophy, social and cultural reality now appears as mere chaos. The disturbed relationship between government and society on the issue of mutual rights and responsibilities within the welfare state is only one example. However, let us admit frankly that modern rationalism has also produced real progress. That is what makes the contemporary crisis of sociology and society so ambiguous.

Do we have to choose between our transmitted normative principles and progress built on modern rationalism? No. To phrase the problem this way raises a false dilemma. Because modern rationalism in principle rejects the autonomy of philosophical reason, it deserves our special interest and perhaps even our sympathy. I would suggest that the first thing Reformational philosophy ought to do is to articulate a positive relation to modern rationalism on the level of principle. Then, the valuable normative heritage implied in Reformational philosophy

could be translated for the use of all those many Christian movements and organizations which are uncertain which policies to choose in this ambiguous time. Modern rationalism is adored by one part of society and rejected by the other; we ought to help Christians live responsibly with it.

According to Weber, the world can be rationalized “from fundamentally different basic viewpoints and in very different directions.” Weber’s own comparative historical analysis proves the accuracy of this thesis. Looking to the future, Weber foresaw the inevitable fate of a thoroughly rationalized world (paying less attention, I think, to naturalism as the foundation of which fascism was the most insolent manifestation). How can we avoid Weber’s tragic view of history? An open and positive relationship to social progress built on modern rationalism, of which modern sociology is a prominent representative, is an essential condition to sociology’s effective redirection and limitation, provided that we remain stubbornly loyal to our own worldview.

Footnotes

1. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin University Books, 1971), 77.
2. The contrast between worldview and philosophy is elaborated by H. W. von der Dunk, *De organisatie van het verleden* (Bussum: van Holkema en Warendorf, 1982), 90. Johannes Hoffmeister stresses the practical implications of worldviews in his essay, “Weltanschauung” in *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1955), 661.
3. Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 66.
4. Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 251.
5. R. S. Lynd, *Knowledge For What?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). The title of this famous book became a standard question from which every form of complacent sociology is criticized.
6. Pragmatism is not a coherent system of philosophy. There are substantial differences between the ideas of Pierce, James, and Dewey. H. S. Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1968) is by far the most comprehensive introduction to pragmatism. Yet Brodsky remarks that even Thayer does not stress enough the differences in ideas between the founders

of pragmatism. G. M. Brodsky, "The Pragmatic Movement," *The Review of Metaphysics* 25, no. 2 (1971): 262-291. In relationship to problem-solving sociology, the ideas of Dewey are especially important. See John Kekes, "The Centrality of Problem Solving," *Inquiry* 22, no. 4 (1979): 404-421.

7. John Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, quoted in C. Wright Mills, *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 433.

8. This famous phrase is Marx's last thesis on Feuerbach. See *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. and ed. L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 602.

9. Korthals and H. Kunneman, *Arbeid en interactie* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1979), 71.

10. Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet, *Contemporary Social Problems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1971), 799.

11. John I. Kitsuse and Malcolm Spector, "Toward a Sociology of Social Problems: Social Conditions, Value-Judgments, and Social Problems," *Social Problems* 20 (1972/73): 404-419.

12. Melvin Tuman, "The Functionalist Approach to Social Problems," *Social Problems* 12 (1964/65): 379-388.

13. For an elaboration directly in accordance with Marx's objective logic see *Soziale Wirklichkeit und soziologische Erkenntnis*, by the East-German sociologist E. Hahn. The subjective side of Dewey's objective logic has likewise been elaborated, e.g., by H. Blumer, "Social Problems as Collective Behavior," *Social Problems* 18 (1970/71): 298-306. The positions of Hahn and Blumer were rather marginal, however; Merton and Habermas put their stamps on modern sociology.

14. J. Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968) and idem, *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971). For a thorough analysis of Habermas' theory of society, see S. Schaap, "Jürgen Habermas: Zelfbehoud en zelfconstitutie," *Vrijheid, een onderzoek naar de betekenis van vrijheid voor de methodologie van de menswetenschappen* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1984), 3369.

15. L. Rademaker, ed., *Sociologie in Nederland* (Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1979), 124-145.

16. During the last decade a multitude of volumes about the foundation, expansion, and crisis of the Dutch welfare state has been published. Some recent volumes about the crisis are A. Idenburg, *De nadagen van de verzorgingsstaat* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1983), and P. Thoënes et al., *De crisis al uitdaging* (Amsterdam: Kobra, 1984).

17. For an example of such radical criticism of sociology see P. Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983).

18. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). See also the chapter by James Olthuis in this volume.

19. I think Geertsema's reinterpretation of the rather abstract principle of "sphere sovereignty" in terms of a norm that needs to be articulated in relation to the demands of historical experience is a valuable attempt to make the basic concepts of the "Philosophy of the Law Idea" more flexible. See H. G. Geertsema, "De actualiteit van 'De soevereiniteit in eigen kring,'" *Beweging*, 49e jaargang, no. 2 (April 1985): 21-28.