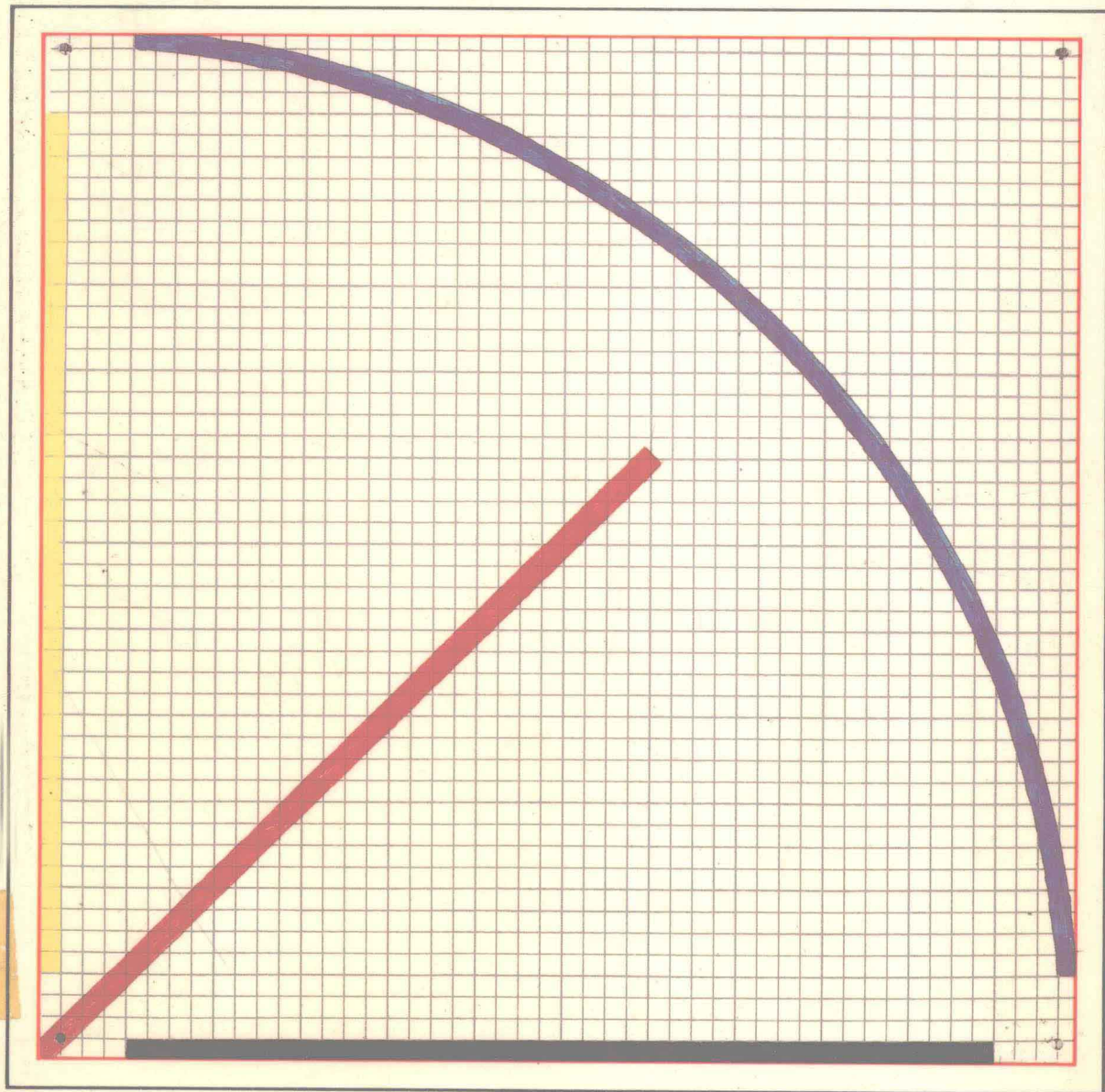


F I F T H E D I T I O N

# SOCIOLOGY FULL CIRCLE



**William Feigelman**

# **Sociology Full Circle**

## **Contemporary readings on society**

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**Fifth Edition**

*Edited by*

**William Feigelman**

Nassau Community College

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# TO MY PARENTS

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# Preface to the Fifth Edition

I am particularly gratified by the considerable positive interest and response that was shown to the earlier editions of this volume. Efforts have been made in the present revision to retain the same qualities that were found in the earlier editions, namely, a social-problems focus and an emphasis upon cross-cultural studies and on the sociology of the offbeat. I have also tried to sustain a sense of timeliness to the selections by focusing upon some of the important social issues of the late eighties.

New selections have been added dealing with the impact of technology on social relations, social adaptations to stagnating economic development, resurging religious fundamentalism, rising proportions of aged, Hispanic and Asian persons in the United States, and the kinds of different organizational structures that may be needed to meet the persistent economic problems of our times. The focus of the present collection is more policy-oriented than earlier editions.

Attempts have also been made to offer representative samples of some of the most outstanding, praiseworthy, and discussed sociological works to appear in the last few years. It is hoped that this effort will yield for instructors and students alike an array of materials that will be as suitable in offering sociological foundations as it will be stimulating and thought-provoking.

I am grateful for the suggestions provided by the following instructors: Bernard Beck, Northwestern University; Spencer E. Cahill, Skidmore College; Russell L. Curtis, Jr., University of Houston, University Park; Augie Diana, Northeastern University; Jeff Ferrell, Regis College; Mark D. Hardt, The University of Connecticut; Jack Harkins, College of DuPage; Susan Carol Herrick, Drew University; Dixie Dean Dickinson, Tidewater Community College; Judith S. McIlwee, The University of Texas at San Antonio; John Tinker, California State University, Fresno; Don Tucker, Neosha Community College; Rhonda Zingraff, Meredith College.

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# Preface

The object of this collection of essays, as of most anthologies in introductory sociology, is to give the student some notion of the scope and intellectual range of the discipline, while presenting examinations in some depth of certain selected issues and topics generally explored in the introductory course. At the same time, I hope that the anthology will make sociology real to the student by presenting a clearer idea of what the sociologist does, how sociological research is actually conducted, and how the sociologist applies seemingly abstract concepts to illuminate our understanding of social phenomena.

One bothersome problem I have noted in many anthologies is that they seem to take little account of the intellectual potentialities and interests of the beginning sociology student. Although the collection may be fairly representative in presenting what is being done and has been done by sociologists, much of what is offered seems to be directed toward professional sociologists rather than beginning students. The classroom performance can often create bridges of understanding across this chasm, but more frequently the student is left with a feeling that sociology consists of a great deal of verbal hocus-pocus overlaid with statistics.

What I have attempted to do in this book is to select materials that are highly readable, straightforward, and inherently interesting to the beginner, including both the student who plans to specialize in the field and the student who does not expect to go beyond the introductory course. Moreover, these selections will be comprehensible and appealing not only to undergraduates in a four-year college but to junior- and community-college students as well. Although several of the selections have been taken from such professional sociological journals as *The American Sociological Review* and *The American Journal of Sociology*, several come from more popular sources such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Society/Transaction*, *Human Nature*, and *Social Policy*. The authors represented are all outstanding social scientists; a number of the works included are prizewinning efforts.

Most of the selections have been extensively tested with students to assess their readability and appeal. With virtually no exceptions, questionnaire responses have indicated uniformly high interest in and acceptance of the articles among students who reviewed them.

In order to stimulate interest in, and appreciation of, the discipline, several areas of sociological inquiry are emphasized. Considerable attention has been devoted to the sociology of social problems—that is, examining contemporary and topical issues in a sociological way, sometimes in their own right and sometimes

as part of larger or more basic social processes. In our increasingly complex world, we look more and more to the sociologist to provide answers to such social questions as alienation, the generation gap, youth culture, the crisis of overpopulation, racial strife, women's liberation, economic and political conflict, the disruptive consequences of technological change, changing courtship and family patterns, and so on.

Another dimension highlighted here is the cross-cultural approach. Many of the selections either were written by anthropologists or concern preliterate peoples and their problems. If we want to develop a systematic understanding of human society, we must take its total variety and diversity into account. By studying the social institutions and cultural patterns of so-called primitives, we may be able to observe social forms in a purer, more elemental state, in a way that better illuminates their dynamics, than would be the case if we observed our own complex and heterogeneous social world. The cross-cultural perspective also enables us to develop and test hypotheses about the interrelatedness of social forms as we compare societies on various axes. From the data provided by cross-cultural research, we may one day derive a meaningful picture of the origins of society, its present situation, how it is changing, and how the transformations may affect our lives in the future.

Still another focus of this collection is what might be called the sociology of the absurd. A number of the essays deal with ostensibly offbeat or bizarre subjects—how professional criminals justify their illegal pursuits, the penchant among many to buy things at “yard sales,” the trend of wearing “designer” jeans. Sociological understanding can be obtained from a study of all human behavior, eccentric as well as conventional. Exploring seemingly absurd questions may enable us to clarify our understanding of important social forms and may give us insight into workings of society that previously seemed obscure. Only by encouraging free-ranging curiosity can we acquire truly imaginative sociological insight.

The selections also represent the most important theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of society—functionalism, conflict theory, social-exchange theory, and symbolic interactionism. The styles of research represented include questionnaire and interview surveys, participant and direct-observation research, census studies, intervention research, and sociohistorical analysis—all of which involve a variety of sampling and statistical-analytical procedures.

In arranging this collection, I have made certain more or less arbitrary decisions regarding the particular chapters in which the articles appear. It should be understood, however, that many articles have ramifications for other topics as well. The introduction to each chapter indicates other articles in the book that might be assigned in connection with the subject under study. The instructor, of course, may wish to assign these essays in still another order.

I hope that these selections will convey to the student not only the range of subject matter and techniques of the professional sociologist but also some sense of the wonder and fascination sociologists experience as they study society and group behavior.

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# The Nature of Sociology

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**INTRODUCTION**

What is sociology? What benefits can it provide for human beings? How does one conduct sociological research? What important moral, sociopolitical, and methodological problems are involved in being a sociologist? The selections in this opening chapter explore some of these questions related to the basic characteristics of sociology and ways of doing social research.

Sociology may be defined as the scientific study of human society. The sociologist's interest is in human relationships: how they arise, how they persist, how they change. Unlike the psychologist, who studies individual behavior, the sociologist is interested in human interaction. Groups, in all their myriad forms, represent the distinctive focus of sociology. The range of human relationships explored by the sociologist is limitless. The behavior of the most respected and the most despised members of society, of the most ordinary and the most extraordinary people—all fall within the province of the sociologist.

The assertion that sociology is "scientific" carries with it a number of implications. It means that one of the sociologist's primary goals is the identification of regularities in group behavior. The sociologist seeks to establish a systematic body of knowledge about human society in the form of logically interrelated sets of hypotheses and theories that are directly verifiable and capable of accurately predicting social action.

To obtain systematic knowledge about society, the sociologist uses the so-called scientific method. This involves adopting a speculative attitude; everything is open

to doubt until it is proved, and nothing is taken for granted. Moreover, the regularities presumed by the social scientist must be capable of being substantiated empirically (directly observable) and thus capable of convincing any rational person. Furthermore, the scientist is obliged to suspend his or her prejudices and predilections and to examine questions about society impartially and dispassionately.

Among the most significant benefits of sociological knowledge is that, by helping people to see clearly what their society is and what it can become, it affords them the opportunity to pursue their goals in rational, intelligent, and effective ways. It also gives them a vision of the manifold consequences of their beliefs and actions and helps them to choose among them.

Moreover, a knowledge of sociology provides the human being with a viewpoint, a way of looking at the world, of examining society critically. A sociological perspective prods the individual to peer behind the commonplace rituals, conventions, and traditions of one's culture. A sociological perspective can thus be unsettling; nevertheless, it yields a broadening vista of human life and engenders an appreciation of the infinite variety of human potentialities.

Some of the many benefits of sociological inquiry are suggested in the late C. Wright Mills's essay "The Promise," an excerpt from his well-known book *The Sociological Imagination*. Mills contends that in the contemporary world—where the urban-industrial individual feels torn from his or her traditional moorings—a sociological imagination has become indispensable for individual well-being.

We can trace sociological analysis in Western history back as early as ancient Greece, specifically to the writings of the Sophists. However, it was not until 1839, in the work of Auguste Comte, that the term "sociology" was first used. Although Comte defined sociology much as it is conceived today, the major corpus of Comte's work was not in keeping with his view of the discipline; for the most part, it represented a social-philosophical, nonempirical approach.

The positivist furor of the late nineteenth century, with its devotion to science and its commitment to the notion of unrelenting evolution toward progress, provided the take-off point for the development of sociology. The development has dramatically accelerated during this century. Notwithstanding several notable exceptions, much early sociological research was, like Comte's, of the "armchair theory" variety. However, sociological study during the twentieth century, particularly in America, has had a decidedly empirical orientation.

The idea of a value-free sociology is one of the legacies of its positivist roots. From the early days of sociology until fairly recently, almost all sociologists argued that in order to maintain scientific objectivity the social scientist must avoid advocacy. Many social scientists believed that any expression of value judgment would necessarily hamper the scientist's ability to study society impartially and would ultimately result in a kind of pseudosociological analysis representing narrow self-interest or political partisanship.

Today, this doctrine has been subject to considerable reexamination. Articles such as Alvin Gouldner's classic "Anti-Minatour: The Myth of a Value-free Sociology," Howard Becker's widely reprinted "Whose Side Are We On?" and others have raised important questions about the problems inherent in the strictly value-free approach. They have argued that such a posture frequently becomes a mask for moral indifference, crass commercialism, and political conservatism. Most present-day sociologists acknowledge that as social scientists select problems for study

they inevitably express their own biases and beliefs. Many contemporary practitioners readily agree that sociological findings ultimately enter into the moral and political arena, where they are likely to benefit the interests of some members of society and threaten the interests of others.

The position of increasing numbers of today's sociologists is that they have a public responsibility to address the public issues and social problems of the times, although they do not limit themselves entirely to studying these questions. The vast majority strive to keep their personal values and beliefs from interfering with the collection of their data and the drawing of research conclusions. Many feel they should do their utmost to allow their personal values and beliefs to be disproven in the course of their research enterprise. Increasing numbers are also recognizing a role obligation that sociologists have in doing what they can to see that their findings are implemented to improve society.

Sociology, like the other behavioral sciences, involves several methodological problems not found in the physical sciences. These problems hinge on the central fact that the subject of sociological study is the human being. Unlike the laboratory scientist studying animals or inanimate things, the sociologist can never perfectly control the subject; no one will permit another to rearrange his or her life completely for a scientific experiment. Secondly, in studying society we are usually studying ourselves, our families, or intimate friends, and other groups of whom we may have formed very definite evaluations. Can we suspend our attitudes and moral judgments so that they do not distort our analysis? While studying ourselves, can we be scientifically objective? In "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," Horace Miner suggests, in a most amusing but thoughtful manner, that transcending the precepts of our own culture, studying a group dispassionately on its own terms, may be an insurmountable task. He leads us to wonder whether the stranger has a distinct advantage over the native in social research. Because the stranger's moral investments in the culture are less great, such a person may be better able to suspend judgment in the interest of scientific objectivity.

Today's more ethically concerned social scientists are beginning to examine much more carefully the consequences of their research on their subjects of study. With greater reliance upon governmental financial support to conduct research, governmental agencies are demanding a more complete and careful accounting of the benefits and costs inherent in the research process. Similar questions are also increasingly being asked by private philanthropic agencies subsidizing social research. Morton Hunt's article "Research Through Deception" alerts us very well to many of the moral questions associated with doing social research. It appears that the studies which are likely to offer the most vital knowledge—affording the greatest dividends in extending our understanding of human interaction—are also likely to incur the greatest risks in deceiving those who would cooperate with social research. It is by no means clear what, if any, deceptions should be permissible in the efforts to advance our grasp of social relationships.

Social-science research involves, first, the selection of a problem for study and the formulation of hypotheses. In the next step, the scientist painstakingly observes and records data relevant to the hypotheses, possibly examining official records, collecting interviews, or directly observing his or her sample or group. The data are then organized or classified; at this point, statistical computations are performed if necessary. Then, the scientist generalizes from the findings, indicates whether they confirm or refute the original hypotheses, and determines whether they add anything to established theory or suggest its revision. Finally, the scientist makes the

work public by putting the findings on record, complete with data and procedures, so that the work can be repeated by others, tested, and added to the cumulative fund of knowledge.

There are many ways in which sociologists study society, including direct observation, interviewing, questionnaire surveys, the study of official records, content analysis (inferring social trends from popular literature, films, songs, or other such cultural items), and correlation analysis (examining data to find whether change in the amount of one variable is accompanied by comparable change in the amount of another). A variety of research designs are employed, including case studies, sampling surveys, and applications and variations of the "classical" experimental design (observing differences between a group exposed to an experimental manipulation and a control group similar in every respect with the exception of the experimental condition).

Sociological curiosity has led to the exploration of a broad and diverse range of problems and questions about human society. In the chapters that follow, we shall attempt to provide an overview of both the types of questions explored and the methods and techniques used in sociological research.

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## **The Sociological Imagination**

### **The Promise**

*C. Wright Mills*

Nowadays, men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that, within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats, that transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet, men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Surely, it is no wonder. In what period have so many men been so totally exposed at so fast a pace to such earthquakes of change? That Americans have not known such catastrophic changes as have the men and women of other societies is due to historical facts that are now quickly becoming "merely history." The history that now affects every man is world history. Within this scene and this period, in the course of a single generation, one-sixth of mankind is transformed from all that is feudal and backward into all that is modern, advanced, and fearful. Political colonies are freed; new and less visible forms of imperialism, installed. Revolutions occur; men feel the intimate grip of new kinds of authority. Totalitarian societies rise, and are smashed to bits—or succeed fabulously. After two centuries of ascendancy, capitalism is shown up as only one way to make society into an industrial apparatus. After two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind. Everywhere in the underdeveloped world, ancient ways of life are broken up and vague expectations become urgent demands. Everywhere in the overdeveloped world, the means of authority and of violence become total in scope and bureaucratic in form. Humanity itself now lies before us, the supernation at either pole concentrating its most coordinated and massive efforts upon the preparation of World War III.

The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed, and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they cannot understand the meaning of their epoch for their own lives? That—in defense of selfhood—they become morally insensible, trying to remain altogether private men? Is it any wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap?

It is not only information that they need—in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it. It is not only the skills of reason that they need—although their struggles to acquire these often exhaust their limited moral energy.

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination.

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social



positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means, the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles, and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways, it is a terrible lesson; in many ways, a magnificent one. We do not know the limits of man's capacities for supreme effort or willing degradation, for agony or glee, for pleasurable brutality or the sweetness of reason. But in our time we have come to know that the limits of "human nature" are frighteningly broad. We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. It is characteristic of Herbert Spencer—turgid, polysyllabic, comprehensive; of E. A. Ross—graceful, muckraking, upright; of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim; of the intricate and subtle Karl Mannheim. It is the quality of all that is intellectually excellent in Karl Marx; it is the clue to Thorstein Veblen's brilliant and ironic insight, to Joseph Schumpeter's many-sided constructions of reality; it is the basis of the psychological sweep of W. E. H. Lecky no less than of the profundity and clarity of Max Weber. And it is the signal of what is best in contemporary studies of man and society.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?
2. Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within, and its meaning for, the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?
3. What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of "human nature" are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for "human nature" of each and every feature of the society we are examining?



Whether the point of interest is a great power state or a minor literary mood, a family, a prison, a creed—these are the kinds of questions the best social analysts have asked. They are the intellectual pivots of classic studies of man in society—and they are the questions inevitably raised by any mind possessing the sociological imagination. For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use, there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being.

That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society. In large part, contemporary man's self-conscious view of himself as at least an outsider, if not a permanent stranger, rests upon an absorbed realization of social relativity and of the transformative power of history. The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of this self-consciousness. By its use, men whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar. Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summations, cohesive assessments, comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values: In a word, by their reflection and their sensibility, they realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences.

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between the "personal troubles of milieu" and the "public issues of social structure." This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

*Troubles* occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and, to some extent, his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: Values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

*Issues* have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieus into the institutions of a historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieus overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: Some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often, there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus, if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday