



THE readings in the  
Social Sciences  
IMPACT OF  
SOCIOLOGY

Edited by  
JACK D. DOUGLAS

# The Impact of Sociology:

## Readings in the Social Sciences

Edited by Jack D. Douglas  
University of California, San Diego



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# Introduction

The social sciences are already a great and growing force in American society and around the world. While a century ago there were no organized disciplines called the social sciences, today several of them have become basic determinants of the social policies which have profound effects on our everyday lives, and there is excellent reason to believe that their impact on our society is still rapidly accelerating and will continue to do so for a long time to come. While it may still be too "prophetic" to be accorded much credibility, I believe that many of us will live to see the social sciences become the primary means by which we seek to determine social policies which will rationally order our everyday lives.

This growth of the social sciences and of their impact on our lives has been due primarily to the scientific-technological revolution in Western thought and action. The secularization of thought concerning nature which grew steadily through the later medieval and Renaissance periods and triumphed in seventeenth century England laid the foundations for the "secularization of political theory" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Tawney has argued in the first selection in this volume, "The Medieval Background of Modern Social Thought," this secularization of political theory was "the most momentous of the intellectual changes which ushered in the modern world." It laid the social foundations for new forms of government and for the new sciences of society. It involved both the new scientific ways of thinking about society and the removal of social thought from the ancient realm of religious and moral thought. While there is still considerable dispute

concerning the basic issues of this secularization of social thought and the exact nature of "scientific thought" in the social sciences, especially concerning the relations between moral commitments and the social sciences,\* this secularization has steadily progressed and has become a dominant tendency in the social sciences.

The progressive change in Western societies from more humanistic forms of social thought to the more scientific forms of the social sciences has not been without costs and dangers. As with most other basic changes in man's social ideas, this one has produced many widespread feelings of confusion and anxiety. As both Cassirer and Kahler have argued in the selections in Part I, the specialization and professional barriers found in the social sciences have greatly increased the sense of cultural confusion and anxiety. It is no doubt true to some degree that the many different and fragmented pictures of man presented by the various social sciences have contributed greatly to the destruction of our traditional, more homogeneous conception of man; and this has probably undercut one of the most integrative forces in our society. But I believe these are transitional problems which will be overcome, both because there are in fact many, often overlooked, common elements in most of the different perspectives and because an *existential perspective* on man and science alike is growing rapidly in all intellectual and scientific disciplines. This existential perspective, which has been dealt with in detail in *Existential Sociology*,† may in time become our dominant social conception of man, in good part because it bridges some of the differences between our traditional conception of man and the conceptions of man which we have been developing out of our experiences in our modern technological society.

The costs and dangers of the social sciences have been borne primarily because Western men have felt a great and growing need for scientific knowledge that can be used in devising practical solutions to our social problems. Unlike the humanities and even the early natural sciences, the social sciences have rarely been justified by their aesthetic qualities or some other inherent qualities. Instead, they have been justified primarily as the means of solving social problems. As our society becomes more massive and more complex, policy makers feel an increas-

\* These questions have been dealt with in the volume on *The Relevance of Sociology* (Jack D. Douglas, ed., New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1970).

† See Jack D. Douglas, ed., *Existential Sociology*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, forthcoming.

ing need for specialized and reliable information and analyses about the parts and the whole of the complex society on which they can base their decisions. They have turned increasingly to the social sciences to provide them with this information. As Robert Lynd has said (in the chapter on "Values and the Social Sciences"), "There would be no social sciences if there were not perplexities in living in culture that call for solution." For example, the complex problems of race have led to great demands being placed on the social sciences to help find solutions. As Herbert Garfinkel has argued ("Social Sciences Evidence and the School Segregation Cases"), information provided by the social scientists was used in important ways by federal judges in making and justifying their decisions to desegregate schools. As Melvin Tumin has argued so effectively ("Some Social Consequences of Research on Racial Relations"), there is reason to believe that many current problems in our cities could have been avoided if policy makers had made more use of the evidence provided by the social scientists.

There is now little doubt that the social sciences can and will become ever more involved in attempting to solve social problems. But this involvement immediately raises great questions about the possibilities of overt and covert power that can be exercised by the controllers of information or by those who control them. As Loren Baritz has argued ("The Servants of Power"), there is ample evidence that social scientists have long been engaged in helping administrators and managers to control their workers. Ralf Dahrendorf, in considering the now infamous case of Project Camelot, has extended this argument to consider the possibilities that such efforts at control could be extended throughout our society and the world ("Sociology and the Sociologist"). Leonard Krasner ("The Behavioral Scientist and Social Responsibility: No Place to Hide") and Raymond Bauer ("'Social Responsibility' or Ego Enhancement?") have presented contrasting arguments concerning the possibilities of using the social and behavioral sciences to manipulate individuals.

There is little doubt, as we have noted, that the social sciences will continue to grow and have an ever greater influence on our futures. Whether this influence will be a *benign* one, and help us to solve the social problems which threaten our very existence in an age of absolute weapons, or whether they will become the servants of powers which seek to subject us to their designs, will be determined by the crucial decisions which the social scientists and the educated public make in the years immediately ahead. Warren Bennis ("Future of the Social Sciences")

and Thomas Bottomore (“Criticism and Ideology”) have analyzed the likely future of the social sciences in our lives and tried to show how they can make a more effective critical contribution. In my own essay on “The Impact of the Social Sciences” I have tried to analyze what I believe to be the fundamental dangers to our individual freedoms which we face in a technological age and the effects I believe the social sciences have had and can have in this struggle.

The dangers we face in our technological society, especially to our individual freedoms, seem to be growing rapidly. Whether we can overcome these dangers and fulfill the promises offered by the scientific and technological revolution will depend very largely on how the social sciences develop.

PART I

# The Impact of the Social Sciences on Man's Self-image



# The Medieval Background of Modern Social Thought\*

By R. H. TAWNEY

“La miséricorde de Dieu est infinie: elle sauvera même un riche.”

ANATOLE FRANCE, *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*.

“Que pourrions-nous gagner,” once wrote a celebrated economist, “à recueillir des opinions absurdes, des doctrines décriées, et qui méritent de l’être? Il serait à la fois inutile et fastidieux de les exhumer.”<sup>1</sup> One who studies the development of social theory can hardly hope to avoid the criticism which is brought against those who disturb the dust in forgotten lumber-rooms. If he seeks an excuse beyond his own curiosity, he may find it, perhaps, in the reflection that the past reveals to the present what the present is capable of seeing, and that the face which to one age is a blank to another be pregnant with meaning. Writing when economic science was in the first flush of its dogmatic youth, it was natural that Say should dismiss as an unprofitable dilettantism an interest in the speculations of ages unilluminated by the radiance of the new Gospel. But to determine the significance of opinion is, perhaps, not altogether so simple a matter as he supposed. Since the brave days when Torrens could say of Political Economy, “Twenty years hence there will scarcely exist a doubt respecting any of its fundamental principles,”<sup>2</sup> how many confident certainties have been undermined! How many doctrines once dismissed as the emptiest of superstitions have revealed an unsuspected vitality!

\* From *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, by R. H. Tawney, copyright © 1926, by Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.; renewed 1954 by R. H. Tawney. (Copyright for world rights by John Murray, Publishers, Ltd.) Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Say, *Cours complet d’Economie politique pratique*, vol. vi, 1829, pp. 351-2.

<sup>2</sup> R. Torrens, *An Essay on the Production of Wealth*, 1821, Preface, p. xiii.

The attempt to judge economic activity and social organization by ethical criteria raises problems which are eternal, and it is possible that a study of the thought of an age when that attempt was made, if with little success, at least with conviction and persistence, may prove, even today, not wholly without instruction. In the present century, the old issues seem, indeed, to have acquired a new actuality. The philosophy which would keep economic interests and ethical idealism safely locked up in their separate compartments finds that each of the prisoners is increasingly restive. On the one hand, it is evident that the whole body of regulations, by which modern societies set limits to the free play of economic self-interest, implies the acceptance, whether deliberate or unconscious, of moral standards, by reference to which certain kinds of economic conduct are pronounced illegitimate. On the other hand, there are indications that religious thought is no longer content to dismiss the transactions of business and the institutions of society as matters irrelevant to the life of the spirit.

Silently, but unmistakably, the conception of the scope and content of Christian ethics which was generally, though not universally, accepted in the nineteenth century, is undergoing a revision; and in that revision the appeal to the experience of mankind, which is history, has played some part, and will play a larger one. There have been periods in which a tacit agreement, accepted in practice if not stated in theory, excluded economic activities and social institutions from examination or criticism in the light of religion. A statesman of the early nineteenth century, whose conception of the relations of Church and State appears to have been modeled on those of Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is said to have crushed a clerical reformer with the protest, "Things have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to interfere with private life;" and a more recent occupant of his office has explained the catastrophe which must follow, if the Church crosses the Rubicon which divides the outlying provinces of the spirit from the secular capital of public affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the merit of these aphorisms, it is evident today that the line of division between the spheres of religion and secular business, which they assume as self-evident, is shifting. By common consent the treaty of partition has lapsed and the boundaries are once more in motion. The age of which Froude, no romantic admirer of ecclesiastical pretensions, could write, with perhaps exaggerated severity, that the spokesmen of

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd George at Portmadoc (*Times*, June 16, 1921).

religion "leave the present world to the men of business and the devil,"<sup>4</sup> shows some signs of drawing to a close. Rightly or wrongly, with wisdom or with its opposite, not only in England but on the Continent and in America, not only in one denomination but among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Nonconformists, an attempt is being made to restate the practical implications of the social ethics of the Christian faith, in a form sufficiently comprehensive to provide a standard by which to judge the collective actions and institutions of mankind, in the sphere both of international politics and of social organization. It is being made today. It has been made in the past. Whether it will result in any new synthesis, whether in the future at some point pushed farther into the tough world of practical affairs men will say,

Here nature first begins  
Her farthest verge, and chaos to retire  
As from her outmost works, a broken foe,

will not be known by this generation. What is certain is that, as in the analogous problem of the relations between Church and State, issues which were thought to have been buried by the discretion of centuries have shown in our own day that they were not dead, but sleeping. To examine the forms which they have assumed and the phases through which they have passed, even in the narrow field of a single country and a limited period, is not mere antiquarianism. It is to summon the living, not to invoke a corpse, and to see from a new angle the problems of our own age, by widening the experience brought to their consideration.

In such an examination the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are obviously a critical period. Dr. Figgis<sup>5</sup> has described the secularization of political theory as the most momentous of the intellectual changes which ushered in the modern world. It was not the less revolutionary because it was only gradually that its full consequences became apparent, so that seeds which were sown before the Reformation yielded their fruit in England only after the Civil War. The political aspects of the transformation are familiar. The theological mould which shaped political theory from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century is broken; politics becomes a science, ultimately a group of sciences, and theology at best one science among others. Reason takes the place of revelation, and

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Froude, *Revival of Romanism*, in *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, 3rd ser., 1877, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> J. N. Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius*, 1916, pp. 21, *seqq.*

the criterion of political institutions is expediency, not religious authority. Religion, ceasing to be the master-interest of mankind, dwindles into a department of life with boundaries which it is extravagant to overstep.

The ground which it vacates is occupied by a new institution, armed with a novel doctrine. If the Church of the Middle Ages was a kind of State, the State of the Tudors had some of the characteristics of a Church; and it was precisely the impossibility, for all but a handful of sectaries, of conceiving a society which treated religion as a thing privately vital but publicly indifferent, which in England made irreconcilable the quarrel between Puritanism and the monarchy. When the mass had been heated in the furnace of the Civil War, its component parts were ready to be disengaged from each other. By the end of the seventeenth century the secular State, separate from the Churches, which are subordinate to it, has emerged from the theory which had regarded both as dual aspects of a single society. The former pays a shadowy deference to religion; the latter do not meddle with the external fabric of the political and social system, which is the concern of the former. The age of religious struggles virtually ends with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The age of the wars of economic nationalism virtually begins with the war between England and Holland under the Commonwealth and Charles II. The State, first in England, then in France and America finds its sanction, not in religion, but in nature, in a presumed contract to establish it, in the necessity for mutual protection and the convenience of mutual assistance. It appeals to no supernatural commission, but exists to protect individuals in the enjoyment of those absolute rights which were vested in them by the immutable laws of nature. "The great and chief end of men uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property."<sup>6</sup>

While the political significance of this development has often been described, the analogous changes in social and economic thought have received less attention. They were, however, momentous, and deserve consideration. The emergence of an objective and passionless economic science took place more slowly than the corresponding movement in the theory of the State, because the issues were less absorbing, and, while one marched in the high lights of the open stage, the other lurked on the back stairs and in the wings. It was not till a century after Machiavelli had emancipated the State from religion, that the doctrine of the self-contained department with laws of its own begins generally to be applied

<sup>6</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, bk. ii, chap. ix, §124.