

# Opening Questions

## *Does "Social Science" Exist?—By JULIUS GOULD*

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES—not just sociology—often proclaim themselves in the grip of endemic crisis. In our self-conscious age, they are mirrors to the Protean shapes which social arrangements assume—and those arrangements are at once both historically rooted and open to transformation. For nearly 200 years now, the political and social worlds have been marked (some backward-looking persons would say disfigured) by such transformations. Sociology itself had its origin in the mixture of messianism and analysis with which Auguste Comte sought to map those changes. Since his time—and in different ways and speeds in different countries—sociology has become “professionalised” and has sought to weld together both its speculative and its empirical components.

It is an unfinished, untidy business. Often its leading exponents seem to have worked out simply a prologue to social enquiry: to have devoted themselves (as, for example, Talcott Parsons has done for almost 50 years) to devising a sociological “frame of reference”, a near-universal catch-all in which the richness of social life can be interpreted, in which the uniformities and the diversities are put into an intelligible shape.

Even the most heroic and long-sustained of such endeavours remain unfinished. Their value is not in the answers they give but in the questions they raise. For there is an educational and a social purpose in the raising of questions—always provided that the answers—often conflicting answers—are not used as mind-closers or thought-stoppers. There is much that can be gained by the pursuit of sociology’s main technique (that of the comparative method), seeking to show how and why different social devices, and beliefs about those devices, have come into being—what the relations are between structures and beliefs, how the structures and the beliefs change, and so on. . . . To shed light—even a half-light—on these matters is a useful and honourable intellectual activity. I do not believe that this can be done without a deep immersion in, for example, history and literature—those ancient forms of self-consciousness in which

analysis and speculation are also indissolubly welded. Nor should we be rigid about the more narrowly “social science” *methods* needed in order to understand and/or explain a social process. Those who have preached a “hard” scientific objectivity have, in their turn, provoked a tedious and muddled subjectivism. Too much time, greatly to the disgust of the bystanders, can be spent on asking how we know what we know and how far we offer “theory” in one sense or other of the word.

FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE social scientists who, through their different merits, do not disgust the bystanders—and can even instruct (and improve) their colleagues. Professor David Martin is one such scholar.

His continuing work on religious life is sociology in its most seminal sense. His new book<sup>1</sup> uses a vast range of published and unpublished materials so as to set up a typology of religious forms in Europe (East and West) and in the United States—the aim being to indicate a “socio-logic” of the underlying forces behind the process of secularisation.

To state a general theory is not to announce some dogma about the way things are going or about irreversible trends. It simply says that in circumstance *X* this or that development *Y* tends to occur, or more broadly that in the complex of historical circumstances *a, b, c*, a development *p, q, r* tends to occur . . . always allowing, of course, for adaptations on the part of those who have grasped more or less precisely this development and the best manner of either nullifying it or canalising it.

Clearly, the interplay between religious organisations and national development is a theme of exceptional importance—and the ways in which different economic and political settings promote or retard secularisation in the Christian world are, in good measure, the story of the last four centuries.

Many of those who speak of “Europe” do not often recognise the variety of social forms that make up the European reality—and those social forms, not least the religious and secular

<sup>1</sup> *A General Theory of Secularization*. By DAVID MARTIN. Blackwell, £10.

political parties, are the sediment of religious history as much as of economic struggles or dynastic battles. (Even the British Labour Party has one root in English non-conformity—and the Church of England, in its time, was regarded in some quarters as the Conservative Party at prayer....) David Martin categorises these phenomena—and the religious (and secular) supports for the American polity: he has also much of interest to say on religion under Communism and the strange mutations of religious-political life in Latin American contexts.

The general reader of this general theory will be struck by two things. Martin's often remorseless rotation of categories may go well beyond his ears—much of the typology arises out of the debate with his fellow specialists that Martin originated, 13 years ago, when he wrote, piquantly, about "eliminating the concept of secularisation." But the clarity of the prose makes the material, with all the contrasts and the paradoxes, highly accessible to the non-specialist. Moreover, there is no pretence of Procrustean finality in this book—no manic drive to encapsulate the universe. To quote Martin again:

the attempt at theory is not rendered useless by the fact that the scope of explanation is limited or some things left unexplained. What is needed is some indication of the crucial nexus of relevant factors and some hint as to their likely relationship.

DR KRISHAN KUMAR'S *Prophecy and Progress*<sup>2</sup> makes a good companion to Martin's book. He has given himself the most majestic of themes—"the sociology of industrial and post-industrial society"—and he focuses on the same relationalising impulses that have induced secularisation in urbanised and technologically "progressive" societies.

There is now a vast literature, carefully digested and criticised by Kumar, on the contours of industrialism, the changing shape of occupational structures, the likelihood of a shift to a post-industrial, knowledge-based society, and the possible convergence of all industrial societies to a common, not just comparable, type. Kumar casts a sceptical eye on most of those theories: and he can be quite censorious about those that offend him most. No doubt there was some overselling of the post-industrial society as a general future for industrial man: much of what was said about the knowledge-based society of the

<sup>2</sup> *Prophecy and Progress*. By KRISHAN KUMAR. Allen Lane, £7.95; Penguin, £1.50.

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# AGGRO

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future clearly derived from the scientific and educational boom of the 1960s. And the quite separate idea that industrial societies, despite their diverse cultures, would "converge" as the result of technological or managerial imperatives brought the whole idea of social imperatives into disrepute.

What has happened to the industrial world since 1973 has also put the idea of progress (rationally defined rather than prophetically proclaimed) under a further cloud. A mere six years ago it was possible to "believe" in growth, to claim that "on and on, and up and up" was a plausible scenario both in economic and scientific affairs. Now we are not so sure. Some, like Kumar, are attracted by the thought that "small is beautiful": and this raises for them the issue of a really alternative post-industrial future. Kumar is right to stress the truism—or maxim—of social discontinuity—that the future may constitute a break with the past rather than its logical extension. Yet we cannot, in the nature of the case, be certain.

I remain of the view that growth can ameliorate social misery and, to mix a metaphor, draw the

teeth out of social tension: I regard the economic power of the "powerless" less-developed countries that supply us with raw materials as a major, perhaps uncontrollable, source of inflation and instability in the developed societies: and I shudder at the way the retreat from growth has undermined yet further the fragile self-confidence of Western man and woman. When and if growth resumes (so as to reduce, not eliminate, scarcities) the hints and messages of the '60s will warrant fresh attention: and Kumar's book will be an invaluable, if not always intended, guide.

NO ONE SHOULD BE DECEIVED by the simple title of Norbert Elias' ingenious book, *What is Sociology?*<sup>3</sup> Since he came to Britain from Germany in the 1930s, he has brooded, written and taught on the essence of sociology—and he has exercised a remarkable influence as a teacher.

His book is *multum in parvo*. At one level, it is a lucid formulation of the social "games" that people play—and of how such "games" can be understood not in terms of an abstract individualism but in terms of the rules which limit or enhance one group's capacity to impose its will, or preferences, upon another. This didactic model, as Elias calls it, gives "material" interests priority over "ideal" interests. But—and in this

<sup>3</sup> *What Is Sociology?* by NORBERT ELIAS. Blackwell, £8.50.

## The Theory of Money

Jürg Niehans

Exploring the function of money as a store of value and a medium of exchange, this major work focuses on the interaction of the money stock with other assets and on the flows of goods and services. Jürg Niehans treats systematically and comprehensively the pure theory of money and monetary policy. It is the first such treatise since Don Patinkin's classic, *Money, Interest, and Prices*, was published in 1956. Since then, monetary theory has progressed considerably and Niehans takes new developments fully into account.

Money is considered in both its microeconomic and macroeconomic aspects. The analysis thus extends from the demand for money by individuals to monetary policy and to the art of central banking. At the microeconomic level the approach is characterized by the decisive role assigned to transaction costs. At the macroeconomic level the distinctive feature is the use of a general stock/flow approach, which includes Keynesian, monetarist, and other positions as special cases. While mathematics is extensively used, the required tools do not go beyond the elements of multivariate calculus and non-linear programming. The emphasis is on economic substance and not on mathematical rigour.

384 pages, £12.50

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he is closer to Weber than to the sanitised sociological Marx—he does not pre-empt the answers to the questions that preoccupy us and which, of course, post-date the classical writers.

Secondly, and quite rightly, Elias does not seek to abstract from politics—the game that interests him relates to the power differential between rulers and ruled and between various social strata. But this concern is presented in a rational, matter-of-fact way. There is none of the ranting obsession with power that the self-accredited radical sociologists display—an obsession that comes naturally to them but into which they were assisted by the apparent neglect of the theme in the '50s and '60s, by “conservative” or liberal writers.

On a third level, Elias is concerned to tell us what sociology is for:

... the task of sociological research is to make these blind, uncontrolled processes more accessible to human understanding by explaining them and to enable people to orientate themselves within the interwoven social web—which, though created by their own needs and actions, is still opaque to them—and so better to control it.

This is an interesting passage—on several counts.

It shows a cautious optimism about human rationality—entirely consistent with the author's refined blend of German and French social thought: but there is nothing technocratic about this position. Matters, please note, are to become “more accessible to human understanding”, not completely transparent to even the most casual or semi-literate observer. It is also written in a conventional sociological style—using the language of “webs” and “orientations” that other writers have, so long and so cheerfully, played to a living death! I am struck by this—for elsewhere in the book Elias rightly comments that our sociological vocabulary is inadequate. One of the purposes of “didactic models” is to fill the gaps—not to generate neologisms for their own sake but new perspectives for a new and changeful era. Elias recognises that this cultural innovation is a long haul, one which, in a way, has hardly begun.

Not that Elias is blind to social change. On the contrary. For on a third plane he shows his attachment to the classical writers by praising their concern with “structured social change” (another cliché which Elias finds unavoidable) in the course of social development. What patterns of human activity are structured—how far they are patterns of conflict or of cooperation and in what mix—is, as he recognises, a key sociological problem; and he is right to say that there are too

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few studies of "the structural properties of social development." Perhaps this is because there are more difficulties to the notion of social development than he allows for. "Modernisation" studies, for example, do not in Elias' book get the attention<sup>4</sup> (largely unfavourable) that they merit—though their failures would confirm some of his judgments.

**P**AUL HALMOS was another scholar who fled from European tyrannies and made his home in England. He did not live to see the publication of *The Personal and the Political*,<sup>5</sup> but in this book he has left a testament that combines wide-ranging analysis with a sustained moral urgency. Trends within social work education may not, *prima facie*, seem the most exciting of topics—but Professor Halmos' account of those trends is informed by a deep sensitivity to wider currents of social thought. He offers a counterpoint on the contrasts and linkages between the "per-

sonalist" and the "political" approaches to individual and social "problems." In an earlier work, *The Faith of the Counsellors* (1965), he had charted the postwar shift to such a "personal" approach and the intellectual rationales that were to influence the growing army of "personal service counsellors." Defective and inadequate as much advanced personalist thought was in the 1950s, it had (and has) the merit of stressing "the reductive working through of what is presented by the client and the establishment of a rapport comprising the core conditions of empathy, warmth and genuineness."

It is true, as Halmos often mordantly insists, that this approach developed in an age of real, if temporary, affluence and that it had links with the contentious theme of the end of ideology. But today, when ideology has resurfaced, its exponents with different degrees of crudeness and malevolence seek to impose a "radical" political stance. A new generation—out of tune with the morally sober political disillusion of the 1950s—has come into its inheritance. In arguments over community action, reverberating through training schools of social work, a radical political role is pushed into focus—not to work in tandem with the pursuit of casework, not simply to purge "individualised" casework of its grosser imperfections, but to create a new version of "agit-

<sup>4</sup> As they do, for example, in the excellent accounts by A. D. Smith in his *Social Change* (Longman's, 1977) and his earlier *The Concept of Social Change* (Routledge, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> *The Personal and the Political*. By PAUL HALMOS. Hutchinson, £5.95, paper £2.95.

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prop"—one which demands a fusion of the political and the service role in the fostering of a sustained hostility to capitalist and liberal institutions. When this ideology is allied to corporate union action in the proliferating public bureaucracies of our age, it becomes a force to be reckoned with, and Halmos' book is one of the most informed guides I know to these strains and tendencies.

Two of his concerns are of the profoundest moral and cultural importance. Firstly, concern with individual cases should not be displaced by political zeal—short-term alleviation of personal stress cannot await the arrival of a socialist, or any other, millennium. Those who are paid to do an urgent personalist job may be, if they desire, revolutionaries (or reactionaries) in their spare time; their political and their occupational roles may engender conflicting loyalties and challenges: but the roles *are* distinct and separate. Mass society—guided by huge self-seeking bureaucracies—can oppress, disturb, and debase the individual. It would be a supreme irony if through a mish-mash doctrine of social "liberation", the individual is told, in effect, to put up with his or her misfortunes until the new revolutionary hour has struck.

Secondly, those who preach such a doctrine

ignore the importance of the tension between opposites—not just that between the personal and the political, but between commitment and objectivity, between thought and action.

SOCIAL THOUGHT in the '40s and '50s may have been sterile and jejune. But there remained scope for debate about these tensions—and, indeed, from that debate (reinforced by actual political and social events) the radical challenge in time emerged. But it would be grotesque to flit from one objectionable sterility to another—through the dogmatic proclamation of an overriding political purpose and the suffusion of all roles by a taken-for-granted politics. This, among other things, is a disservice to serious sociology—which has always stressed the richness of polarities and the difficulty of transcending them by what Schumpeter once called "the glamour of fundamental truth." Of course, there were sociologists—not least Auguste Comte—who veered (and sometimes collapsed) into a "transcendent" position. But their internal dialogue and their dialogue (often posthumous) with the empiricists is itself a cultural phenomenon—and to suppress it would not be a service either to education or to society.

## "Tokenism"

### *Women as Social Animals—By DONALD MACRAE*

"TOKENISM" is, I think, the only word in the English political vocabulary to have come from West Africa. Certainly "tokenism" was on everyone's lips on the Gold Coast in the months before that state was metamorphosed into Ghana in the Spring of 1957. Both Nkrumah and Busia were accused of this crime and both were, covertly, praised for the realism embodied in it. As a sociologist I have been guilty of tokenism for a very long time. I would tell my students with gravity and conviction—both perfectly sincere—that our accounts of social phenomena were gravely lacking in that they excluded so much of humankind from consideration at all and excluded other categories of humanity from a more than partial appraisal.

Take social class, I would say, and you will find that most people are involved only sometimes in the business of stratification and then only with a high probability during certain periods of their lives. Infants, the sick, the mad, the aged may all

be affected by the class arrangements of a given society, but they are not class-conscious nor class-engaged to any great extent. Women, I would say, warming to my theme, are much less involved in class than we men, nor do they constitute a class as such. They are, because more free-floating, less class-identifiable, more upwardly socially mobile than men. Their participation in the labour market save in certain areas and trades is less close than that of men. Domesticity is in some ways a refuge from class. And so on. . . .

All good stuff, all true, but what followed was tokenism. We ought, I would say, lighting my (phallic?) cigar or taking another sip of water from my carafe beside the lectern, take such matters seriously in our studies and researches. I would then go and do something else.

NOW OUR STUDIES of society are transformed and my tokenism revealed. True I have tried to