

Dan Leahy's Book Outline:

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION
By C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, 1959

THE PROMISE

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men don't define their troubles in this way. They have a sense of being "trapped."

Sociological Imagination: a quality of mind that will help them to use information and develop reason that they need (5).

Sociological Imagination:

1. 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.
2. Within the welter (of daily experiences) the framework of modern society is sought and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated.
3. The personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.
4. The first lesson of SI is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period. (5)
5. Enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and promise (6).

Sociological Imagination

6. The capacity to shift from one perspective - from political to psychological, etc. (7)
7. The capacity of range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self (7)

8. Men can 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 (7)

Questions to arrive at Promise (6-7)

1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole?

Essential components; how do they relate; how does it differ from other social orders; meaning for its continuance or change?
2. Where does this society stand in human history?

Mechanics by which it is changing? Place within and meaning for humanity as a whole? How are aspects effected by the historical period in which it moves? And, this historical period? essential elements, differences?
3. What varieties of men and women prevail in this society and this period? What varieties are coming to prevail?

What kinds of "human nature" are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this period? What is the meaning of human nature in each feature of the society we are examining?

SI Works within Personal Troubles of the Milieu and Public issues of Social Structure.

Troubles:

occur within the character of the individual. A private matter: cherished values are felt to be threatened. Resolution properly lies within the individual as a biographical entitle.

Issues:

Matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and range of inner life. They have to do with the way the milieu is organized and overlaps with social structures. An issue is a public matter: values cherished by the public are threatened.

1. **Well-being:** cherish some values and do not feel any threat to them.

2. **Crisis:** Cherish some values, but do feel a threat to them.
3. **Indifference:** Not aware of any cherish values nor experience any threat.
4. **Uneasiness:** Unaware of any cherished values, but are still aware of a threat.

In the 1930s there was wide recognition of a "economic issue" - this was a political age. (12).

Dan's Thoughts

The analysts task to make clear the elements of (numbers 1-4)

The age of indifference and uneasiness with the help of SI's exploded into the 60s and challenged the social structure that was no longer working (three tier).

It is the replacement of this social structure that I am trying to analyze and show its policy implications.

What is our age today? An age of Crisis?

Sociological Imagination is replacing the older "cultural meaning of the physical sciences."

Science as the instrument of their conquest is in need of a reappraisal. It overcame religion as culture. (16) The effects of H bomb development. Science as a false and pretentious Messiah.

As social science searched for laws analogous to "physical sciences," it felt to literary critiques to be formulators of private troubles and public issues. (18)

My conception (of social science) stands opposed to social science as a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by methodological pretensions (ie Patton) which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues. (20)

Classic Social Analysis

A definable and usable set of traditions.

Essential feature is the concern with historical social structures; and that its problems are of direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles. (21)

Three Directions of Sociological Work (22-23)

1. Toward a theory of history. Historical uses of the past to construct a systematic explanation of stages.(Marx, Weber, etc)
2. Toward a systematic theory of 'the nature of man and society. Concern with static and abstract conceptions to classify all social relations at a very generalized level.(Talcott Parsons)
3. Toward empirical studies of contemporary social facts and problems. Miscellaneous studies of academic leftovers, eg cities, families, racial and ethnic relations. (Lazerfeld)

Now on to the study of some habitual distortions. (Chapters 2-6)

GRAND THEORY

Translations of Talcott Parsons by Mills

1. People often share standards and expect one another to stick to them. In so far as they do, their society may be orderly. (27)
2. Men act with and against one another. When men are guided by Standards and Sanctions they are playing roles. Institutions as a more or less stable set of roles. Institutions or anomie (when roles break down)
3. When people share the same values, they tend to behave in accordance with they way they expect one another to behave. (31)

4. Two ways of maintaining social equilibrium:

Socialization, all the ways a new born individual is made into a social person; and social control, ie ways of keeping people in line. He cites Weber for analysis of social controls (I should cite this in my talk on Education and NAFTA.)

Grand Theory is drunk on syntax (relation of words to words) and blind to semantics (what a word stands for)

1. ... when we define a word we are merely inviting others to use it as we would like it to be used;

2. that the purpose of definition is to focus argument upon fact;

3. the proper result of good definition is to transform arguments over terms into disagreements about fact and thus open arguments to further inquiry.

4. We must be aware of the hierarchy of specificity and be able to consider all levels.

For example, what do we mean by capitalism as we are going to use it?

a. The fact that all means of production are privately owned?

b. Do we want to include the idea of a free market as the determining mechanism of price, wages and profit?

c. Do we assume the term to imply assertions about the political order as well as economic institutions?

The absence of this type of systematic thinking is the keys to **fetishism of the Concept.** (!)

Power (40-41)

Power, as currently used in social science, has to do with the decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live and the events that make up the history of their period.

1. Governed by their own consent

2. By manipulation: power employed without the sanction of reason or the conscience of the obedient. (power wielded unbeknown to the powerless)

3. by coercion

In modern times, power is not so authoritative (power justified by beliefs of voluntarily obedient) as it may appear.

Mass persuasion is not needed or attempted; the fact is simply accomplished. (41) (eg Iraq War).

Intellectual "conviction" and moral "belief" are not necessary, in either the rulers or the ruled, for a structure of power to persist and even to flourish. (41)

People are neither radical nor reactionary. They are "inactionary." Greeks defined the altogether private man as an idiot. –

Dan's note: How often are we asked, implicitly, to "read out of the picture the facts of power and institutional structures;" to read out history, conflict.

What holds a social structure together? The "problem of order"

How do societies hang together? (A very good question for today; where does it go? from correspondence to coordination to:_____)

For example, the last century of American history shows a transition from a social structure largely integrated by correspondence (of autonomous, competing institutions) to one much more subject to coordination. (47)

Final Shot at Parsons:

Verbiage 50%

Well known Textbook Sociology 40%

Ideological Use 10%

ABSTRACTED EMPIRICISM

The basic source of its "data" is the more or less set interview with a series of individuals by a sampling procedure. Their answers are classified and coded for statistical analysis looking for relationships

1. Public Opinion is the subject matter of most work in this style.
Public gets defined as any sizable aggregate of the data collected.
2. Voting Behavior is the subject of most work on political life of this school.
(53)
Who voted how, but not why.
3. They have studied problems of abstracted empiricism; but only with the curiously self-imposed limitations of their arbitrary epistemology have they stated their questions and answers. (55)

As a field, not characterized by any substantive propositions or theories, but emphatic as to their claim of SCIENCE.

1. Their most cherished professional self-image is that of
natural scientist.
2. More concerned with the philosophy of science than the social study itself
(57)
3. Methodology (The Scientific Method) seems to determine the problems (to be studied)

Percy Bridgman - There is no scientific method as such, but the vital feature of the scientist's procedure has been merely to do his utmost with his mind, no holds barred. (58)

William S. Beck - The mechanics of discovery are not known.. I think that the creative process is so closely tied in with the emotional structure of an individual.. that... it is a poor subject for generalization.

Sociology becomes the midwife between the individual observer of social philosopher and organized, full fledged empirical science. The sociologist is the "science maker." (61) Lazarsfeld. (1955)

1. Shift from history of institutions and ideas to "concrete behavior of peoples.
2. Study a sector of humans affairs as it relates to other sectors (CW says relate is only statistical).
3. Study social situations that repeat themselves rather than happen only once. (elections require many people to engage in a similar act, again and again).
4. Emphasis on contemporary rather than historical. (CW says due to available statistics. This epistemology stands in contrast to the formulation of substantive problems as the orienting point of work. (62)

This conception of the sociologist well housed in research institutions, as science-maker, tool-maker and keeper of the interpretations, has several problems:

How do they explain the thinness of results?

1. The economics of truth - the costs of research - seem to conflict with the politics of truth - the use of research to clarify significant issues and to bring political controversy closer to realities.
2. When these studies are all "added up", there will be a full fledged social science.
3. Any style of empiricism involves a metaphysical choice - a choice as to what is most real - (67)

These studies are examples of "psychologism": attempt to explain social phenomena in terms of facts and theories about the make-up of individuals - based on explicit metaphysical denial of the reality of social structures.

This argument could be based on the fact that the fundamental source of information is a sample of individuals.

4. Those in the grip of methodological inhibition often refuse to say anything about modern society unless it has been through the fine little mill of "The Statistical Ritual."

It is usual to say that what they produce is true, even if unimportant...
More and more I wonder how true it is. (72).

The question of significance of study

1. If we have a sense of real problems, as they arise out of history, the question of truth significance tends to answer itself: we should work on such problems as carefully and as exactly as we can.

2. Important work, usually, is carefully elaborated hypotheses, documented at key points by more detailed information (72)

Conclusion:

As practices (Grand theory and abstracted empiricism), they may be understood as insuring that we do not learn too much about man and society - the first by formal and cloudy obscurantism, the second by formal and empty ingenuity. (75)

TYPES OF PRACTICALITY

... we must make up our minds about a great many political values as well as intellectual issues.... for we cannot very well state any problem until we know whose problem it is. (77).

In the meantime, to cry for 'the constructive program' and 'the hopeful note' is often a sign of an incapacity to face facts as they are even when they are decidedly unpleasant - and it is irrelevant to truth or falsity and to judgements of proper work in social science. (78)

The art of teaching is in considerable part the art of thinking out loud but intelligibly.... The teacher ought, then, it seems to me, to make very explicit the assumptions, facts, methods, the judgements. (79)

Images and ideas produced by social scientists may or may not be consistent with society's images leading to implications:

1. By justifying the arrangement of power and ascendancy of the powerful, images and ideas transforms power into authority.
2. By criticizing or debunking prevailing arrangements and rulers, they strip them of authority.
3. By distracting attention from issues of power and authority, they distract attention from the structural realities of the society itself. (80)

Liberalism has been the political common denominator of virtually all social study as well as the source of virtually all public rhetoric and ideology (85)

1. tended to take up one empirical detail, one problem of milieu,.... scatter their attention ... assumed all facts are created equal assumed pluralistic causes ... for piecemeal reform. - liberal practicality.

2. In viewing everything as a continuous process sudden changes of pace and revolutionary dislocations - so characteristic of our time - are missed, or, if not missed, merely taken as signs of the pathological, the maladjusted. (86).

TYPES OF PRACTICALITY

The older practicality has shifted to a newer one as liberalism has shifted from reform to administration in a welfare state.

The meaning of practical has shifted: that which is thought to serve the purposes, of these great institutions is held to be practical (92)

To make the worker happy, efficient and cooperative we need only make the managers intelligent, rational and knowledgeable. (93) -- (psychologizing of problems of industrial relations)

Comments about why academia goes along. No political education and or engagement, etc.

Thus it would be naive, as well as inappropriate, to suggest that anyone was 'selling out' for surely that harsh phrase may properly be used only when there is something to be sold. (!!) (99)

THE BUREAUCRATIC ETHOS

For the technique of abstracted empiricism and its bureaucratic use are now regularly joined. ... so joined, they are resulting in the development of a bureaucratic social science. (101)

1. It is not true at all true that only as 'general principles' are discovered can social science offer 'sound practical guidance.' (Lazarsfeld)

Often the administrator needs to know certain detailed facts and relations and that is all he needs or wants to know. (Abstract empiricists are quite willing to abdicate choice of problems). (102)

2. (AE) requires research institutes and funds.

3. Does not address the "public", but rather "client."

4. Research institutes made up of two types: intellectual administrators and promoter and research technicians.

The social worlds about which so many scholars feel ignorant do not puzzle them. (105) Intelligence itself it often disassociated from personality. (106)

5. What is at issue seems plain: if social science is not autonomous, it cannot be a publicly responsible enterprise. (106).

Cliques. The acquisition of the "means of competence," not necessarily personal competence.

"The purpose of social science is the prediction and control of human behavior." (113)

(Robert Lynd): It is a significant measure of the impotence of liberal democracy that it must increasingly use its social sciences not directly on democracy's own problems, but tangentially and indirectly. (115). (1949) - The Science of Inhuman Relations.

THE PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE

The problem of empirical verification is "how to get down to facts" yet not get overwhelmed by them; how to anchor ideas to facts but not to sink the ideas. The problem is first what to verify and second how to verify it. (125)

1. General Theory is not concerned about either.
2. AE does not take the issue of what to verify seriously. Only how.
3. In classic practice, what to verify perhaps has more importance. Ideas are elaborated in close connection to some set of substantive problems.

It is the problem of evidence. Of course it is true that we are never certain. In fact, that we are often guessing.

Verification consists of rationally convincing others as well as ourselves. (126) Work needs to be presented in such a way that it is open to be checked by others. Attention to detail, a habit of being careful, a tireless curiosity about possible meanings, their bearings on facts and notions. (Look at this paragraph for "method." ---)

1. Classic social science builds up and deduces down. To practice such a policy - **is to take up substantive problems on the historical level of reality.** (128)

(What if I asked my seminar to make up a list of these?)

2. Method and theory is properly carried on in close and continuous relation with substantive problems.

3. Objectivity requires:

- a. Continuous attempt to become explicitly aware of all that is involved in the project.

- b. Wide and critical interchange of such attempts.

THE HUMAN VARIETY

Social science is properly about the human variety:

1. All the social worlds in which men have lived, are living and might live.
(132)
2. The human variety also includes the variety of individual human beings.

Is it possible to understand the human variety in an orderly way?

To come to an orderly understanding of men and societies requires a set of viewpoints that are simple enough to make understanding possible, yet comprehensive enough to permit us to include in our views the range and dept of human variety.

To study these problems, to realize human variety, requires:

1. Our work be continuously and closely related to the level of historical reality...
2. A fully comparative understanding of social structures as they have appeared and do now exist in the world
3. Smaller scale milieux be selected and studied in terms of larger-scale historical structures.

Social structures refers to the combination of institutions classified according to the functions each performs (134)

THE HUMAN VARIETY

THE NATION STATE (135) -- use this in my talk!

In our period, social structures are usually organized under a political state.

In terms of power, and in many other interesting terms, the most inclusive unit of social structure is the nation-state.

The nation state is now the dominating form in world history and, as such, a major fact in the life of every man.

Within the nation-state, the political and military, cultural and economic means of decision and power are now organized; all institutions and specific milieux in which most men live their public and private lives are now organized into one or the other of the nation states.

(My point is that we now need to choose not a "national social structure" as our generic working unit, but a continental one, because issues of public concern are not necessarily organized between and within the nation state. (135) -- The nation state is not the new coordination --trade is not between nations, but within transnational corporations.

USES OF HISTORY

Every well considered social study requires an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials. This simple notion is the major idea for which I am arguing (145)

An attempt to write the present as history (Sweezy). Reasons for intimate relation of sociology and history:

1. In our very statement of what-is-to-be-explained, we need the fuller range provided by knowledge of history. Otherwise we are trying to study birth without motherhood. (147)
2. A-historical studies usually tend to be static or very short term studies of limited milieux. (149)
3. We need comparisons with other societies to understand our own.
4. The study of trends, its relevance to a period, demands full and adroit use of the materials of history.

Discussion of historical specificity (Marx); psychology and history, etc.

ON REASON AND FREEDOM

The climax of the social scientist's concern with history is the idea he comes to hold of the epoch in which he lives.

The climax of his concern with biography is the idea he comes to hold of man's basic nature and of the limits it may set to the transformation of many by the course of history. (165)

1. Mills thinks we are at an end of an epoch. post "Modern Age."
2. Liberalism and socialism have virtually collapsed as adequate explanations of the world and ourselves. (166)
 - a. Rationality is the prime condition of freedom, liberating notion of progress by reason, faith in science, demand for popular education and faith in political meaning of democracy.
 - b. Inherent relation of reason and freedom. To be free the person must become more rationally aware (Freud); Marx's "class conscious" is also rationality.
 - c. Marxism bureaucratic defense and abuse and liberalism a trivial and irrelevant way of masking social reality. (167)

3. The ideological mark of the Fourth Epoch is that the ideas of freedom and reason have become moot; that increased rationality may not be assumed to make for increased freedom. (167)

Great bureaucracies have produced the man who is "with rationality, but without reason." This rationality is not commensurate with freedom, but the destroyer of it. (170)

4. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them and then the opportunity to choose.

The social task of reason is to formulate choices, enlarge the scope of human decisions.

ON INTELLECTUAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

How I go about my craft.

1. They do not split their work from the lives. They use each to enrich the other. Scholarship is a choice of how to live, as well as a choice of career. (196)

2. Use your life experience in your intellectual work. Use it to examine and interpret it. Enrich each.

3. You must set up a file, a journal? This helps in your systematic reflection. (GET MY JOURNAL). What you are doing intellectually and what you are doing as a person.

4. This file develops self-reflective habits and keeps your inner world awake. (197)

5. Periodically review "the state of my problems and plans."

6. Taking Notes. To grasp the structure of the writer's argument or use the idea for the realization of your own projects.

7. The maintenance of such a file is intellectual production. (201)

8. Empirical inquiry after books. Its purpose is to settle disagreements and doubts about facts. Facts discipline reason, but reason is the advance guard in any field of learning. (205)

9. You don't really have to study a topic you are working on; for once you are into it it is everywhere (211)

10. Stimulate your SI by rearranging your files; make up charts and cross classifications. Look at your range and relationships.

11. Get a comparative grip on the materials. (215)

12. The distinction between theme and topic. A theme is an idea, usually of some signal trend, some master conception or key distinction. A topic is a subject area.

(Vera Michales Dean called mere a journalist!) (218)

13. To write is to claim for the attention of readers and to claim for oneself status to be read. (1) how difficult and complex after all is my subject matter? (2) When I write, what status am I claiming for myself? (3) For whom am I trying to write?

14. Summary of precepts and cautions:

1. Be a Good craftsmen.

2. The simplicity of a clear statement.

3. Make up transhistorical constructions - define reality

4. Study structures within which milieux are organized.

5. Aim is fully comparative understanding.

6. Keep open to your notion of human nature and your notion of how history is made.

7. Understand others a historical and social actors

8. Do not allow public issues as they are officially formulated or troubles as they are privately felt, to determine the problems that you take up for study.