
Jane C. Canning
SAU #60,
Charlestown, New Hampshire

In Sociology for People, de-humanized versions of sociology and the interests served by bureaucratic, technical, management-oriented managerial social scientists are contrasted with that of critical emancipatory sociology. Lee states that his purpose in writing this book was the promotion of a brand of sociology that he terms "existential humanist." These philosophical roots serve to nourish a vision of sociology that takes human concerns as its central focus.

All too often, attempts to infuse sociological thought and practice with philosophical considerations desert the realm of scientific practice in order to ponder metaphysical and epistemological questions that engender debates on issues of ultimate knowledge and meaning. Lee does not abandon sociological discourse nor intelligibility in his attempt to develop an existential humanist framework for sociology. Drawing on classical and contemporary traditions, he offers a prescription for a discipline that he views as increasingly irrelevant, acquiescent, and of little use to people. In this book an attempt is made to restore to the sociological enterprise a dimension of scientific responsibility, curiosity, and vitality that ultimately brings sociology to its vocational mission—that of serving people. It is in this vein that Lee presents a view of sociologists as "consciousness raisers" (41) who "stimulate participation in constructive social actions" (43).

How does one arrange this marriage of existential humanism and sociology? Lee suggests that as a scientific endeavor, sociological knowledge serves to increase "human understanding of the human lot." While the social sciences can clearly serve both humanist and scientific values, it is the humanist social scientist who is self-committed to do so (16). Humanist sociology continues to struggle with forces within the discipline that seek to reduce sociology to scientific research and guarantees of professional respectability. The price of this respectability is the avoidance of consideration of human needs. Lee is sharply critical of what he calls "ASA insiders" and cites his own experience as an
officer of that organization. He characterizes the association's efforts in the area of professional ethics as "propaganda ventures" that "protect the tenured against the untenured" and "do little to give security to the controversial innovator" (30). Despite its outsider status, humanist sociology has continued to grow and attract a new generation of sociologists who embrace the challenge of a sociology committed to democratic social change and human liberation.

It is this emancipatory function that is problematic from an ethical perspective. Perhaps the uses of sociology that are discussed at length in this book are ethically bound to the question: sociology for whom? (Answer: people.) A sociology that espouses liberation and an emancipatory mission echoes this concern. Sociology that is liberating for some may for others be precisely a sociology from which liberation is sought. Sociological knowledge can serve to legitimate a given social order just as effectively as to delegitimate it. Lee fails to raise the potentially troubling questions of whether humanism itself, in its existential or conservative modes, functions as an ideology.

In the first three chapters, Lee explores the relationship between existential humanism and the sociological enterprise by examining the work of sociologists who use a sociology committed to facilitating nonviolent social change and personal growth. This brand of sociology reaffirms the essential debunking task of "stripping the disguises from social controls and manipulations and trying to understand how they work" (42). The works of Danilo Dolci, Holly B. Porter and Irving Goldaber, and Thomas J. Rice illustrate the diversity of sociological action that can effect social change. Their applications of sociological knowledge in concrete situations highlight some of the possibilities for applied sociology in a variety of community settings. In their efforts, Lee finds reason for optimism regarding the possibilities for meaningful sociological practice. In subsequent chapters Lee expands his discussion to include some directions sociology should explore in order to perform its critical and emancipatory mission.

Chapters 4 and 5 are centered on the role of ideologies in the social arena. The active role that ideologies play in social struggles is discussed in terms of different types of social conflict situations. Lee appears to subscribe to the notion of ideology as symbolic distortions that are used to legitimate social interests, and he defines propaganda as "ideology on the march." He then develops a typology of ideologies based on stage of development, groups to which they are related, and their social roles. These in turn are elaborated in terms of sub-sets that specify the "characteristics of ideologies relative to their social purposes and roles and their degree of establishment or non-conformity" (65). Examples include the ideologies of class, ethnicity, occupation, gender, and age which are used to perpetuate inequality, exploitation and aggression.

In Lee's view, ideologies are alive and well and their unmasking is an important task for the critical social scientist. The critical sociologist has a responsibility to adhere to a single, rather than a double, standard of truth when analyzing
what passes for social truth. The engaged social scientist must commit to the
facts, socially constructed or otherwise, and not cravenly act as an apologist for
any given regime or social order. Our often unpleasant job is to unmask the
hidden-unapparent relations of power, exploitation, and human rights violations
that exist no matter how congenial a particular established or aspiring order may
be. It is the analysis of the potential for nonviolent change that may be the social
scientist's primary undertaking in any conflict situation.

In chapter 6 Lee addresses the issue of ideologies among sociologists. Lee
asserts that not only are sociologists not exempt from ideological practices, but
that the different professional postures adopted by sociologists actually compro-
mise independent creative inquiry. Four focal points influence the relationship
of ideological to intellectual autonomy. First, there is the task of scientific
questioning versus that of technical problem solving. The second point is the
market which is the field of application of sociological knowledge. Third, the
profession acts to define, control, and authorize what is acceptable practice.
The last focal point is the institutional setting as viewed by promoters of the
managerial-bureaucratic paradigm. They are represented by Parsonian system
theorists. In particular, Lee views this type of sociology as appealing to the
need for an appearance of theoretical sophistication while at the same time
serving the interests of those who manage social hierarchies. These aspects of
sociological identity are then linked to a discussion of problems posed by social
values, political-economic ethos and pressures, goals, and communications. It
is in this context that he raises a central question. For what or from whom does
the sociologist work? The answer provided is the "sponsor." Lee chooses to
distinguish between those sociologists who "are committed to the contribution
to human welfare through the liberating influence of more accurate social
knowledge," and those who "merely use the discipline to pursue their own
selfish goals" (16). I would add the possibility that for others it may be the
pursuit of one's own "selfish" curiosity regarding the nature of social reality.

Lee concludes that what is needed to remedy this state of affairs is "greater
mutual understanding, tolerance, and recognition among the adherents of these
diverse value orientations—the (1) entrepreneurial, (2) bureaucratic, (3)
technical, (4) innovative" (119). For Lee, all of these orientations are
thought to be compatible with a humanist existentialist orientation (19).

Lee argues that the social location of sociology and individual sociologists
may distort perception and therefore self knowledge. He isolates a number of
professional distortions: orthodoxy, legitimacy, elitism, social contractism and
utopianism, symptomism, and pedantry. According to Lee, these distortions
glorify elites or utopias, legitimate the status quo, promise sweeping social
change, and lead to a preoccupation with symptoms rather than causes. Finally,
Lee looks at propaganda and the tactics employed by social actionists to achieve
their ends. The use of propaganda in any context relies on the tactics described,
but raises the questions of whether the tactics themselves necessarily imply distortion and if it is possible that these proven tactics can be used for effecting positive social change? The spin doctor tactics outlined can be used by a candidate, a campaign to support the ERA, or one to prevent the spread of AIDS. In short, the tactics have no ideological ownership. On the other hand, manipulation may be a question of perception, and social truth may be less than absolute. If the propaganda employed by the Contras seeking U.S. support is compared to that of the Sandinista regime who must expand and stabilize their power base, we should expect to find many similarities.

The distortions of social thinking discussed in chapter 9 are more or less familiar: sexism, tribalism, classism, and intentionism are classified as prevailing ideologies. To these are added life events, fads and fashions, and the personality types each discipline attracts. These underline the point that social scientists and their respective disciplines are influenced by social forces themselves. This theme—sociologists as products of their social biographies—continues in the closing chapters. The divergence in social identities within the profession has led to a variety of roles sociologists can play. Ultimately, in Lee's view, all are potentially liberating and can serve people, especially the non-elites. The liberating, emancipatory sociology that Lee envisions may not be achievable. That may not be necessarily a bad thing. The ambitions of a liberation humanist sociologist are as subject to the same distortions Lee takes such pains to point out: for aren't there many humanisms?

In the closing sections Lee offers a recipe for sociological practice and some reflections on the transformative and liberating potential of sociology. The question, "Sociology for Whom?" is answered in part by stating sociology for what? If sociology's purpose is service, it cannot be realized through a diminution of the discipline's scientific contributions to human knowledge. The idea of serving people is not a radical one, but it does require that the profession actively develop an identity that the people who are to be served can recognize as being useful. It must also be a service that people are willing to pay for.

Lee's book is a plea to those who practice or contemplate the practice of sociology to be open to innovation. If sociology is to become a caring profession it must confront a number of serious and complex questions, not the least of which is the accepted or acceptable—as opposed to respectable—domain for sociologists as professionals, scientists, and citizens to explore. Sociology for People is optimistic, but urgently so. It proposes a mission and contributes to the continuing debate on "Sociology for Whom? A sociology of, by, and for the people may dismay practitioners who covet their professional prerogatives and cherished identities as "experts" on "society." Others may find the approach espoused here an important validation for a brand of sociology that embraces humane values, ethical practice and a perspective that facilitates non-violent social change.