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Frontiers in Sociological Practice

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It is an honor and a pleasure to be invited to conclude your traversal of frontiers in sociological practice. First let me compliment you for not inflating its theme by calling it new frontiers. We have plenty of old frontiers where civilization is not yet secure.

I have just come back from Florence where the Renaissance began. It is humbling for anyone of our time and place to observe the relics of an age that generated such a fountain of artistic wealth, derived from a torrent of economic productivity that mobilized talents to their limits, to step across the tombs of Galileo and Michelangelo and Machiavelli, and to realize how rare have been such surges of creativity during the five centuries since.

It was even more humbling to read on the way home of the civilization created by the Egyptians not five centuries but five millennia ago—replete with not only pyramids and statuary that rival the masonry of the Florentines but their advances in irrigation, agriculture, engineering, astronomy, writing and the arts of jewelry and fashion clothing. Relative to our resources, have we in the West as much to be proud of? Some important things have been accomplished, like modern medicine, but the resurgence of tuberculosis and malaria and emergence of new plagues like AIDS show how precariously we hold our ground. We shudder over the horrors of slavery and the torture of heretics in the past but which century can match ours in the multiplication of agony? And what have the last 500 years done for—or to—the Mexicans or the Haitians—or the Egyptians?

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Imminence of the next century is evoking speculation about what it will bring forth, in sociology as in other fields. Again, let me compliment you for dwelling on the near future. Development can only proceed from where one is, using the materials at hand. Every step follows from the one before, yet to move onward novel elements continually emerge from human imagination and effort. Let us therefore peer closely at what will occupy sociology during the rest of this century.

I need not remind you that academic sociology is on the defensive if not in decline, whether gauged by student enrollments, university budgets or faculty rosters. The narcissistic image of the career that proceeds from undergraduate major to attainment of the Ph.D. to tenured professorship began to implode a full generation ago, although the major graduate schools are still bent on reproducing their kind. Meanwhile more and more youngsters, attracted to sociology by glimpses of its promise, have turned toward careers in professional practice, exploring the frontiers out there beyond their teachers' ken. The size and diversity of this gathering, the organization of other bodies like it, that gain in resources and morale as they become acquainted and compare experiences, are evidence enough to assure further development of practice.

One development has already occurred, although its significance has not been fully appreciated: Recognition that sociological practice or applied sociology can no longer be intelligently construed as a mere specialty within academic sociology, one of four hundred sessions to be allotted hotel space at annual meetings. As sociology comes to be practiced as a profession outside academia, the moment is at hand for it to be recognized and organized to embrace the entire spectrum—and indeed much that academic sociology does not yet delve into.

You may find an historical analogy to the Reformation illuminating. Dissenters from the rule of the Roman hierarchy arose independently in many places—Waldensians, Hussites, Anabaptists, Calvinists, Huguenots. At first they were less conscious of each other than the Papacy was. It tried to head them off—by cooptation of leaders, by denial of respect and office, ultimately by violent suppression. Proliferating sects wasted support and slowed movement by disputing denominational doctrines but the Reformation triumphed, helped along by the invention of the printing press and dissemination of bibles; by reciprocal effects of the rise of science, republicanism and capitalism, and by opportunities discovered in the new world abroad. Analogies mislead if taken literally but suggest lines of inquiry. Three or four major graduate schools, for example, long exercised a papal kind of hegemony over

sociology, although, like the rivalry between Avignon and Rome, one pope sometimes vied with another. The reformation of sociology—or regeneration, as some of your leaders now term it as they reach across from the ASA Practice Section to the Society for Applied Sociology—has sprung up especially in many state universities. It is a grass roots movement, not led by the inner circle of the establishment.

It is not presumptuous to imagine that practicing professionals will soon take over leadership from the academics. American sociology may well be said to have been founded by Lester Ward, the first ASA president. While employed most of his life by the federal government as a paleobotanist, he had, working prodigiously on his own, before the turn of the century published his fundamental statement, Dynamic Sociology, followed by a formulation of social psychology, several lesser works and articles in the new American Journal begun by Albion Small at Chicago. Reviewing Dynamic Sociology, Small asserted that he would rather have written it than any other book published in America. Ward's culminating work was Applied Sociology in 1907. In it he dealt with some issues of his era but laid down some principles that are timeless. It still lends conviction to anyone engaged in practice.

Ward was a notable scientist of natural evolution. It is as timely now as then to absorb his denunciation of sociologists like Spencer and Sumner and the economists who fabricated the ideology of Social Darwinism to justify the ravages of the Robber Barons. As a theorist he drew a sharp line between those capacities of *Homo sapiens* common to all members of the species and those patterns of behavior learned after birth by partaking of the accumulated cultures of mankind. No objective motivated him as keenly as equal access by all to that heritage. He saw it as the source of command over nature and thus of wealth and power. His indictment of denial of opportunity to women, ethnic minorities and children of the poor was reinforced by eye-opening calculations of how much is thereby lost to society as a whole. He had no patience for those who defend inequality by claiming it to be natural or inevitable or divinely ordained. He described all social arrangements, nations and corporations, classes and creeds—as artificial, man-made, therefore open to continual evaluation and adaptation to the welfare of the living.

While versed in all social sciences, he was most critical of economics and its dogma of the economy as an automatically self-correcting mechanism that produces ideal results left unattended. He devoted much time to lecturing laymen on the evils of *laissez-faire*, the ideology wielded as the weapon of those bent on aggravating inequality. How dismayed

he would be to find this nation, for which he fought and nearly died, currently suffering the gravest maldistribution of income of all rich nations, and worsening. Yet he was no proponent of state ownership of industry or political revolution. He thought consistently in terms of dynamics, what we nowadays call development, not drift or aimless change but intelligent revision of current practice.

It may strike some academics as audacious for Ward to uphold sociology as the queen of the social sciences. If you studied the history of sociology before the Parsonian papacy, however, you know that its founders in France and England had long before nominated it to that office. Its scope has already been intimated by referring to the range of institutions that now employ sociologists. If we now scan them one by one as the frontiers of professional practice, we note that the other social sciences roughly correlate, economics with industry, political science with government, psychology with education, anthropology with the arts and the beliefs of which ethnic identity is constituted.

We ought perhaps to start with the family, from which historically and prehistorically all other institutions were split off by delegation of functions, and which other social sciences seem happy to leave to sociology. I shall come back to the family but think it makes sense to start with medicine. It is the classic model for professional practice and an institution where sociology has won encouraging acceptance. Now absorbing close to a seventh of our gross domestic product, medicine is one of our fastest growing industries. By contrast, the goods-producing industries, each dominant for a period, are drastically shrinking as sources of employment, with repercussions only dimly grasped by the public, hence demanding the comprehensive, contextual awareness of sociology. After industry we scan education, which comprises not only schools but the media and other agencies like libraries and laboratories dispensing old knowledge and gathering new. Counseling and consulting may belong here too, although in traditional societies religious institutions largely performed those functions. After them, out of conventional order but no less prominent as employer of sociologists, government. And finally, combining them to keep the number manageable, the proliferating variety of recreational institutions, including entertainment and the arts. After circling this panorama we conclude by commending the sociologists who serve these diverse clients for their progress in synthesizing, through meetings like this, those principles common to their practice in all.

Medicine piquantly illustrates how the concept of development helps to connect what follows. Especially under the influence of the spread-

ing HMO's, we observe not only the shift from the old fee system of payment for services but in the content of the services, from treatment to prevention of illness and positive pursuit of fitness through diet, exercise, sanitation and environmental protection. These cause one to lift an eyebrow over promotion of the therapeutic stance among sociologists. The rearrangements of social relations forced by aging of our population, growth of sedentary occupations, inequality of access to services, and conflict over financing, not to mention the changing incidence of illness and injury, all call for further applications of sociology. Whoever designs these rearrangements is practicing sociology, whatever title he goes by. Physicians present a relevant model by referring clients to specialists who have acquired knowledge, skill and insight beyond those that accrue without specialization.

The practice of medicine, however, like the practice of sociology, cannot be conducted entirely by state-certified professionals. In recent decades we have come to appreciate the contributions to physical and mental health made by support groups enlisting fellow-sufferers—from addictions to disabilities to grief, from psychosis to marital strife to gambling. Another frontier now opening is alternative medicine, each kind of which challenges some premise of the orthodox paradigm that reduces the human organism to a physical, chemical and biological mechanism and transforms many physicians' offices, hospitals and clinics into factory-type assembly lines with pill or surgery specified by computer for each ailment. Investigation of these conflicting premises challenges the methods of both medical and sociological research. And other territories to be explored stretch beyond present imagination.

For too long the study of economic institutions has been left to economists who reduce them to a hydraulic mechanism of flows of money that circulate as if untouched by human hands. I spent more than a dozen years of my life practicing sociology within a huge corporation. I was never granted the title of sociologist, although some economists there, while confined to forecasting, were termed economists. Had they been hired to analyze the structure of the corporation and recommend adaptations better to serve its constituents, that would have been to practice sociology, but reorganization was left to lawyers and accountants, neither of whom qualify as social scientists. Business firms present an immense vista for applied sociologists to encompass. Insofar as corporate managers consult social scientists, apart from forecasting it has usually been with regard to marketing and personnel management. Too often they have been confined to enhancing sales or eliciting effort from em-

ployees, too rarely asked to recommend directions for investment or to amend the constitutions of corporate government. Managers are too concentrated on their upward movement in the bureaucracy and on maximizing return to absentee investors to appreciate long-term implications of the policies they pursue, even in marketing and personnel. Yet the consequences calculable from the trajectories displayed by their day-to-day decision-making are inescapable, far more predictable and far more fateful than the daily fluctuations which preoccupy them.

Sociologists employed by corporations do themselves the most good if from the outset they can define themselves as professionals worthy of as much respect as lawyers or accountants. To acquiesce to subordination within bureaucracies that strangle the capacities of industry to produce plenty and end poverty in the world is to act as accomplices. It is impossible seriously to contemplate the urgent expansion and upgrading of employment without restructuring corporate government, a task in addressing which political scientists have been as delinquent as economists. It is impossible seriously to contemplate expanding and upgrading demand for output sufficient to employ the labor force extruded from the extractive and fabricative industries without cultivating new tastes as assiduously as seeking new knowledge. A few economists have finally perceived that the potential for unlimited economic growth lies not in adding plant and equipment to industry but by cultivating the talents of producers—investment in human capital, as they put it. Abiding by their older premises, however, they concede that such investment will come only sparsely if at all from private firms, the "fiduciary responsibility" of whose directors is to invest in nothing that will confer benefits on competitors, on employees who change employers, or on future generations, benefits current owners cannot capture. On the scale of societal architecture, who beside applied sociologists is concerned or equipped to display to public view the worsening stratification of our society that divides it and defeats its ideals of freedom and equality? The consequences keep ramifying. Social work and clinical psychology now find as many clients among the so-called middle class as among the poor. Disemployment—though still disguised or concealed by many—has even invaded "middle management."

That trend nicely illustrates the responsibility sociology has to resist the polarization of practice between micro and macro approaches, as gratuitous as that between qualitative and quantitative. Over the years I have known many persons who, when dismissed from a job, wondered what was wrong with them, considered themselves failures, burdened

or abused others around them, some turning to psychotherapy. A person in misery deserves solace and support from friends but to treat disemployment as only an emotional problem of the suffering individual raises ethical and theoretical problems which sociologists should be first to perceive. What a disemployed person most needs is not psychotherapy but a job! The same applies to the underemployed person who hates his work. But he or she—indeed all of us—need much more than that. Every person needs the opportunity and the means to produce something that the rest of the world wants. It is from satisfying reciprocal relations with others that one derives the sense of worth and self-esteem and those other sources of confidence and creativity that are not provided simply by treating him as a patient seeking remedy for an internal ill. This is not the time or place to pursue it further, but high on the agenda for sociological practice belongs some constructive controversy over the psychotherapeutic stance as a model.

Psychology makes at best an ambiguous claim to being a social science. Much of its content is a branch of biology. Its strongest claim is based on its study of learning. But even that is compromised by those psychologists who construe learning as limited by inherited degrees of intelligence. Its explanation of kinds of behavior by attributing them to traits—tendencies toward those kind of behavior resident in the individual—is tautological. Its approach to personality as private possession or ineluctable fate conflicts with the basic premise of sociology that we are all products of our relations with others, which must change if we are to change. Too much of social psychology is preoccupied with trying to bridge the gulf between micro and macro, when by definition personal identity refers to how one is designated—by self or others—in relation to those on whom he or she depends. Yet despite these misgivings I visualize a boundless frontier for the application in educational institutions of "sociological social psychology" to the identification of nascent tastes and talents among persons at all ages, and to discernment of optimal conditions for cultivating their development.

Such an approach to education harks back to etymology of the term, which originally meant to draw forth. Drawing forth collides with the vulgar notion of education as only transmission and memorization of information. An ominous implication of that popular premise is that teachers will soon be replaced by computers and multimedia data banks. Beleaguered educational institutions need sociological practitioners. While I deplore the current irrelevance of much academic sociology, this not the moment for universities to throw sociology out, as some

threaten, but to invite applied sociologists in. Neither should applied sociologists spurn their *alma maters* but take them as clients to whom they owe conscientious service.

Out of conventional order, let us come back briefly to government. To no institution has sociology been applied more anciently, certainly as far back as Plato's Republic or Aristotle's Poetics. Some say modern sociology began not with Comte but with Montesquieu and The Spirit of the Laws, which first laid out the separation of powers embodied in most current constitutions. At the moment, however, despite all the agitation over what should be in public hands and what in private, I see the political frontier most in need of exploration by sociologists to be that of industrial self-government—i.e., employee ownership of private corporations, taking them out of the control of absentee investors who want them managed exclusively to render them maximum return. With the collapse of communism, that grand developmental alternative to capitalist and socialist models now beckons ahead. It sets before you an intellectual feast that will engross the lifetime of the youngest here so is hardly to be swallowed in one gulp.

Let me therefore switch to a dish that is more familiar and easier to put your tongue around, evaluation of governmental programs. That was where I got started 55 years ago and have done intermittently ever since. Many in this audience have been likewise so employed. I deplore the cutbacks being made by politicians in funds for that purpose, irrational if their aim is to assure that taxes are well spent. I also deplore the notion that government should freely award grants to academics to pursue projects of no discernible value to anyone except themselves. But I have a bone to pick with practitioners who in designing evaluations erect arbitrary criteria *post factum* for the success of programs rather than insisting that the only legitimate criteria are those built into each program from its beginning. Alas, I do not know any academic sociologist writing about organization theory or any applied sociologist consulting on organization development who designs schemes for built-in evaluation that feed back to personnel and clientele regular indices of how well or poorly they realize their intentions under varying circumstances. Now and again someone mentions that "the Hawthorne effect" could perhaps be put to systematic use but so far, as the epithet goes, the evidence is anecdotal. Nonetheless, if there is any magic to be performed by means of sociology, I think it will be devised by exploring and experimenting with the reflexive effects upon the quality of collaboration of displaying to the actors how they are doing, as they are doing it.

A century ago Lester Ward proposed that legislatures employ sociologists rather than lawyers to design, evaluate and redesign their regulations. His idea was not absurdly visionary, because in effect that is what happens anyway, but with massive waste and damage, inexcusable delay, mutual injury, pain and grief. If the purpose of social science, as Harry Stack Sullivan said of psychiatry, is to facilitate living, then evaluation is an opportunity we have already held in our hands and should not let slip away.

Two more institutions to go, recreation and the family. Some fascinating questions invite sociologists in the direction of play and the arts, questions that the academics have strangely neglected, like the distinction between unemployment and leisure, work and play, or the ambiguities of art and play performed for pay, as in sports. The decrease of the workweek among those employed, along with increased incomes, has elevated entertainment, including tourism, to one of our largest and fastest-growing industries, and with it employment of sociologists in audience research, management consulting, urban planning and career counseling. From practice in these fields one derives insights into matters like the sources of joy in work, absence of which accounts for much resort to inane entertainment. As a dabbler myself in the management of music concerts, I have been fascinated by the power of the right kind of audience to evoke superior performance from artists. By involvement here sociologists gain opportunities to illuminate pressing issues like public support for the arts *versus* their domination by advertisers who exploit violence and sex to gain attention for their wares. These issues grow in salience when small nations come to depend on tourism or communities resist obliteration of their character by commercial chains. Apart from politics, play and the arts teem with internal issues, like amateurism *versus* professionalism, elitism *versus* pluralism, fashion *versus* tradition, artistry *versus* technique. Here again sociological practice can step forth not only as renovator of academic sociology but of the role of the entire university as critic and counselor to communities at large.

And now to the family. Its centrality to sociology goes back as far as Leplay's original studies of family budgets. To this moment family budgets remain the vehicles by which the offerings of the other institutions and industries are allocated and integrated within the lives of consumers. Consumer behavior does not consist only of purchases of goods; it distributes household income and time among work and play, saving and borrowing, giving and investing. Profit-making firms, non-profit associations and governments all compete for the favor of families. When

I left academia for marketing research, I learned much from my new colleagues but I believe they found I had something to teach them.

Applications of sociology to marketing the products of employers, however, is only half the task of professional practice. Our prime obligation may not be to our ostensible client but to our client's clients. Here we come to an issue not addressed in many codes of ethics devised by committees of our various bodies. I found that some of my most valuable contributions to my corporate employer were as the advocate of its customers. Many medical sociologists feel they best justify their presence as the advocate of patients. My first task in the Department of Agriculture was to convey the reactions of farmers directly to the Secretary, short-circuiting the layers of bureaucracy that distort messages on their way to the top.

At the end of the day, as we now say, it is the folks out there in families whom we should take as our ultimate clients. Ideally we should regard our institutional employers—and they us—as colleagues. While we owe much to our colleagues, and they to us, the essence of professional ethics is not loyalty to them but to clients. Have you ever asked yourself how professional ethics differ from just plain ethics? Offenses against colleagues are not violations of professional ethics, only of ethics, but betrayals of the trust of clients violate both. Too often cases of malpractice are defended by putting loyalty to colleagues first. Service to clients is what practice is all about.

In the terms just stated, should family sociologists take the parent as their client or should they take the child? I say child. Let the parent be construed as our colleague, often an amateur just beginning his or her career with their first child. If social scientists in general are to conceive development henceforth as originating with the discovery and cultivation of human tastes and talents, then development begins at birth and entails collaboration throughout life with those others on whom the person unremittingly depends. So understood, no occupation is as strategic an instrument for development as responsibility for care of the child when it is most dependent. When contemplating the consequences of the process of unnatural selection by which persons obtain the role of parents, one can only shake his head over the folly of turning parenthood over to nannies and mammies, to sitters and servants, to boarding schools and commercial services. Child care is one of the most underappreciated, underpaid and underprofessionalized vocations in our labor force. And yet many who make their living by caring for other people's children do far better than the parents who hire them. The fam-

ily presents many tasks for applied sociologists. The incompetence of marriage partners to manage their relations usually grabs center stage, followed by enemies that attack from outside like unemployment, addiction and the commercial media of entertainment. But I consider no agenda deserve higher priority than the professionalization of parenthood through the professionalization of child care. No longer can contemporary society rely upon parents to teach their children how to become competent parents in turn. In effect we have next to establish the profession of parent care, to elevate it from one of the most despised to the most honored vocation. Planned Parenthood has long set as its goal "every child a wanted child." In sociological practice, conceived comprehensively as the program for human development, every person becomes a wanted person.

No sociologist should over-estimate how ready our fellow creatures are to amend their habits when we enable them to see themselves as others see them. Some are so shakily in command of their situations that they react to the mildest suggestion as a mortal insult. Parents are notoriously jealous to defend their dictatorship over their subjects. Criminologists have long pointed out that many crimes, maybe even most murders, go unreported; of those reported, few are investigated; fewer of those lead to arrests, fewer to trials and fewer still to convictions. Nonetheless the vindictiveness of the public is focused on the losers who finally land in prison. Meanwhile we see states budgeting more for prisons than for higher education, while cries for capital punishment fill death rows to bursting. Nonetheless I daresay some sitting here feel emotional discomfort when I assert that violence in our society traces back to corporal punishment of children. The family is the most sensitive of clients in every sense of sensitive.

Hazardous as it may be, I would nonetheless generalize further to suggest that a major office of the applied sociologist is to attack false premises on which clients base their actions. The economist Joseph Schumpeter praised capitalism for what he termed its "creative destruction" of inefficient firms by innovative competitors. Unfortunately, as economists are wont, he overlooked how relentlessly commercial competition eliminates competitors, not by innovation but by consolidation. Lester Ward strove diligently in the days of the Robber Barons to destroy the premise of perfect competition, winning the applause of Theodore Roosevelt and other trust-busters. But in our day of mergers and acquisitions, of multinational conglomerates assembled by megalomaniac financiers, of presidents and attorneys-general who stifle their

own antitrust watchmen, and of economists who trumpet the virtues of economies of scale, it takes a stout heart to uphold the standard of fair competition that prevails in games as the right model for business.

Let us not pretend that we ourselves are free of false premises. Even the TIAA and labor unions whose members face the miseries of "downsizing" invest their pension funds where returns are highest, thus becoming accomplices of those who elevate unearned income at the expense of those who earn their living by producing something of value. Or take a more innocent example: Many of our colleagues assume that applied sociology is synonymous with applied social research done for clients who pay them for it. That notion overlooks the storehouse of existing knowledge available for application. A conscientious consultant often finds that what the client needs to know is already known and has only to be brought to bear, saving not only time and money but engendering respect for our discipline. To see one's craft as only the collection of new data is to belittle it; to pretend it is necessary when it is not is malpractice.

Beginners may fear to offend a client by disclosing false premises on which it operates—and indeed may so offend. But the beginner must also be prepared for the opposite reaction from clients, not to be taken seriously. Merely to be awarded a grant or contract or job does not prove the client is truly serious. Exchanges of experience about such matters is a vital function of workshops at meetings like this, a source of appropriate instruction not available as yet in textbooks.

Professionalization, however, consists of more than training beginners. It is a trend in every occupation and institution. It advances not only through innovation in technology and artistry among producers of goods and services but through rising sophistication among clients and customers. With employment in producing goods shrinking, the proportions of work performed in all fields by paraprofessionals and professionals is expanding correspondingly—if not fast enough to keep up. What that trajectory bodes should be obvious but its significance may be slow to register, that the clients of every profession consist more and more of members of other professions, able to demand improving performance by their suppliers.

Let me hark back to the last big turning point in higher education, the one that followed the GI Bill. Student attraction to sociology crested in the late Sixties, excited by the civil rights movement, the women's movement and the War on Poverty. One of the quieter contributions of sociological practice during that period was installation in many schools

of student evaluation of teaching and its use in personnel decisions. Not all that advance was owing to academic sociologists, some of whom bitterly spurned it as another outrage of the New Left. Some of the decline of sociology since, may be owing to that rift, but broader influences were operating. Many students who might have gone into sociology, soon after turned toward getting MBA's, programming computers, writing commercials and so on. One generation became separated from the next as if by a watershed. Let me therefore ask if we are not now approaching another watershed between generations, perhaps again to be reflected in national elections, with students of sociology again presented with opportunity to play strategic roles.

If so, it makes sense now to glance backward from our cursory flight over the institutions that employ us to abstract some principles that, if explicitly declared, may better prepare our successors:

First, sociological practice is not an exotic specialty within academic sociology but embraces the entire discipline.

Second, one of its major functions is to reveal to every other profession and institution how it is evaluated by its clients.

Third, because all clients are becoming professionalized, they require as much respect as one shows colleagues—and more loyalty.

Fourth, insofar as other institutions undertake to rearrange relations between their personnels and clienteles, they utilize and practice sociology, whether wittingly or not.

Fifth, just as physicians in practice greatly outnumber those who teach in medical schools, so do those who practice sociology outnumber the academics. For raising their consciousness and competence and ethics, neither they nor we can rely on academics with no interest in practice. The first priority in organizing practitioners therefore is to reach out to non-academics with a vision of the potential significance of their roles.

Sixth, because all human actions must utilize assumptions founded on insufficient evidence, a major responsibility of sociology is continually to render those assumptions either more trustworthy or obsolete by bringing further knowledge to bear.

Seventh, as John Dewey prophesied long ago, all of human behavior is exploratory, not instinctive, and should therefore be conducted as a chain of participant experiments, with results subject to recurrent revision.

Whether we term it renaissance or reformation, regeneration or reinvention, sociology offers others and itself the means for continuous development instead of spasmodic surges and slumps.