

SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM:

A Comparison of Perspectives

with an emphasis on the work of
Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

by

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ABSTRACT

The intent of this thesis is to examine some of the mutual philosophical implications of the sociological perspective described by Peter Berger, and the conception of social reality as captured and expressed in the literature of existentialism. This objective is approached in three related but relatively independent ways. In part I, the sociological impressions of "external" and "internal" social reality, as developed by Berger in Invitation to Sociology, are related, respectively, to the implicit descriptions contained in Sartre's No Exit, and in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground. It is argued that the existentialist's emphasis on the emotive wholeness of man clashes more severely with the sociologist's cognitive and analytic emphasis as one moves from the external, situational, understanding of the human condition to the internal, socio-psychological, level of analysis. This clash expresses itself most openly on the question of human freedom.

Part II starts with a formulation of this question and argues that a resolution of sorts is possible if one is willing to consider situational determination and human consciousness of alternatives as related in an essentially dialectical fashion. This dialectical relationship is then compared with the general concept of dialectics as developed

by Berger and Luckmann in The Social Construction of Reality, and several further implications are suggested. These include the suggestions that the dichotomies of internal and external, ideas and material conditions, and static and dynamic approaches to the analysis of the social process are each inseparably united. Some further comments on the problem of motivation and a brief discussion of Verstehen and compassion conclude part II.

Part III is an attempt to address a broader audience of sociologists by suggesting that recent studies in the social sciences have the cumulative effect of raising serious questions about the adequacy of the taken-for-granted epistemology of traditional sociology. Aside from a renewed consideration of The Social Construction of Reality, and a review of some basic material in phenomenology, linguistics, and social psychology; there is particular attention given to the implications of the sociology of deviance, and the studies of ethnomethodologists such as Harold Garfinkel and Aaron Cicourel. Part III closes with an overview of debate which centers around the problem of "reality." This overview is suggested by certain propositions of elementary rhetorical theory and is of primary interest to those who would hope to appreciate the nature of the challenge being offered by sociologists like Goffman, Garfinkel, and Berger and Luckmann.

The thesis as a whole suggests that a more "interesting" approach to the understanding of human social reality can be provided by integrating the existential and sociological modes of consciousness. The attempt to present an existential sociology in any specific or concrete sense is, however, expressly denied. The desire, rather, is to emphasize and inculcate a "posture" or "attitude" which has been shared by sociologists and existentialists but which, nonetheless, seems occasionally forgotten by both.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.	iii
INTRODUCTION: REASONS FOR AN INTEREST IN SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM.	1
I. SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM AS PERSPECTIVES ON REALITY.	11
1. "Pictures" of Sociological and Existential Perspectives.	14
2. Perspectives on External Reality.	28
3. Perspectives on Internal Reality.	42
II. SOME MUTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM.	64
1. The Question of Freedom.	66 ✓
2. The Berger and Luckmann Conception of Dialectics.	75
3. Social Change and the Distinction Between Ideas and Material Conditions.	84
4. Consciousness, Ecstasy, and Existentialism.	92
5. Social Change and the Problem of Motivation.	102
6. On "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive."	111
7. <u>Verstehen</u> and Compassion: The Method and Goal of an Existential Sociology.	119

III. THE PROBLEM OF REALITY.	124
1. The Social Construction of Reality and Epistemological Relativism.	125
2. Traditional Epistemology and Its Problems.	129
3. Some Material Which Challenges Traditional Epistemology and the Response.	136
4. Reality Construction and the Study of Deviance.	143
5. Ethnomethodology.	151
6. A Rhetorical Perspective on the Problem of Reality.	155
CONCLUSION: EXISTENTIAL SOCIOLOGY AS A MATTER OF ATTITUDE.	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	167

INTRODUCTION: REASONS FOR AN INTEREST IN
SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM.

The main objective of this thesis is to present an overview of some basic contrasts and similarities between sociology and existentialism considered as modes of reflection on the nature of social reality. It is a project of comparing styles of consciousness. The idea for such a project could have originated in several different ways.

It might have begun with an historical interest in the peculiarly "modern" features of sociological and existential thought. In his book, The Tyranny of Progress, Albert Salomon has argued that the sociological consciousness emerged only after the collapse of Christendom and the disintegration of the absolute state.¹ Existentialism, on the other hand, has been connected with similar historical developments by William Barrett in his book, Irrational Man.² Both writers, as historians of ideas, locate sociology and existentialism in a social climate where "God is dead" and

¹Salomon, Albert. The Tyranny of Progress, Noonday Press, New York (1955). See also Berger, Peter L. Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York (1963) pp. 29-30. Berger's book henceforth referred to as: Invitation.

²Barrett, William. Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York (1962). See particularly chapters 1 and 2. This volume henceforth referred to as: Irrational Man.

the impersonal giant of Western industrialism sits heavily on the freedom of man.

Or it could have been the search for a better understanding of the social events of our own time which prompted attention to sociology and existentialism. Sociology, of course, in offering itself as the "science of society," would seem to provide the best source for such an understanding. And yet there are certain features of life today which would seem almost designed to point out the inadequacy of traditional sociology. The radical questioning of today's youth and their sometimes even more radical political behavior are only a part of the social thought and action which challenge sociological analysis. The possibility could at least be admitted that sociology's intellectual origins, in social systems of increasing rationality and impersonality, may have rendered it quite incapable of comprehending the reactions to such systems which are now occurring. One might, then, take a new look at sociology, attempt to integrate a part of the non-rationality of existentialism, and, thereby, go beyond the blanket categories of "anomie" and "alienation" by moving toward a direct description and understanding of modern social action itself.

My own reasons for reflection on sociology and existentialism derive, in part, from such an interest in understanding modern society. The following discussions of

"the leap of faith," "sociological ecstasy," and various problems of motivation, should be viewed as a part of the attempt to suggest new approaches to the analysis of social action. And yet, if one approaches this thesis with the expectation that a new sociological theory is being proposed, one is bound to be disappointed. In the first place, the view being presented is very close to the one developed by Peter Berger and by Berger and Luckmann. The sociological material to be discussed is perhaps less general to sociology than it is specific to these theorists.³ Insofar as I have tried to go beyond Berger and Luckmann, it has been in directions which they were probably wise to avoid;⁴ directions, that is, which raise very grave doubts about the adequacy of the very foundations of sociological thought. To expect significant revisions based on changes at that level is a bit too optimistic. The problems are far too difficult, and the assumptions of traditional thought

³Though it must be remembered that Berger and Luckmann self-consciously attempt to relate their theory both to grand sociological tradition and a wide range of more recent and more empirical studies. Insofar as their arguments for generalizability are valid, my own observations should be equally generalizable.

⁴Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas. The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York (1967). Henceforth referred to as: Social Construction of Reality. Note the authors' expressed reluctance (pp. 2 and 13-14) to take up specifically philosophical problems.

about these problems far too entrenched, to admit of any immediate or profound successes in reorienting sociological theory.

As a more practical short range objective, this thesis attempts to simply uncover a few of the important mutual philosophical implications of sociology and existentialism and offer them to the reader as intrinsically "interesting." In fact, then, the idea for this project has originated with my own studies of these two modes of thought and particularly with my interest in their epistemological and metaphysical foundations. It is only with a renewed attention to epistemology and metaphysics that any truly fresh theoretical orientations can develop.

I am not referring to anything mysterious or profound with the labels "epistemology" and "metaphysics." I am only drawing attention to the fact that every system of thought has at its foundation some conception of reality and some notions as to what constitutes knowledge. The "reality" and "knowledge" of sociology and existentialism (as systems of thought in themselves) constitute the "problem" of this thesis. The "point of view" being adopted in order to address this problem is one which I would associate with the "posture" or "attitude" which both sociology and existentialism seem to adopt toward the "reality" and the

"knowledge" which they would attempt to understand, i.e., toward the social world itself.

In order to make it clearer just what sort of "point of view" this is, it will be helpful to discuss Peter Berger's notion of sociological "motifs" and the existentialist catch phrase, "God is dead." Berger's mention of motifs occurs in Invitation to Sociology,⁵ where, in attempting to describe sociology as a form of consciousness, he claims that sociology seeks to "look behind" the taken for granted routines of daily life.⁶ The sociologist, according to Berger, persistently locates himself so as to be able to "see through" the "official" interpretations of reality which he encounters. He goes on to describe four motifs which can be associated with sociological consciousness. These he labels as: the debunking motif, the motif of unrespectability, the relativizing motif, and the cosmopolitan motif. It is unnecessary to describe or illustrate these motifs in detail. For our purposes, it is necessary only to emphasize the debunking and relativizing motifs and note their philosophical implications. Sociology's debunking tendencies serve to reveal that things are not what they seem. Its

⁵Chapter 2, "Sociology as a Form of Consciousness," pp. 25-53.

⁶Invitation, p. 30.

relativism would have us conclude that, furthermore, what things seem to be, is largely conditioned by the cultural and historical circumstances of place and time. The motifs in general point toward a considerable scepticism with respect to our perception of reality and our knowledge of it.

Properly understood, the famous Nietzschean proclamation: "God is dead," points to a very similar scepticism and a very similar set of debunking and relativizing motifs. Existentialism is a philosophy of disenchantment. The claim that God is dead is not a religious claim; certainly not any more than it is a political or cultural claim. Rather it is an expression of the symbolic death of any and all external social values. "God," represents the entire range of unquestioned goals or forces with which men identify and for which men struggle and die. "God is dead" is much less about a sacred God than it is about secular man, who, in the view of the existentialists, is left alone to structure his reality and define his truth.

There are a number of very difficult "problems" raised by the attempt to combine these two modes of attention to social reality into one point of view for the writing of

a thesis.⁷ It is partly through an attempt to avoid these problems that I describe my point of view as a "posture" or "attitude" rather than a "position." The disadvantage to the reader is, of course, that postures and attitudes are not as easy to adopt or follow as are clearly stated positions. Hopefully this disadvantage will be counteracted by the greater advantage of being able to talk about matters of epistemology and metaphysics without employing a "point of view" already based on epistemological or metaphysical assumptions.

It will probably appear, then, as if I discuss sociology from an existential position and then do an about face by

⁷The combining of existential "atheism" and sociological relativism creates particularly awkward problems. How, after all, should an atheist remain faithful to his lack of faith? How does a relativist argue so as not to appear as an absolute relativist? Should, in short, a sceptic remain sceptical of his own scepticism? Such questions as these indicate the problems which could be raised for the point of view of this thesis. It has been traditional for critics of atheism, relativism, scepticism and so on to criticize apparent self-contradictions of their opponents. The question is seldom asked, however, whether it is the self-refuting position which is in error or the logical system in terms of which it was viewed to be self-refuting; or, perhaps, neither, or both of these. Once this kind of ultimate questioning is undertaken, an almost infinite array of possibilities is uncovered. An excellent description of this state of affairs (a state, incidentally, which is remarkably similar to the void and the infinite possibilities beyond as described later in the "picture of existentialism") is provided by Kaufmann, Gordon D. Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois (1960). One of the greatest problems raised by this sort of ultimate questioning is the question: What is a "problem"? (and perhaps also the question: What is a point of view?).

discussing existentialism from a sociological position. The appearance would not be entirely illusory. But what I have tried to do is discuss both existentialism and sociology from a position which is consistent with "the attitude" of existential sociology. What I have purposely not attempted is a clear statement of what existential sociology is.

Nor do I view this as a particularly important task. The philosophical puzzles just alluded to are important. I do not believe, however, that their solution is worth the trouble. Furthermore there is another way of looking at the material in this thesis which ignores "ultimate" sorts of philosophical questions almost entirely. On this level, the thesis is not offered as a contribution to grand theoretical debate so much as it is offered as a range of fairly ordinary observations as to the conceptual contrasts, similarities, and implications of sociology and existentialism. It is on this second level of attention that the more concrete goals of this thesis have been formulated and approached.

The first part of the thesis is addressed, in general, to all who might be interested in grasping sociology and existentialism as roughly definable perspectives. The attempt is to show that there is a shared interest in many aspects of social reality; and that this interest can be

described by noting the existentialists' attention to the forces and circumstances which sociology describes under various headings or through various theoretical approaches.¹ At the same time, an effort will be made to remain faithful to the basic differences between sociology and existentialism - particularly their expressed or implied differences on the question of human freedom.

The second part of the thesis is addressed to those who would attempt to integrate the sociological and existential perspectives in any explicit way. The material of that part comes close to being presented in an openly argumentative style. But the argument is between sociology and existentialism (or their implications) as outlined in part I, rather than between any explicitly formulated existential sociology and other sociological approaches. The goal is not to outline an integrated theory but to discuss: a) some of the problems which would need to be overcome if such an approach were to be devised, b) some possible advantages of such an approach, and c) some possible methodological and philosophical implications of the amalgamation.

The third part is addressed to a somewhat different audience, though it is not assumed that readers of the first two parts will find it totally uninteresting. The discussion of the problem of reality is an attempt to offer a rough

description of the epistemology traditional to sociological inquiry and then to give a survey of recent studies which would urge us to reconsider that epistemology.

Parts I and II, then, assume that there are those who are unsatisfied with sociology as it is now being practiced and suggest that existentialism can be fruitfully considered as a complementary perspective on social reality. Part III is addressed, quite simply, to those who are not unsatisfied.

In the final analysis it will be seen that this discussion is not being presented in the hope of winning converts or in the interest of waging any specifically polemic battles. It is hoped that the material being presented will be "interesting" to both "satisfied" and "dissatisfied" sociologists. Some people are convinced that all will be well as soon as we know how things are and what makes them that way. There are others who insist that no matter how things are we must have a right attitude toward them as well as a mere knowledge of them. If I offend only the former, I will be satisfied.

I. SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM AS
PERSPECTIVES ON REALITY.

In a recent C.B.C. radio interview a Canadian author told of the problems he faced as a result of his habit of chewing tobacco. Apparently very few offices or public lounges are any longer equipped with cuspidors. The author explained that carrying his own spittoon was both awkward and conducive to a rather negative first impression. Having unsuccessfully tried several different alternatives, he decided it was best to simply stuff a large envelope with toilet tissue and file it in his briefcase for use when needed. As it turned out, this arrangement also made disposal of used envelopes very easy. The author simply addressed them to various publishers, whom he obviously did not like, and deposited them in the nearest mailbox.

The tale is relevant for illustrating what I take to be common everyday features of every man's life. The impression that the author's problem and his solution to it are exceptional is only a result of the relatively stronger values, norms, and sanctions which relate to such an outdated practice as chewing tobacco. Behavior, whether deviant or conforming, is always viewed by others in the context of expectations which are socially established and enforced. That same behavior, and those same expectations,

are also internalized by the individual and play a part in the construction of his own self-concept or sense of identity. It is also true that, as with the author's practice of mailing the used envelopes, each individual makes a unique selection among the range of his situated alternatives.

Taken as an Everyman illustration, both sociology and existentialism constitute modes of attention to such a phenomenon. They amount to perspectives on the nature of man's existence in society. The first part of this thesis will attempt to describe the contrasts and similarities between these two perspectives. The most obvious and persistent of the contrasts lies in the distinctly different interests of sociology and existentialism. Sociology is self-consciously analytic and scientific; its interests lie in explaining the reality it describes. Existentialism is decidedly non-analytic; its interests lie in coming to appreciate the ethical and philosophical implications of reality. Whereas the sociologist would want to know more about others' reactions to the author's habit, for example, the existentialist would likely be more interested in the spitefulness of the author himself. It is as an outgrowth of this basic contrast of interests that the problem of determinism and freedom will arise as central to the present

discussion. But first we must develop some general notions as to how sociology and existentialism constitute perspectives on reality. |

1. Pictures of Sociological and Existential Perspectives.

For purposes of the present discussion a careful definition of sociology would be misleading and irrelevant. I intend to treat sociology as a form of consciousness with a certain focus on reality and certain objectives and interests in mind. By operating at such a high level of abstraction, specific details of various sociological approaches or theoretical orientations can be ignored. Nonetheless it must be admitted at the outset that the account I offer of sociology would probably not be universally accepted by all those who share the academic title. Short of pleasing all sociologists, I would be satisfied with pleasing Peter Berger. In itself, that should be a much easier task since it is his description of the sociological perspective which forms the basis for the present discussion. By the same token I accept Berger's general account of sociology as an accurate one and hence intend that the observations related in this first part of the thesis should be at least as generalizable as Berger's own observations.

Berger claims that sociology is concerned with understanding society in a disciplined scientific way.¹ I take this claim as in part a reference to sociology's goal of gaining

¹Invitation, p. 16.

valid knowledge about society. Knowledge, that is, which can lead to better prediction of social behavior through discovering the law-like character of social processes. In placing this interpretation on Berger's claim that sociology is scientific, I am very likely going beyond his own intentions. I do so because, although sociology as Berger conceives it is not directly concerned with discovering the laws of social behavior, it is at least an implication of scientific "knowledge" that such "laws" must exist. I also extend Berger's account of sociology in this direction because in order to appreciate the basic contrast between sociology and existentialism alluded to earlier, one must emphasize the deterministic philosophical implications of sociology. This, then, is the most basic general feature of sociology to be kept in mind in comparing it with existentialism. Sociology assumes the applicability of a rational, scientific approach to the analysis and explanation of social behavior.

The various concrete attempts at such analysis can be roughly divided into those which focus on external, socio-structural factors and those which focus on internal, socio-psychological factors. Again this separation is based on Berger's own presentation of the sociological perspective. In Invitation to Sociology that perspective is divided into two parts. The first of these sees "man in society."² The

²Invitation, Chapter 4, "Sociological Perspective - Man in Society," pp. 66-92.

second looks at "society in man."³ Berger refers to this distinction in many of his writings. Since my parallel references to "external" and "internal" "reality" will serve as basic organizational divisions for this thesis, it would be wise to relate some of these. In a discussion of the sociology of work, for example, Berger refers first to the technological and concomitant social-organizational aspects of modern work and then notes that:

. . . this is only a part of the basic human problem, the external, or socio-economic, part. But there is also an internal, or sociopsychological, part of the problem.⁴

This same distinction between external and internal realities is also drawn in the theoretical treatise which Berger co-authored with Thomas Luckmann.⁵ In that book the authors present their argument in two key sections titled, respectively, "Society as Objective Reality" and "Society as Subjective Reality." In both Invitation to Sociology and The Social Construction of Reality, the two

³Invitation, Chapter 5, "Sociological Perspective - Society in Man," pp. 93-121.

⁴Berger, Peter L. (ed.) The Human Shape of Work, Macmillan, New York (1964). From Berger's own contribution, "Some General Observations on the Problem of Work," p. 215.

⁵Social Construction of Reality.

different approaches to sociological analysis are associated with the theories of Durkheim and Weber.⁶ *inreality*
The validity of this division between sociological attention to external reality and attention to internal reality will be considered more critically in part II of this thesis. For now it will be used as a convenient way of describing sociology and existentialism and locating their areas of greatest contrast and similarity. Thus we have something of a picture - not so much of sociology itself, as of the sociological perspective on reality. A picture, that is, which stresses cognitive analytic interests and divides the subject matter and analytic approaches of sociology into "external" and "internal" halves.

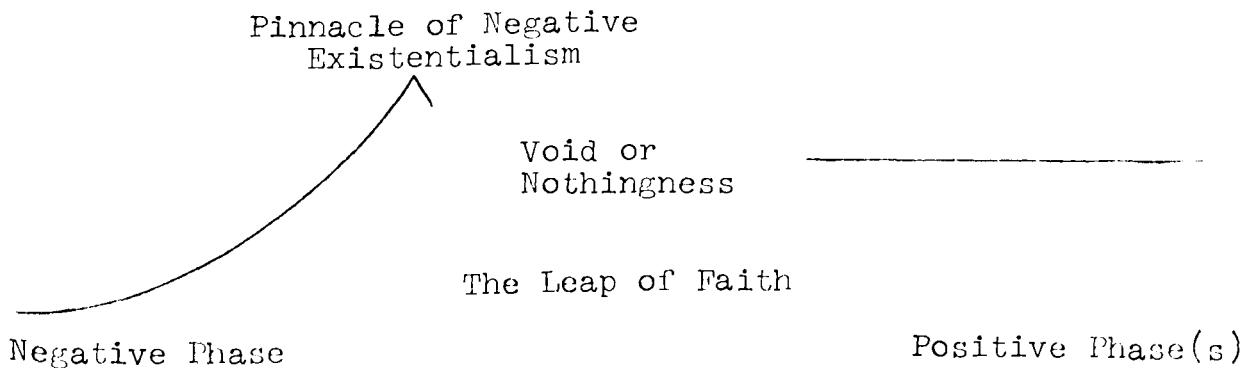
My view of existentialism may require a bit more effort in its presentation. Although that view would no doubt meet with at least as much opposition as the above view of sociology, the picture I would present of existentialism lacks the precedent which Berger provided for the account of sociology. Additional complications arise from the relatively recent popularity of existentialism and the subsequent circulation of many diverse attempts to define it.

There is little value in offering yet another account of what existentialism is. Such an account would have

⁶For an elaboration of the reasons for these associations, see this thesis, p.76.

little hope of being less misleading than the others. But it can be helpful to consider what, if any, general trends are shared by existentialists. By "general trends" I do not refer to concrete elements of the existential position. It is obviously not true, for example, that all of the existentialists are atheists or that they all stress "authenticity" in human action. On the other hand, it is true that they all seem attracted to apparently morbid or depressing themes. Each of the existentialists concentrates on one or more of the topics of death, despair, human finitude, anxiety, physical pain, nothingness, the anguish of choice, meaninglessness, etc.

This negativeness is one of the general tendencies which is discoverable in all existentialist writings. And yet not all such negativeness is of the existential variety. The uniqueness of existentialism's negative phase lies in its relationship to other phases which are shared by the existentialists. These phases could be represented in the form of a graph as follows:



The "negative phase" relates to the above mentioned existentialist concentration on "morbid" or "depressing" themes.⁷ But the actual process is more complicated, involving, in ideal typical terms, something of a search for meaningfulness and purpose in existence. That search, however, is consistently frustrated. Each new failure to locate the "real meaning" of human existence constitutes a move closer to total despair.

The state of total despair is represented on the graph by the peak at the end of the negative phase and the label: "the pinnacle of negative existentialism." This pinnacle involves the complete acceptance that life, my life, has no meaning or "purpose" whatsoever. In this brief attempt to present my "picture" of existentialism, I can best illustrate the pinnacle of negative existentialism by referring to the absurdists. If we take Samuel Beckett as the key spokesman for these philosophers and recall Waiting for Godot,⁸ we can begin to appreciate what a conscious lingering at the pinnacle of negative existentialism might entail.

The third part of the "graph" is associated with two distinct types of labels. The first refer to the gap itself

⁷The graph is intended solely as a heuristic device. I am not using it to describe the biographical development of the existentialists. I am only offering it as an aid to a clearer understanding of what the various existentialists have in common.

⁸Beckett, Samuel. Waiting for Godot, Grove Press, New York (1954).

and could be "nothingness," "the void," "meaninglessness" or others like these. It is important that just beyond the pinnacle of negative existentialism lies a state of absolute emptiness, the complete nihilation of all meaning, and of death - either physical, hence the existentialist's fascination with suicide, or as a more symbolic "giving up" or "not caring." Some of the most superb descriptions of the metaphysical terror which follows negative existentialism are provided by Blaise Pascal in his Pensées written in the 17th century. The following quote is an example:

When I see the blindness and misery of man, when I gaze upon the whole silent world, and upon man without light, abandoned to himself, lost, as it were, in this corner of the universe, without knowing who has placed him there, for what purpose, or what will happen to him at death, and altogether incapable of knowledge, I become terrified⁹

The second label associated with this portion of the graph, "the leap of faith," is a reference to the radical commitment required to bridge the gap between negative and

⁹Pascal, Blaise. Pensées, John Warrington (translator), Dent and Sons, London (1960) p. 105. A similar quote from Pascal is provided by William Barrett in Irrational Man, Doubleday, New York (1962): "When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which knows me not, I am frightened, and am astonished being here rather than there, why now rather than then." p. 118.

positive existentialism. In using the phrase, I have in mind Kierkegaard's difficult but very important analysis of Abraham's agony over the commandment to slay Isaac.¹⁰ That analysis is representative of the general existentialist conviction that positive action in the face of meaninglessness is only possible through the most total and irrational commitment based on faith.¹¹

Beyond the void lies the positive phase of existentialism. Or perhaps the label should be "positive phases," since it is in this area of our "picture" that the existentialists become most difficult to represent as following any common pattern. It is as if the total acceptance of nothingness brings a leap to anything. For each of the different existentialists, most of the systematic philosophy and ethical recommendations or commandments fall within the positive phase of their work. Thus we find Sartre commanding authenticity and action, Camus urging a lucid compassion, Kierkegaard insisting on a radical and individualistic religious commitment, etc. And yet with existential positiveness, just as with existential negativeness, the urgings and commandments are unlike those of non-existentialists who

¹⁰ See Kierkegaard, Soren. Fear and Trembling, Robert Lowrie (translator), Doubleday, New York (1954).

¹¹ In my opinion, the best attempt to explicitly describe and analyze this phenomenon is to be found in Albert Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (1955).

seem to take similar positions. Again, existentialism's uniqueness stems from the fact that its positive elements have come only after an arduous intellectual development through increasingly negative conclusions and eventual total despair. The note of irony or humility which seems always to accompany existential positiveness clearly distinguishes it from more traditional ethical and philosophical positions.

There is another key distinction between existentialism and traditional philosophy which must be mentioned. This key distinction, however, goes far deeper than merely separating ordinary positiveness from the existential variety. In fact this further distinction between existentialism and the traditional mainstream of Western philosophy is also the distinction which most decidedly places it in opposition to sociology. What I have in mind should be clear from the two "pictures" presented in this section. Whereas the picture of the sociological perspective reveals the cognitive analytic interests of science, the existential perspective is decidedly emotive and non-analytic in outline. The concern for human meaningfulness and purpose, the reference to faith, the concentration on morbid topics and despair, together with the positive ethical commandments of existentialism, all testify to this marked distinction between existential-

ism and sociology. Whereas sociology can remain detached and rational in its consideration of reality, existentialism demands an extremely personal and ultimately non-rational concern and commitment.

William Barrett has given an excellent account of this contrast in locating its origins, not only in the history of philosophy but also in the total history of Western culture.¹² The contrast is so important to the argument of this thesis as to justify the relating of part of Barrett's account.

At one point Barrett relies heavily on Matthew Arnold's division of Western cultural influences into two basically antagonistic views on the nature of man. These are described as Hebraism and Hellenism. A sort of catalogue of contrasts is provided by Barrett in summarizing these two positions. These contrasts could be outlined as follows:

1. Whereas the ideal man of Hebraism is the man of faith, his counterpart in the Hellenic tradition is the man of reason.

2. Whereas Hebraism stresses the emotive wholeness of man in his concrete and particular individuality, Hellenism stresses the cognitive functions of man as the avenue to an existence in the eternal realm of ideas.

¹²In Irrational Man, especially part II, "The Sources of Existentialism in the Western Tradition," pp. 67-146.

3. Whereas the Hebrew tradition sees life as a passionate involvement with mortal human commitments, the Hellenic ideal is that of detached contemplation and the search for wisdom.

4. Whereas the concept of eternity has only a shadowy significance in the Hebraic tradition, except as embodied by the unknowable God, eternity for the Greek is very real and constantly available through the intellect.

5. Whereas Hebraism is more likely to see rational argument as irrelevant and vain, Hellenism contends that above all it is man's logic and rationality which sets him above the animals.

6. Whereas "the Greek pursues beauty and goodness as things that are identical or at least always coincident . . . , [to the Hebrew] good must sometimes wear an ugly face, just as beauty may . . . be the shining mask of evil and corruption."¹³

¹³This six point summary is a condensation and paraphrasing of Irrational Man, pp. 77-78. One should also note Barrett's apologies, and consequently mine as well, for certain distortions of Arnold's original contrast, see p. 79. Another dichotomy with important similarities to the present one is the division between Dionysian and Apollonian orientations developed by Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm in The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, Francis Golffing (translator), Doubleday, New York (1956). Nietzsche seems to have also seen the contrast in terms of the Hellenic-Hebraic distinction dealt with here. Walter Kaufmann in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, World, New York (1956), introduces Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, with Nietzsche's comment that the Notes constitute "a kind of self-derision of the . . . [know thyself]". Incidentally, these Greeks have

In terms of Arnold's dichotomy, existentialism clearly stands in the Hebraic tradition. ". . . the features of Hebraic man are those which existential philosophy has attempted to exhume and bring to the reflective consciousness of our time."¹⁴ It may not be so obvious, however, that sociology is associated with the Hellenic tradition. And once again I must admit that such an association is plausible only with an overemphasis of sociological aspirations as a science. The scientific ethos is, of course, clearly the ethos of Hellenic man. The search for "valid explanation," like the older search for "natural laws," is clearly descendant from Plato's search for eternal truth. Insofar as sociology participates (and certainly at times it seems even to over-participate) in this scientific ethos, it is but a more modern development of the same Hellenic approach to reality. It conflicts,

a lot on their conscience: falsification was their true trade; the whole of European psychology is sick with Greek superficiality; and without that little bit of Judaism, etc., etc., etc." p. 52 see also p. 53.

¹⁴ Irrational Man, p. 78. Yet another commentator who makes similar observations, without reference to existentialism, is Roszak, Theodore. The Making of A Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York (1969).

however, even more sharply with existentialism than do the natural sciences since sociology would purport to apply its analyses to the very nature of human existence itself.

With only a modest distortion of the sociological perspective, then, we can easily enough see where sociology and existentialism will stand opposed. In order to appreciate their areas of agreement a similar modest distortion will be required. This time, however, it is the cognitive or analytic implications of existentialism which must be emphasized. For just as the analytic aspects of sociology have emotive implications, so likewise do the essentially emotive concerns of existentialism have analytic implications.

The following two sections will work from the "picture" of sociology suggested above and, by emphasizing the analytic side of existentialism, attempt to relate certain features of existential literature to Berger's presentation of the sociological perspective on external and internal reality. They will, then, constitute an attempt to outline some of the analytic similarities between existentialism and sociology. Nonetheless, the non-analytic emphasis of existentialism will result in a progressive straining of the uneasy alliance. Especially as we move to the internal sphere and discuss the sociological analysis of the ways in which even individual

identities are socially molded and constructed, we will become increasingly aware of existentialism's open opposition.

2. Perspectives on External Reality.

✓ Berger's Invitation to Sociology is particularly suited for the present comparison of sociology and existentialism because of the intent to convey the human or philosophical implications of sociology. In the two main chapters of that book the author is specific in creating the impression that men are located in and identified by the societies in which they exist. In opening the chapter on "man in society," Berger provides an illustration which reveals his intentions very clearly. He describes an imaginary child's fascination with the facts that his geographical location can be plotted on a map and that his identity is recognized by the postal officials who deliver letters addressed to him. If the illustration is properly understood for its symbolic significance, geographical location will be generalized to include all modes of social location within general systems of social forces and general structural and social organizational features. The attempt to present an overview of the sociological analyses of these forces and structures makes up Berger's material on external reality. In relating this material it will be convenient to use a simple three part breakdown.

Much of Berger's material can be discussed under the heading of social control. His reader is encouraged to develop an image consisting of a series of concentric circles around each social actor. In Berger's view the most remote circle is that of violence and coercion, where the ultimate sanction behind the mandates of all social systems is death. Inside this circle are the forces operating to control individuals through application of economic rewards and punishments. The differential distribution of a society's resources is always a major part of its ability to locate its members. Somewhere at a fair distance from the individual is a third sort of circle, a bit more blurred than the others, which channels behavior by, in effect, labeling it as socially "acceptable" or "unacceptable." By reference to such a circle, Berger is alluding to more than just the terms of reference, so to speak, used for the application of more concrete sanctions. In addition, he is pointing out that the labeling itself - "deviant," "female," "delinquent," "businessman," etc. - constitutes positive or negative sanctions for particular persons. Another circle, closely related to that of social acceptability and equally blurred by its differential existence in various segments and levels of the society, is the one composed of the systems of values, beliefs, and moralities which operate in social communities. These are particularly interesting both for standing as the guidelines

and justifications for applications of other specific sanctions and also by virtue of their ability to control individuals, or at least those "properly socialized," from the inside as well as from the outside. The closest circle referred to by Berger is a sort of miniature imitation of all the more remote controlling circles. This inner circle represents all the complex admonishments and encouragements applied by one's "significant others" - the wives, friends, colleagues, and peers whose opinions, expectations, and reactions count so much.

Berger's concern with these circles of social control correlates with sociology's interest in the dynamic functioning of society. The second part of Berger's material on external reality correlates with sociological attention to structural features of society. Thus, although Berger makes specific reference primarily to the phenomena of class, stratification, and race, he could just as well have included such things as ethnic background or sub-cultural membership. Just as the first mode of sociological analysis stresses the mechanisms for patterning individual behavior, the second focuses on the distinguishable social contexts within which, or against which, such mechanisms may be applied. This division of sociological material into behavioral and structural concentrations is consistent with Berger's project of creating the

impression that men are socially located or imprisoned. Especially in his discussion of race, it is clear that both the limits of one's social action and the categories others use in considering that action are socially determined.

The third portion of Berger's chapter likewise implies a style of sociological determinism, in this case the determinism of history. Berger argues that the sociological perspective on the past reveals how the institutions, values, beliefs, structures, control mechanisms, and, ultimately even the definitions of reality shared by one's contemporaries in today's society, are all the inventions of people who have long been dead. All those things, then, which determine what one may do, or even think, today, are only the current expressions of social forces which have long been active and which, at best, are amenable to only the slightest alterations. Placing this final conclusion along with those related to social behavior and social structure, Berger can conclude that: "Society is the walls of our imprisonment in history."¹⁵

The remainder of the chapter on man in society constitutes something of an attempt to combine all three styles of sociological determinism into one comprehensive theoretical approach - institutional analysis. Berger defines "institution" simply as ". . . a distinctive complex of social actions."¹⁶

¹⁵Invitation, p. 92.

¹⁶Invitation, p. 87.

His theory of institutions in itself becomes very important to the general theoretical position which he and Luckmann develop in The Social Construction of Reality. For present purposes, however, it will be necessary only to consider institutional analysis as a summarizing approach to the understanding of sociology's deterministic implications. Thus, it is in the concept of "institution" that all the social controls, social structures, and social history can be located. (Institutions constitute the "grooves" into which social action is patterned. They operate in terms of the structural contingencies of the society, are enforced by the operative control mechanisms of the society and are legitimated and solidified over time by the dominant historical forces which have operated in the society.

If we consider Berger's account as at least an important part of what sociologists would agree to as the implications of their analyses, we may conclude that the sociological perspective on external reality locates man firmly in the midst of the forces which surround him. In order to outline the existential perspective on external reality I will assume that Jean-Paul Sartre's views are as representative of existentialism as Berger's are of sociology.

For the present discussion it will be convenient to use Sartre's play No Exit¹⁷ as a compact presentation or illustration

¹⁷Sartre, Jean-Paul. No Exit from No Exit and Three Other Plays, Vintage, New York (1946). Henceforth referred to as No Exit.

of the existential perspective on external reality. In order to use such a literary source for my discussion it will be necessary to provide an interpretation of the symbolism involved. I do not claim that the one I offer is "the" correct interpretation - only that it is an interpretation, at least as defensible as the others possible. I will consider No Exit as a philosophical play in which Sartre anticipates much of what was formalized later in Being and Nothingness. No Exit reveals much about Sartre's view (and, by extension, the view of many other existentialists as well) as to the nature and quality of man's location in society.

The structure, setting, characterization, and plot of the play are all extremely uncomplicated. The action is presented in one act and one scene. The setting is "a drawing room in Second Empire style." There are no mirrors and no windows.¹⁸ There are three brightly colored sofas in the room - one for each of the three main characters. Other furnishings consist of various odd pieces poorly arranged. The room also contains a huge bronze ornament - symbolizing the fixidness of man's life once it has been finalized by death - and a paper knife - but no books, hence no apparent use for the knife. There is a bell to connect the three occupants of

¹⁸Also no blinking and no sleep. Early in the play the male lead, Garcin, connects all these features and announces ". . . Ah, I see; it's life without a break." No Exit, p. 5.

the room with the valet who is the only other character of the drama. But the bell is unreliable, and, like the door into the passage which seems only sometimes locked, it symbolizes the contingencies of life. It is progressively revealed to the characters that the Second Empire drawing room is hell. There are numerous references to this fact in the dialogue. And yet there is some room for doubt. It is interesting to note, for example, that in referring to the unexpected nature of his surroundings, Garcin reveals that the room is much different from what he had been led to believe by people "down there."¹⁹ In any case it is clear that their situation is like life. "You remember all we were told about the torture chambers," says Garcin at the very end of the play, "the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker. Hell is - other people!"²⁰

There are three persons assigned to the room, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle. On the surface, Garcin is a coward, Inez a lesbian, and Estelle a baby killer. But these identities are only revealed and solidified as the three characters construct the miniature society which is their hell.²¹ The plot of the

¹⁹No Exit, p. 3. I am suggesting, of course, that for Sartre the setting of his play could just as well have been heaven.

²⁰No Exit, p. 47.

²¹It is interesting to note that in The Social Construction of Reality, Berger and Luckmann illustrate the process of reality construction with an example which is almost identical to the three member society of Sartre's No Exit. See Social Construction of Reality, pp. 63 and 82-84.

play consists of little more than the details of how this construction proceeds.

It is clear that the main point of Sartre's play is not analytic but moral. The plight of his three characters is a plight which is common to most men in society. The message conveyed by Garcin, Inez, and Estelle is nicely expressed by William Barrett:

These three persons have no being other than that each has in the eyes of the others; they exist in each other's gaze, in fact. But this is exactly what they longed for in life - to lose their own subjective being by identifying themselves with what they were in the eyes of other people. It is a torment that people do in fact choose on earth; the bourgeois salaud and the anti-Semite, Sartre says, have chosen as themselves their public stance or role, and thus really exist not as free beings for themselves but as beings in the eyes of others.²²

The moral implications of the play concern, then, the human propensity to live inauthentically. The analytic significance of No Exit is, however, underestimated by Barrett in implying that only certain bourgeois types and anti-Semites are guilty of living only in the eyes of others. The great majority of characters portrayed by Sartre in other novels and dramas²³ as well as the very drive of his whole

²²Irrational Man, p. 253.

²³The self-taught man in Nausea, the citizens of Thebes and Electra in The Flies, the prostitute in The Respectful Prostitute, to name only a few.

philosophical position indicate that, for Sartre, inauthenticity with respect to the expectations and values of others is both the greatest and the most wide-spread human shortcoming. Every man is susceptible to the determinations imposed by his existence in a social world. We can, therefore, look to No Exit for its broader significance as a vehicle for revealing Sartre's general analysis of the social world as a provider of "alibis" for the vast majority of human beings in their futile attempts to escape from freedom.

Ignoring for a moment, however, the ethical message of No Exit, it is interesting to note the concrete similarities between Berger's view of external reality and the one conveyed by Sartre.

(Berger's image of social control mechanisms as an array of circles around the individual has interesting existential parallels. Hell, as the setting for No Exit, conjures up a similar image of concentric circles - probably traceable to Dante's classical portrayal. The existential novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The First Circle,²⁴ is certainly an appeal to Dante's account. Much of the action of that novel, like the action of No Exit, stands nicely as an illustration of what sociologists describe as social control mechanisms.

²⁴ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. The First Circle, Harper and Row, New York (1968).

In No Exit, then, hell itself is the most obvious symbolic reference to social controls in general. As for more specific references, the fear that all three inmates have of "the torturer" can be easily and plausibly related to Berger's references to violence and the threat of violence as ultimate control mechanisms. But it isn't until one gets to the controls involving social acceptability, both within the larger community and by immediate associates, that the real insights of Sartre show forth. The concern expressed by Garcin as to other's labels of himself as a coward²⁵ can be taken as a prime example of the former style of social control. Whereas the whole content of the interaction between all three characters throughout the play is a direct illustration of social control operating within the intimate world of one's close associates. The characters' opening relief at not finding torturers in hell is soon revealed as most ironic by the torture each inflicts on the others.²⁶

As for the more structural mode of sociological analysis - as represented by attention to matters like class, stratification, and race - Sartre has little to say in No Exit. In his other writings, however, there are numerous references to the

²⁵"That's what they've decided, those dear friends of mine. In six month's time they'll be saying: 'Cowardly as that skunk Garcin.' You're lucky, you two; no one on earth is giving you another thought. But I - I'm long in dying."
No Exit, p. 39.

²⁶The characters eventually become quite conscious of the power each has over the others. The following dialogue

bad faith which so often hides behind generalization in terms of class, religion, or race. The Respectful Prostitute²⁷ and Portrait of the Antisemite²⁸ are both articulate expressions of that conviction. The fact that these works are generally intended to convey his condemnations of inauthenticity and self-deception should not prevent us from giving credit to what are basically sound sociological observations.

As for sociology's attention to the past as a determiner of present locations in society, there is a particularly interesting parallel in Sartre's work. I have in mind Sartre's

illustrates this point:

INEZ: . . . So you've no choice, you must convince me [that he is not a coward], and you're at my mercy

GARCIN: That's true, Inez. I'm at your mercy, but you're at mine as well.
[He bends over ESTELLE. INEZ gives a little cry.]
No Exit, p. 45.

Other authors have also recognized this sort of mutual dependency between individuals. Edward Albee's, Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf, is a fine example of such recognition in the context of existential or nearly existential drama. Sartre's consciousness of such social dynamics could almost be better related to the sociological material on internal reality. Berger's summarizing observation on the implications of role theory - that, ". . . human dignity is a matter of social permission" [Invitation, p. 103, and the next section of this thesis p. 46] is almost identical to this aspect of No Exit.

²⁷In No Exit, pp. 249-281.

²⁸In Kaufmann, Walter (ed.) Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, World, Cleveland, Ohio (1956) pp. 270-286.

theory of existence whereby each individual is involved throughout his life in a project, or series of projects, which is never completed but is always in a state of becoming. This is an important part of what Sartre has meant with his insistence that existence precedes essence. Only upon dying does one finalize oneself. Inez is Sartre's most explicit spokesman for this view when she says:

One always dies too soon - or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are - your life, and nothing else.²⁹

In No Exit the message with regard to this aspect of Sartre's position is that what each character is (i.e., coward, lesbian, baby killer) is not captured by these labels or even by the "fixing eye of the other," as Sartre calls it. Rather, the essences of Garcin, Inez, and Estelle were determined at the time of their respective deaths and that essence simply is the sum of their actions, irrespective of the labels attached. This position has great importance for Sartre's existential psychoanalysis but is of only marginal significance here. Since sociological concern is primarily with the ways in which present social processes or institutions are rooted in the past, the chief interest of Sartre's theory lies in its seemingly parallel contention that an individual's


²⁹No Exit, p. 45.



"essence" (though not his "existence") is subject to a similar historical determinism. As for existence, it is only the inauthentic man who would attempt to escape from the responsibilities of life (considered as an ongoing project of self-creation). Such an attempt, like all forms of bad faith, generally consists in believing or trying to believe that freedom is an illusion because of the determination inherent in the past.

In fact it is this whole notion of bad faith and freedom which so clearly differentiates existentialism from the more traditional philosophies, sciences, and hence social sciences. Sociology, as a science, must apparently insist on a deterministic view of human and social events. The past for the sociologist is that complex of circumstances which have "produced" the present. And the past and present are the producers of the future. For the existentialist, however, there are no determiners of the human "now" nor of the individual future, except the individual's own free choices. The past, for the existentialist can be admitted as a set of conditions (or as the producer of such conditions) in the context of which the individual's free choices are made. But these external conditions, the location of the individual, in society, are only a context in which the individual chooses. They do not determine which choices will be made.



Basically, then, both sociology and existentialism can agree in their descriptions of external reality. Both concern themselves with the sort of location in society which can be analyzed under the headings of social control; class, stratification, and race (i.e., institutionalized structural features of society); and the past. But whereas sociology seems to imply that this location is absolute, binding, and inescapable in its effects on the individual; existentialism makes reference to these features primarily in the context of instructions, so to speak, as to how not to view the forces acting on the individual. For the existentialist the individual is crucial and only those who would attempt to escape from their freedom (and the responsibility it entails); that is, only those who opt for inauthentic existence, subject themselves to control over their lives by the social forces around them. Nonetheless,  since the existentialists would agree that most men do live inauthentically, it would seem that, in their perspectives on external reality, the sociological position is strongest.

3. Perspectives on Internal Reality.

Sartre's No Exit, discussed in the last section is a part of his work which I would place either early in the negative phase of existentialism (by virtue of its description of the hell which is other people) or in the positive phase (insofar as it condemns bad faith and urges authenticity as an escape from hell). By moving to a consideration of Berger's account of the sociological perspective on internal reality, we will be forced to consider the philosophically more radical portions of the existential "picture." This is particularly necessary in light of the fact that the impression of imprisonment created by the perspective on man in society is rendered even more severe by the implied psychological determinism of Berger's material on society in man. Although the existentialist may tolerate a determinism which ends with the situation of man's existence, he cannot afford to admit the necessity of forces which would seem to mold and determine even man's essence or identity, in his situation. In this section I will give a brief overview of Berger's material on role theory, reference group theory, and the sociology of knowledge; stressing, in each case, the ways in which these sociological approaches seem to imply that man's being is socially determined. I will then consider Dostoevsky's Notes

from Underground³⁰ as an example of existentialism's radical response to such determinism. The selection is a good example precisely because, in lingering at the pinnacle of negative existentialism and symbolizing the void which follows, it so clearly lies in the center of the existentialist picture.

For the appreciation of Berger's material on internal reality it is best to return to the concept of institutions which summarized the earlier described sociological perspective on external reality. (Institutional analysis reveals the ~~the~~ pattern of socially constructed "grooves" into which human behavior is channeled. Institutions define the range of alternatives which develop over time, operate in terms of the structural features of the society, and are enforced by the range of social controls. But institutions also serve to define individuals. The theoretical correlary^{or} to the concept of institution at the level of internal reality is the concept of roles. Institutions are distinctive complexes of social action. Roles are institutionalized patterns of individual behavior. ~~of~~

And yet the simple existence of such patterns would not be sufficient to define individuals. ~~Behavior~~, in itself, remains external. Hence the really important point

³⁰Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich. Notes from Underground. All quotes from this source will be from the translation by Constance Garnett as included in Kaufmann, Walter (ed.) Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, World, Cleveland, Ohio (1956) pp. 52-82. Henceforth referred to as Notes.

about roles is that they not only pattern individual action but also constitute the only basis for the construction of "self." Men, in fact, always identify with the roles they perform. This point, as the summarizing contention of the sociological perspective on internal reality, is carefully developed in Berger's chapter on society in man. The conclusion which he would have us draw is that roles are both what an actor does in an institutional framework and what an actor is in that framework.

The argument leading to this conclusion starts with an extremely ordinary observation:

One feels more ardent by kissing, more humble by kneeling and more angry by shaking one's fist. That is, the kiss not only expresses ardor but manufactures it. Roles carry with them both certain actions and the emotions and attitudes that belong to these actions. The professor putting on an act that pretends to wisdom comes to feel wise. The preacher finds himself believing what he preaches. The soldier discovers martial stirrings in his breast as he puts on his uniform In other words, one becomes wise by being appointed a professor, believing by engaging in activities that presuppose belief, and ready for battle by marching in formation.³¹

The claim that behavior in general both expresses and manufactures the sentiments develops into the claim that role behavior, in particular, both expresses and manufactures one's sense of identity. No complex argument supports these

³¹Invitation, p. 96.

claims. A series of illustrations is provided; but, for the most part, the claimed connection between action and identity rests on appeals to our own awareness of the ways in which such connections normally operate. In elaborating the sociological relevance of role theory, however, Berger makes the further points that identity is socially bestowed, socially sustained, and socially transformed.

The social acquisition of identities is illustrated with the example of an army officer who is raised from the ranks. The officer will likely begin his performance, says Berger, with certain reservations - "I'm just another guy really." But due to the whole world of actions and attitudes surrounding the officer he will soon lose all such feelings and accept totally the assumptions of his superiority inherent in the army's world-view. Although the example is one of secondary socialization, Berger stresses the basic similarity of primary socialization and the identities which are bestowed upon first being initiated into the world of others. Particular reference in this connection is made to the work of George Herbert Mead.³²

(Berger uses other illustrations in showing that identity must be socially sustained as well as bestowed. On the one hand these involve cases where the social recognition of a certain identity is radically withdrawn. Berger cites the

³²Most notably, Mead. Mind, Self, and Society, University of Chicago Press, Chicago (1934).

citizen who is suddenly thrown into prison and points out that, whereas assumptions of his dignity and consideration for others were formerly regularly supported by "important" people around him, the new image of himself as irresponsible and self-interested soon have the effect of producing those traits in his behavior. On the other hand, Berger illustrates his claim that social recognitions serve to maintain identities by recalling to his readers the functions of encouragement by superiors, expectations of wittiness by others at a party and so on. Berger summarizes his arguments on this point with the claim that ". . . human dignity is a matter of social permission."³³) We would do well to relate this comment to the plight of Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in Sartre's No Exit.

(As for the social transformation of identities, Berger's references are to psychoanalysis, some observations by Erving Goffman and an array of illustrations, including religious and military "training" procedures and processes of "brainwashing."³⁴ Of these, the observations on psychoanalysis are most interesting. Berger, in a typically debunking style, insists that processes leading to psychological "cures" are really no more than glorified instances of what occurs during any attempt to alter radically an individual's sense of identity. That is, the individual is made part of an intense

³³Invitation, p. 103.

³⁴For details of these illustrations, see Invitation, pp. 103-105.

social relationship in which all prior foundations for identity are systematically rejected (or "broken" as in basic training or brainwashing) and a new identity is carefully constructed by the people in power) (the psychoanalyst, the military superiors, the advertising executives, etc.).

As part of his discussion of identity transformations, Berger refers to "group therapy" as one of the organized uses of group pressures to bring about changes in the individual's concept of self. Erving Goffman is cited for his use of the concept of "selling out" to describe the abandoning of former identities by mental patients in favor of the institutionally preferred interpretations that serve as the frame of reference for the therapeutic group. This reference to Goffman, drawn from his book Asylums,³⁵ is of importance to my own argument in two ways. First, it provides an opportunity to look again at literature which I would label "existential," for an effective illustration of the process of selling out. I have in mind Ken Kesey's novel, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.³⁶ The story is set in a mental hospital and revolves around the tactics used by one of the inmates to break up the "therapeutic" mechanisms being used to co-opt the patients. That novel constitutes an articulate presentation of ways in

³⁵Goffman, Erving. Asylums, Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York (1961).

³⁶Kesey, Ken. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Signet, New York (1962).

which the existentially aware can counteract pressures on their individuality no matter what the source or context.

The other important way in which the discussion of group therapy relates to my argument returns us, however, to the sociological perspective on internal reality by introducing the influence which others as a group may exert over the individual's sense of reality. The therapeutic group is as real as any other reference group despite the apparent artificiality of its manipulation by the psychiatrists in charge. But, in considering reference groups here, we are primarily concerned with the phenomenon of identity. Role theory leads us to conclude that man is the masks that he wears.³⁷

The person's biography now appears to us as an uninterrupted sequence of stage performances, played to different audiences, sometimes involving drastic changes of costume, always demanding that the actor be what he is playing.³⁸ ✱

And the deterministic implication of all this is that society not only controls what we do, but who we are as well. Reference group theory simply tells us more explicitly of the ways in which identity is a matter of social affiliation.

³⁷Invitation, p. 105

³⁸Invitation, p. 105.

(Berger describes a reference group as:

. . . the collectivity whose opinions, convictions and courses of action are decisive for the formation of our own opinions, convictions, and courses of action. The reference group provides us with a model with which we can continually compare ourselves. Specifically, it gives us a particular slant on social reality, one that may or may not be ideological . . . , but that will in any case be part and parcel of our allegiance to this particular group.³⁹)

A number of examples are used to illustrate the effects of reference group membership. Rather than relating Berger's examples, however, I would simply describe an incident which occurred at Simon Fraser University in the summer of 1969. A touring choir from Texas made a visit to campus that summer and thereby provided the opportunity for an almost perfectly balanced display of counter-allegiances. The choir's performance consisted of a series of numbers which, by their progression from neutral and modern to heavily religious, were clearly designed to lead the audience away from their ignorance and toward the light of Christianity. But an equally interesting "performance" was simultaneously provided by a local delegation of "the youth culture." These "delegates" had a presentation of their own which, by involving a progressively louder, closer, and more vociferous rejection of the choir, constituted an equally effective counter-position. The highlight of both

³⁹Invitation, p. 118.

performances came at the end when, just as the choir dispersed to distribute its religious pamphlets, several members of the youth culture delegation stepped forward, offering the "joint" they had been sharing to the singers.

The incident was certainly not remarkable or exceptional, other than for the almost perfect parallelism of the actions, gestures, and symbols of the two groups. And yet, from a perspective outside both groups and particularly from the sociological perspective, the simultaneity of the performances seemed all the more clearly to reveal the ways in which group membership has a profound effect on one's conception of self. The incident was also interesting because the two groups so clearly operated with equally comprehensive cultural, political, and religious conceptions of reality.

5-11-61 (In his chapter on society in man, Berger notes that there is a relationship between ~~such~~ insights of reference group theory and the sociology of knowledge. His claim is that whereas ". . . reference group theory shows us the many little workshops in which cliques of universe builders hammer out their models of the cosmos, . . . the sociology of knowledge gives us a broad view of the social construction of reality."⁴⁰

For Berger, the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the social location and the social function of ideas. These

⁴⁰Invitation, p. 120.

two, location and function, are closely related. The traditional sociological interest in "ideology," for example, is both an interest in finding which class, segment, or group in a society has developed some ideological definition of reality; and an interest in how that definition functions to "explain" and "justify" those who developed it. However, since the previous discussion of reference groups could be generalized to include larger social segments and the ideas which may be located therein, I will here be more interested in the social functioning of ideas.⁴¹ In this connection the concept of "legitimation" is crucial. ("Legitimation" is used by Berger to describe the process by which certain ideas serve to "explain" various social situations and ultimately "justify" the existence and behavior of the individuals or groups in those situations.⁴²)

On a large scale and in connection with external social features, Berger uses the example of the southern American racial system and the ways in which certain religious beliefs legitimate such an institution. But in the present context, the internal, psychological, function of legitimation is more relevant. In the case of racial-legitimizations, it is

⁴¹The fact that ideas (or knowledge) are socially located will also be taken up in part III of this thesis where the relativistic implications of the sociology of knowledge are more specifically discussed.

⁴²See Invitation, p. 111 and Social Construction of Reality, p. 61.

important to stress that both black and white participants in the system have available a ready-made interpretation and justification of their own identity and relationship to others. To free one's self from such an interpretation is extremely difficult if not impossible.

Nor need we limit the awareness of how socially constructed legitimations function psychologically to matters which are so obviously ideological in the traditional sense. A similar, though much more subtle, process can be noted with virtually all forms of "knowledge." Even the linguistic labels used to express the most ordinary "facts" carry with them important worlds of meaning. The simple recognition that I am a "man," for example, derives from, and implies, a vast array of subtle, taken-for-granted prescriptions for action and general terms of reference for self-interpretation. This final mode of psychological location in society, as bound up with the whole world of meanings captured in language, is perhaps the most general and comprehensive way in which sociology seems to lead us to the conclusion that man, in his very essence, is determined by social forces over which he has virtually no control.

(Berger's description of the sociological perspective on society in man is intended to complement the perspective on external reality by showing that ". . . society not only

controls our movements, but shapes our identity, our thought and our emotions."⁴³ Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground provides us with a radical response to this conclusion - a response which, at the same time, admits much of the conclusion's depressing implication.

The Notes from Underground are presented as the irrational ramblings of a 19th century Russian former civil servant who has, in effect, "dropped out" of a society and an intellectual milieu which totally disgust him. His verbalizations ("arguments" seems hardly appropriate) are addressed to some imagined "gentlemen" who represent the underground man's reasons for dropping out. These gentlemen argue for a sort of scientific ethics which is probably most like the one attributed to the utilitarians and particularly Bentham.⁴⁴ This scientific ethics combines enlightened self-interest with a mathematical consideration and appraisal of alternatives and their consequences. The conflict, then, between the underground man and the gentlemen is primarily ethical and philosophical rather than merely descriptive or scientific.

In order to place such an ethical and philosophical disagreement into the context of the present comparison of sociology and existentialism, we must remember the Hellenic-

⁴³Invitation, p. 121.

⁴⁴Bentham's "hedonistic calculus" was supposed to offer a foolproof mathematical way of calculating the ethical merits and demerits of any course of action.

Hebraic contrasts outlined earlier. The very distinction between ethical implications and scientific analysis is, for the most part, a modern development of the Hellenic approach to reality. A development, in fact, which very easily allows the emphasis on description and analysis to spill over into the non-rational areas of human freedom and ethics. The gentlemen, for example, quite explicitly attach the scientific appraisal of alternatives to their ethical theory. The fact that sociology is much less explicit in implying such a connection⁴⁵ should not prevent us from seeing its essentially Hellenic character and its essentially deterministic implications.

The discussion of the Notes from Underground which will now be undertaken will, then, treat these gentlemen as the spokesmen for the sociological position described so far. The man from underground, of course, will represent the existentialist response to such a position. Above all that response is based on placing the rational side of human existence into some sort of proper relationship with the wholeness of human life. The man from underground stresses this point in the following passage:

You see, gentlemen, reason is an excellent thing, there's no disputing that, but reason is nothing but

⁴⁵Attention to the later ("Positivist" and "Humanist") works of Auguste Comte shows clearly that sociology has not always denied any connection between a science of society and a scientific ethical or religious doctrine.

reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and all the impulses. And although our life, in this manifestation of it, is often worthless, yet it is life and not simply extracting square roots. Here I, for instance quite naturally want to live, in order to satisfy all my capacities for life, and not simply my capacity for reasoning, that is, not simply one twentieth of my capacity for life. What does reason know? Reason only knows what it has succeeded in learning (some things, perhaps, it will never learn; this is a poor comfort, but why not say so frankly?) and human consciousness acts as a whole, with everything that is in it, consciously or unconsciously, and, even if it goes wrong, it lives.⁴⁶

Thus, in spite of the imaginable sociological protests ". . . that no one is touching [his] free will, that all they are concerned with is that [his] will should of itself, of its own free will, coincide with [his] own normal interests, with the laws of nature and arithmetic,"⁴⁷ the existentialist will reply:

Good Heavens, gentlemen, what sort of free will is left when we come to tabulation and arithmetic, when it will all be a case of twice two makes four? Twice two makes four without my will. As if free will mean that!⁴⁸

Much of the Notes from Underground consists of elaborations and modifications of the above basic conflict. And yet there are several features of Dostoevsky's character which

⁴⁶Notes, p. 73.

⁴⁷Notes, p. 76.

⁴⁸Notes, p. 76.

relate more specifically to the sociological material on internal reality, with its attention to role theory, reference group theory, and the sociology of knowledge. All of these features derive more or less directly from what the man from underground describes as his "being too conscious." It was by being too conscious that he chose to go underground. It was by being too conscious that he ". . . did not know how to become anything: neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect."⁴⁹ It was by being too conscious that he was forced to reject the gentlemen and all that they represented in the nineteenth century intellectual community. It was by being too conscious that he could not find any justification for his actions whatsoever.

The consciousness of the underground man is almost ironically the consciousness of the human condition which would be associated with the sociological perspective, and particularly the sociological perspective on internal reality.

★ It is very important to stress that existentialism's response to sociology is not so much through a rejection of its empirical "validity" or "correctness" as through an emotive ^{irrational} rejection of its deterministic human implications. In Dostoevsky's case this rejection amounts to the insistence that, in the face

⁴⁹Notes, p. 55.

of all forces working to control individuals from outside or from the inside, it is still possible to refuse action, to refuse commitment, and to remain inert. "You know the direct fruit of consciousness is inertia, that is, conscious sitting-with-the-hands-folded."⁵⁰

Thus, the underground man's response to role theory and its implication that identity is socially bestowed, socially sustained, and socially transformed; is to do nothing and be no one. Such a response is not a particularly attractive one. The underground man repeats again and again that to be too conscious is ". . . an illness - a real thorough-going illness";⁵¹ an illness which is not shared, of course, by those less conscious - by "the direct persons and men of action." Such men are even envied:

Oh, if I had done nothing simply from laziness!
Heavens, how I should have respected myself, then.
I should have respected myself because I should at least have been capable of being lazy; there would at least have been one quality, as it were, positive in me, in which I could have believed myself. Question: What is he? Answer: A sluggard; how very pleasant it would have been to hear that of oneself! It would mean that I was positively defined, it would mean that there was something to say about me.⁵²

⁵⁰Notes, p. 64.

⁵¹Notes, p. 56.

⁵²Notes, p. 66.

The underground man's existence constitutes a similar response to reference group theory. Again the underground man counteracts the identity bestowing powers of such a group by having no identity - by believing in nothing and remaining sceptical of everyone.⁵³ And again Dostoevsky's character seems to envy those less conscious than himself. In following up his lamentable failure even to be a sluggard, he continues:

"Sluggard" - why it is a calling and a vocation, it is a career. Do not jest, it is so. I should then be a member of the best club by right, and should find my occupation in continually respecting myself.⁵⁴

The most interesting way to consider Notes from Underground as an existential response to the third area of the sociological perspective on internal reality (the sociology of knowledge and the concept of legitimation) is a bit more complicated and will require further elaboration of the notion of being "too conscious." Dostoevsky's character divides human beings into two distinct groups, those who, like himself, are "too conscious" and the others -- "the direct persons and men of action." This division is like the one Sartre develops between authentic men and those who live in bad faith. Just as for Sartre, authenticity is an avenue of escape from the hell of other

⁵³The closest thing to a reference group for Dostoevsky's hero is the sort of negative reference group which "the gentlemen" represent.

⁵⁴Notes, p. 66.

people, so likewise for Dostoevsky being too conscious is a defense against internalizations which would otherwise determine one's very essence or identity.

And yet there is one central difference between Sartre's dichotomy and the one alluded to by Dostoevsky's character. For Sartre, authenticity is the necessary pre-condition for action and commitment in life. For the man from underground, being too conscious implied total inaction.⁵⁵ If this contrast were any less total, we might attribute it to the fact that, as Kaufmann claimed, ". . . the only thing they [the existentialists] have in common is a marked aversion for each other."⁵⁶ But the picture of existentialism employed in this thesis can help in providing a much more satisfactory explanation. Sartre can insist on action and commitment because his notions of authenticity are developed after a leap of faith which can serve as the "foundation" or "primary cause" for such action. The man from underground has attempted no such leap, his consciousness is the consciousness of the void.⁵⁷

⁵⁵The contrast could also be expressed by saying that for Sartre the direct fruit of consciousness is free action and commitment. Recall the earlier quote from Notes, p. 64, ". . . the direct immediate fruit of consciousness is inertia, that is, conscious sitting-with-the-hands-folded."

⁵⁶Kaufmann, Walter. Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, World, Cleveland, Ohio (1956) p. 11.

⁵⁷Both Sartre and Dostoevsky have produced works which relate to both the positive and negative phases of existentialism. Sartre's more negative side is probably best represented by Sartre, Jean-Paul. Nausea, New Directions, New York (1964).

In describing how consciousness and inertia are related, Dostoevsky's character explains how it is with ordinary men:

. . . men of action are active just because they are stupid and limited In consequence of their limitation they take immediate and secondary causes for primary ones, and in that way persuade themselves more quickly and easily . . . that they have found an infallible foundation for their activity.⁵⁸

He illustrates this explanation by discussing vengeance and the fact that ordinary people revenge themselves because they see justice in it and hence have located a "primary cause" for their actions.

I take this account as an excellent illustration of what Berger describes as the legitimating efficacy of institutionalized beliefs. On the level of individual action it is precisely the function of ideologies to provide men with "infallible foundations for their activity"; to provide them, in short, with primary causes or motives⁵⁹ for what they do.

legitimating
activity

Dostoevsky's more positive works include Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich. The Brothers Karamazov, Penguin Books, Baltimore (1958).

⁵⁸Notes, p. 64.

⁵⁹The problem of motivation within an existential sociological framework will be taken up again in part II of this thesis.

The sociologist of knowledge, in analyzing this phenomenon and generally uncovering the social functioning of ideas, stands as curiously similar to Dostoevsky's hero, who says:

I exercise myself in reflection, and consequently with me every primary cause at once draws after itself another still more primary, and so on to infinity. That is just the essence of every sort of consciousness and reflection.⁶⁰

Being "too conscious," like doing sociology of knowledge, serves to nullify all those beliefs and conceptions which formerly offered themselves as foundations for action in the social world. The sociology of knowledge is not alone in sharing its style of consciousness with that of "too conscious" existentialists. One just as much negates the influences of reference groups by being conscious of their pressures. And one can be freed from the identity-producing influences of various role expectations once these are understood.⁶¹ Sociology, then, seems like existentialism in one further respect, beyond their analytic and descriptive agreements. Sociology, too, by implication at least, divides human beings into two groups. In this case, those who are

⁶⁰Notes, p. 65.

⁶¹These possibilities are implied in Berger's concept of sociological "ecstasy" taken up in part II of this thesis and described in Invitation, pp. 136-138.

objects of one's sociological investigations - the "ordinary" actors in the social world - and those who, like the sociologist himself, are conscious of the social forces which operate.

But the establishment of this similarity at such a high level of abstraction is not meant to detract from the fundamental disagreement between sociological and existential perspectives on internal reality. It remains true that whereas sociology implies a psychological determinism which complements the external social determiners, existentialism insists that man can say "No!" - to everything . . . to ideologies and beliefs, to pressures exerted by others, even to the forces which mold identities and create "selves."

Furthermore, if we had to grant that the sociological arguments on external reality were stronger than the existential view, it would seem equally necessary to give the weight of the argument in this section to the existentialists. Peter Berger, at least, seems willing to admit the existentialist position when he says:

The animal, if it reflected on the matter of following its instincts would say, "I have no choice." Men, explaining why they obey their institutional imperatives, say the same. The difference is that the animal would be saying the truth; the men are deceiving themselves. Why? Because, in fact, they can say "no" to society, and often have done so. There may be very unpleasant

consequences if they take this course. They may not even think about it as a possibility, because they take their own obedience for granted. Their institutional character may be the only identity they can imagine having, with the alternative seeming to them as a jump into madness. This does not change the fact that the statement "I must" is a deceptive one in almost every social situation.⁶²

⁶²Invitation, p. 142.

II. SOME MUTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM.

We have reached a point in the comparison of existentialism and sociology such that these two modes of consciousness are appreciated for their contrasts as well as their similarities. I will begin here with the key difference between existentialism and sociology, their responses to the question of human freedom, and move on to show how a possible resolution of this question exhibits features which can serve as the foundation for their similarities.

The key to the following discussion is the concept of dialectics as developed by Berger and Luckmann. Rather than treating their dialectical approach to sociological theory as an essentially minor modification, however, I will emphasize its radical implications. In particular, I will try to show how their dialectical approach makes the distinctions between internal and external reality, between static and dynamic conceptions of society, and between ideas and material conditions no longer applicable.

There will be a persistent emphasis, in part II, on human consciousness as the key variable in understanding social process. This emphasis will show in my treatment of Berger and Luckmann's dialectics as well as in the later dis-

cussions of social change and problems of motivation. It will also be prominent in the final section which suggests that existential sociology must be motivated by a new set of goals and by a human orientation to social reality. But that emphasis on consciousness is established first of all in the discussion of freedom.

1. The Question of Freedom.

In considering the problem of freedom, the following conditional truth has often been maintained: "If a man's every action is predictable, then, the man could not be free."

Dostoevsky's hero would, for example, seem to agree with such a statement. For the man from underground, the bare possibility of a scientific tabulation of all alternative courses of action poses a threat. The listing of human possibilities, ". . . like tables of logarithms up to 108,000 . . ." would, for him, ". . . reduce man to something of the nature of an organ stop or a piano key . . ." ¹ Thus, in order to reassert human freedom the man from underground denies the antecedent of the above conditional statement. He insists, that is, that scientific prediction is necessarily unable to handle the human insistence on acting out of pure fancy and caprice. Man's individuality and dignity will be retained at all costs.

Peter Berger also seems to accept the "if then" character of human freedom. "There is no way of perceiving freedom . . .," he says, ". . . except through a subjective inner certainty that dissolves as soon as it is attacked with the tools of scientific analysis."² But Berger does not deny the reality of freedom. Instead his claim is that freedom is not admissible within a scientific framework which presupposes

¹Notes, p. 70.

²Invitation, p. 124.

complete causality. In other words, Berger is arguing that the scientific universe of discourse and the universe within which reference to human freedom is possible are "strictly incommensurable." Like "utility" and "beauty," "causality" and "freedom" are not contradictory but are rather "disparate" terms.³

Both Berger and Dostoevsky would appear, then, to accept the claim that scientific determinism is incompatible with human freedom. Yet both insist on making room for freedom. But whereas Dostoevsky rejects science in doing so, Berger simply claims that the scientific mode of discourse does not exhaust the possible universes available for the understanding of man. Each of these alternatives has drawbacks. Both seem to misunderstand the implicit position of science.

The man from underground seems to think that the sort of complete caprice which is man's "most advantageous advantage"⁴

³Invitation, p. 123.

⁴At one point the underground man is ready to admit that men are guided by self interest but goes on to insist that mere "advantage" is not enough: "One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy - is that very 'most advantageous advantage' which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms." Notes, p. 71.

is somehow beyond the scope of scientific predictability. But, of course, it is not. The holism of the scientific approach is quite capable of making room for actions which appear to go against all reason. The underground man himself comes close to admitting this in a passage concerning science's ability to predict even the chaos and darkness brought about by those who would act out of total caprice.⁵ He goes on to claim that if such prediction were possible, then man ". . . would purposely go mad in order to be rid of reason and gain his point."⁶ What the underground man fails to see is that even this madness is predictable, at least in principle, given the "laws of nature" and a scientific understanding of them. As long as the scientific assumption of total causality is maintained with regard to all spheres of action and behavior there is no room possible for a freedom which depends on in-principle unpredictability.

Berger seems to recognize this point in his claim that freedom is neither that which is uncaused nor that which is unpredictable.⁷ He cites Weber in noting that if freedom were unpredictability then the madman would be the freest human being. But for Berger the retention of freedom brings other costs. In particular, he seems forced to somehow

⁵In Notes, pp. 75-76.

⁶Notes, p. 76.

⁷Invitation, p. 123.

divide the modes of reflection on the nature of reality into distinct and unrelated frames of reference. Within the scientific frame of reference one must conclude that freedom is an illusion. Within the so-called "human"⁸ frame of reference freedom is real. The cost, then, lies in the necessity for Berger of somehow claiming both that man is not free and that man is free. He summarizes his position with a kind of religious analogy:

. . . one must keep a kosher kitchen if one's intellectual nourishment is not to become hopelessly polluted -- that is, one must not pour the milk of subjective insight over the meat of scientific interpretation.⁹

My own inclination is to conclude that if scientific interpretation cannot account for what we know by subjective insight, then there may be something wrong with scientific interpretation. A resolution of the problem of freedom is not to be found by challenging the principle notion of universal causality, but rather must involve a reassessment of the scientific frame of reference as a whole; at least insofar as that frame of reference is to be applied to the understanding of human behavior.

⁸Invitation, p. 125.

⁹Invitation, p. 124.

We should begin with a closer look at freedom itself. I agree with Berger that freedom is not that which is uncaused nor that which is unpredictable. The remarkable thing is that Berger could have accepted these points and then gone on to claim that freedom is perceivable only ". . . through a subjective inner certainty that dissolves as soon as it is attacked by the tools of scientific analysis."¹⁰ One must suppose that such an analysis is in terms of causal principles and that what is revealed is that the alleged "freely chosen act" is actually quite predictable. If, however, freedom has nothing to do with causality or prediction, why should the "inner certainty" dissolve with their establishment?

I am reminded of a philosophical problem I considered some time ago. I was asked to imagine an omniscient God who was able to predict perfectly my every action for all time. The problem was then put: Could I, under these circumstances, consider myself free? I was expected to reply negatively, but reflection did not support that reply. I wondered, in the first place, what would be necessary in order that I could say to myself, "I am free." I concluded that the knowledge others, including omniscient Gods or social scientists, might possess had no bearing whatsoever.

¹⁰Invitation, p. 124.

Let us consider the following example:

Suppose I decide to take a walk in the evening. I proceed along the sidewalk and come upon a child's tricycle left in my path. I pause before the obstacle and, being inclined toward philosophical contemplation that particular evening, consider the possible choices open to me. I can pass the tricycle on the left or the right. I can leap over the obstacle. I can kick it out of my way. I can mutter a curse and detour across the street. The options open to me are wide indeed. I can, for example, ride the tricycle into the gutter and proceed with my stroll. Am I "free" to choose among these alternatives?

In this context, it seems hard to imagine what such a question could be suggesting. If the tricycle is a very small one I might be forced to forget about riding it. If I feel compelled to return home, I might rule out any lengthy detour. If I am lazy, I might not seriously consider jumping over it. And if I fear the consequences of kicking the tricycle, I may rule out that option as well. Let us suppose, then, that I simply scoff at the philosophical puzzle and pass the tricycle on the right. In any case, I am sure that having been conscious of alternatives and having chosen among them, I would not hesitate to say that my choice was free.

Certainly the knowledge which an omniscient God might have possessed would not affect that conviction. The God,

or the sociologist, might conceivably have known that my inclination toward philosophical puzzles, my laziness, my fear of the police, and my right handedness, would indeed lead to the choice of simply walking around the tricycle on the right. But that knowledge in no way affects my freedom nor my conviction that I could have chosen differently.

In fact it seems very odd to claim that freedom depends on anything more than the awareness an individual has of various alternatives and the consciousness he possesses that he could choose among them. The view which makes freedom depend on something other than this seems almost an expression of frustration . . . at the impossibility of acting on two distinct choices simultaneously or at the impossibility of acting on choices which are physically impossible (such as throwing the tricycle into orbit) or at being unable to act in ways that will bring certain consequences without in fact having to face those consequences (such as destroying the tricycle without being liable for prosecution). They seem, in other words, to depend on some conception of freedom which is independent of the situations in which that freedom is being exercised. But freedom removed from all context is absurd. It is precisely through consciousness of the context in which one acts . . . precisely through the awareness of

many different alternatives and their consequences that one is free.

Sartre's analysis of freedom agrees with this, although his own account is complicated by being expressed in his own philosophical jargon. Sartre says, for example:

There can be a free for-itself only as engaged in a resisting world. Outside of this engagement the notions of freedom, of determinism of necessity lose all meaning.¹¹

What Sartre and I are here contending, and what Berger and Dostoevsky seem to ignore, is that freedom and ~~deter-~~ ~~minism,~~¹² far from being intrinsically opposed, are intimately interdependent. Without the context of causally related factors which stand opposed to my choices, the choices themselves become meaningless.

An even more important feature of Sartre's analysis of freedom lies in the contention that the relationship between the individual and the context in which he acts is in a sense dialectical. That is, just as the individual's freedom is meaningless without the context or situation in

¹¹Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology, Hazel Barnes (tr.), Citadel, New York (1956) p. 459. Henceforth referred to as: Being and Nothingness.

¹²Where "determinism" in this context can be understood as synonymous with the assumption that human behavior is always, at least in principle, predictable.

which it is being exercised, so too is the situation or context itself meaningless without the individual's own freely chosen projects. Sartre elaborates this notion with an illustration:

A particular crag, which manifests a profound resistance if I wish to displace it, will be on the contrary a valuable aid if I want to climb upon it in order to look over the countryside. In itself -- if one can even imagine what the crag can be in itself -- it is neutral; that is, it waits to be illuminated by an end in order to manifest itself as adverse or helpful.¹³

We have, then, a conception of freedom which depends on a consciousness of situated alternatives and an appreciation of "the situation" (i.e., the social or non-social world; Sartre's term, "facticity") which depends on freely chosen human projects. Both Berger and Dostoevsky seem to miss this essential interdependency. The man from underground fails to realize that the tabulations of the "gentlemen," far from restricting his freedom, constitute no more than situational descriptions which become meaningful only when his freedom is indeed "real." Berger perpetuates the opposite error by maintaining that the universes of discourse of science and "human freedom" are essentially incompatible. On the contrary, it should now be clear that a science which is not related to individual human freedom is meaningless and irrelevant.

¹³Being and Nothingness, p. 458.

2. The Berger and Luckmann Conception of Dialectics.

I have attended here to the question of freedom and determinism because the essential interrelatedness of these two exhibits features which are common to the sort of existential sociology I would propose. Our Western intellectual history seems studded with problems like that of "free will and determinism." Thought in our culture seems almost to depend on developing incompatible opposites which mark off independent provinces of reality as their own. The famous mind-body problem and the epistemological puzzles suggesting that knowledge (a subjective state of mind) of the external (objective) world is impossible seem like the free will problem in arising from such a source. Perhaps this habit of thought is conditioned by the logic of our language. Or perhaps that logic is only an expression of a deeper, culturally conditioned, separation of the world into subjective and objective spheres. In any case, I will now argue that existentialism and sociology contain within them elements capable of overcoming a large part of the narrowness inherent in that dichotomizing.

I have, of course, myself submitted to this dichotomizing tendency - above all through references to external and internal reality. The key to an existential sociology lies

in reintegrating these two. Somehow it must be shown that what has thus far been labeled "external" is actually every bit as much internal and that what has been labeled "internal" is actually every bit as much external. Success in this task will effect an abolition of the entire distinction. We may start with attention to classical sociological theory.

Durkheim, in his commandment to treat social facts as things, as well as in his consistent reference to the predominance of "the social" over "the individual" (as exemplified in Suicide,¹⁴ e.g.) is said to have provided the strongest arguments for the view of society as an objective reality and for the conception of the individual as a product of social forces. Weber, on the other hand, through his emphasis on Verstehen, his recognition of the role of values in determining social patterns, and his concentration on the unique "historical individual," could be said to represent the opposite view; namely, the one which sees society as a form of subjective reality and the individual, his values and his outlook, as the most reliable source for

¹⁴Durkheim, Emile. Suicide: A Study in Sociology, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. (1951). See also, Durkheim, Emile. The Rules of Sociological Method, Free Press, Chicago (1950).

the grasping of "the social."¹⁵

Berger and Luckmann have not been unique in trying to unite these two theoretical positions. Talcott Parsons, for example, saw the problem and attempted a synthesis. But the Parsonian synthesis is in directions other than those suggested by Berger and Luckmann. The particular drawback of Parsons' theory lies in its continued acceptance of a separation between individuals (the "personality systems") and societies (the "social systems"). Berger and Luckmann go further, and they do so in directions which are philosophically more interesting.

Their attempt to unite the Durkheimian and Weberian perspectives consists primarily of introducing a third element, the dialectic, which seems to be drawn from the theories of Hegel and Marx. They also devote considerable portions of their theory to attempts to integrate diverse developments in twentieth century social analysis into their theory. These include the concept of institutionalization, Meadian social psychology, role theory, and reference group theory, as well as various implications of the sociology of religion and the sociology of language to name just a few.

¹⁵Weber's methodology is presented most explicitly in Weber, Max. The Methodology of the Social Sciences, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. (1949). See also Weber, Max. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York (1958). An excellent presentation of the positions of both Weber and Durkheim is presented in Parsons, Talcott. The Structure of Social Action, McGraw Hill, New York (1937).

Finally, the whole attempt is more self-consciously philosophical both for its basis in phenomenological studies by Schutz and Luckmann and in its direct claim to being "a treatise in the sociology of knowledge."¹⁶

Since my main purpose here is only to suggest some implications of an existential sociology, it will be unnecessary to go into the details of the Berger and Luckmann position. Rather it will be sufficient to relate their theory of social dialects in order to show its analytic usefulness in dealing with descriptions of reality which, like the above treatment of the problem of freedom, make room for both internal and external, individual and social, halves of reality.

Berger and Luckmann speak of dialectics in many different contexts and consequently their presentation of it takes several different forms. The most important of these maintains that the social dialectic consists of three analytically distinguishable, but temporally coinciding, "moments": externalization, objectification, and internal-
ization. Externalization is that process whereby men individually and collectively express themselves through activity in the world. A key mode of externalization

¹⁶The subtitle of Social Construction of Reality.

involves the development of typifications. Typifications are words, labels, type conceptions, or, in general, conceptual tools for dealing with "the world." The term is a difficult one to specify exactly. It is above all these typifications which allow men to refer to and share a universe of meanings relevant for their daily lives. In general, it is the externalizations of individuals and collectivities which constitute the "society" in which they live. Consequently it is in this connection that Berger and Luckmann claim that: "Society is a human product."

The second "moment" in the dialectics of reality construction is called "objectification" or "objectivation."¹⁷ This term, which is again difficult to paraphrase neatly, refers to the process whereby the products of the first moment¹⁸ are endowed with an ontological status of greater and greater concreteness or objectivity. This process is most easily detected in socialization or in close, face-to-face interaction. In socialization, for example, the process of objectification consists in representing, both overtly and covertly, the expectations of behavior, the descriptions of reality, the mechanisms for social control, and the general institutional patterns in such a way as to

¹⁷Berger and Luckmann seem to use these two interchangeably.

¹⁸That is, the typifications -- the externalizations of intersubjectively shared meanings within a texture of relevancies.

endow them with a certain tangible character which the initiate can grasp easily and "see" clearly as guides for his own personal orientation. It is by virtue of this second moment that Berger and Luckmann can claim that: "Society is an objective reality."

The third "moment," internalization, is also most clearly illustrated in the process of socialization. Yet it must be understood that, like objectification and externalization, internalization is present in all social action. Internalization is the process whereby individuals appropriate the objectified externalizations available to them in the social context in which they exist. They in effect "construct themselves" out of the material made available by society. They become "socialized." It is in this connection particularly that Berger and Luckmann refer to Mead's analysis of the process by which a "self" or an "identity" is created.¹⁹ Their claim, then, is that: "Man is a social product."

The dialectic presents us with one more philosophical problem . . . like the ones surrounding the question of freedom or the epistemological puzzles of the subject/object sort. In this case, however, the paradox is more like the chicken-or-the-egg question which derives from linear assumptions of causality. Berger and Luckmann claim that the

¹⁹In Mead, George Herbert. Mind, Self, and Society, University of Chicago Press, Chicago (1934).

three moments of the dialectical process are absolutely simultaneous. They claim that all three of their summarizing propositions are equally true and in the same way and all at the same time:

Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.²⁰

But the full impact of their position is concealed if for no other reason than that the logic of our language makes the expression of such simultaneity exceedingly difficult if not impossible. The Hegelian and Marxian conceptions of dialectics certainly faced similar difficulties. Both the later works of Hegel and the earlier works of Marx²¹ reveal obscurities which could well be attributed to their attempts to break radically with the logical strait jackets their expression was forced into. The key technique used by Berger and Luckmann to express the essential unity of their three part dialectics is found in their references to "reality." The taken-for-granted epistemology of Western thought about the world insists that "the real" is singular and that various

²⁰Social Construction of Reality, p. 61.

²¹Particularly Marx, Karl. The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, International Publishers, New York (1964). It is important, when considering the Berger and Luckmann dialectics, not to associate this exclusively with either Hegelian idealism or Marxian materialism. Indeed, a significant part of the fascination of the Berger and Luckmann dialectic lies in its suggestion that the very distinction between ideas and material conditions, in terms of which Hegel and Marx are generally differentiated, is itself false and misleading.

propositions are true or false depending on their "correspondence" with "reality."²² But Berger and Luckmann are actually claiming that reality is each of the following:

1. Reality is a projection of individuals. It is constructed by individuals who have "purposes" in life, who have orientations toward the social world and who have conceptions of relevancies with respect to that world.

2. Reality is an objective, concrete, and external structure. It is "taken for granted." It is conceived of by individuals as "out there." It is a composite of reifications.

3. Reality is also subjective, internal, and personal. It is one with the individual's identity.

The really crucial point in Berger and Luckmann is that they are speaking of one reality in all three of these formulations. The distinction between external and internal realities, which is developed in Berger's Invitation to Sociology and is incorporated in part I of this thesis, is actually an artificial one. A distinction, that is, which is conditioned by the ways we have come to think about the world. The usual mistake in sociological theory is that of

²²For much more detailed discussion of this epistemology and its problems see part III of this thesis.

choosing between a Durkheimian or a Weberian emphasis [★] and thereby failing to see that the "reality" of social process is contingent upon the internalizations of individuals just as the reality of the individual's internalizations is contingent upon the "reality" of the external social world. The situation is essentially similar to the one described concerning the problem of freedom. On that issue the protagonists have felt compelled to choose between the analytic consideration of the situation and the emotive consciousness of freedom. An awareness that these two are dialectically interrelated; and, hence, coinciding aspects of a unitary state of affairs, would have obviated such a choice. The existential sociology I am proposing would, then, be one for which this dialectical understanding of the social process is taken as the foundation.

3. Social Change and the Distinction Between Ideas
and Material Conditions.

The last section was primarily an attempt to show how the dialectical approach used by Berger and Luckmann reunites the distinction between external and internal realities. In that context, Durkheim and Weber were taken as key spokesmen for the respective emphases. But the dialectic itself is drawn from Hegel and Marx. As a result, the sociological theory of Berger and Luckmann unites more than just the external and internal perspectives on society. In particular, Berger and Luckmann suggest a new attack on the problem of social change.

Durkheim, and functional or "integration" theorists generally, have been often criticized for their "static bias." Weber, in spite of his theory of charisma, seems only slightly more able to account for social change. Only with the dialectics of Hegel and Marx does change seem to lose its character as an exceptional phenomenon and take a place at the center of sociological theory. An attempt to integrate Hegel and Marx with Durkheim and Weber must, then, be of particular interest to students of social change. Without close attention to the historical roots of the Berger and Luckmann theory, I would make the following suggestions.

The problematic distinctions between subject and object, freedom and causality, the individual and the collectivity are outcomes of preconceptions woven into our language and thought about the world. The distinction between static and dynamic conceptions of reality is not unlike these others. Our style of thinking about society demands that we come to some conclusions about what sort of reality we are dealing with. On the one hand, we are predisposed to consider reality as "the way things are." On the other, we are constantly aware that things are always becoming, that is constantly changing. It has appeared that a choice must be made . . . between the approach which deals with the way things are and the approach which deals with the dynamics of change. The choice is illusory. One can no more speak of the way things are without some conception of what they are not than one can speak of change without some conception of what it is that changes.

This mutual dependency of statics and dynamics, like the mutual dependency of freedom and situational causality and the dependency of subject and object, should make us suspicious of the opposed distinctions. "Reality" is not only both internal and external, it is also both static and dynamic. Berger and Luckmann skillfully convey this

view by consistently treating "reality" not simply as in process of changing but as being a process of change.

But even if one admits that reality is a process, it would still seem necessary to choose between an emphasis on ideas or an emphasis on material conditions in making sense of that process. In grand sociological theory these choices are best represented by Hegel and Marx.

Berger and Luckmann specifically refer only to Marxian dialectics in crediting the sources of their own theory. But it is in Hegel, and post-Hegelian idealists like Feuerbach and Hess, that one finds reference to "externalization," "objectification," and "internalization." The dialectical materialism of Marx, except in its earliest formulations,²³ had little use for such concepts. And yet Berger and Luckmann do not favor an idealistic bias. For them ideas and material conditions are inseparable. This aspect of their position is revealed in the more substantive portions of their treatise.

The Social Construction of Reality can be viewed as an attempt to establish the identity of ideal and material social factors. In saying that it "can" be so viewed, I am not implying that Berger and Luckmann would necessarily accept such an account. This point, as well as the others made in this part of the thesis, results from my interpretations and

²³ Particularly, Marx, Karl. The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, International Publishers, New York (1964).

extensions of the Berger and Luckmann position. On the question of distinguishing, or not distinguishing, between ideas and material conditions, my view is prompted by several observations.

The first of these concerns the title of the Berger and Luckmann treatise and their announced redefinition of the sociology of knowledge:

. . . we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.²⁴

Taken by itself, the claim that reality is socially constructed could be as uninteresting as the claim that social forces have worked to mold the external world. Men have collectively built cities, waged wars, moved mountains, and polluted the environment. But, by making the social construction of reality the subject of the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann become suddenly much more radical and interesting. They do not deny, of course, that "reality" is the objective state of affairs produced by social actors; the material construction of those producers. Rather they insist on a sort of double meaning for "reality" by contending that "reality" is above all that which is considered "real" by individuals and collectivities.

definition

²⁴Social Construction of Reality, p. 3.

This double meaning of "reality" comes across most clearly in Berger and Luckmann's attempts to explain how reality is socially constructed. In order to show how some of the central conceptual elements of Berger and Luckmann's description of the social process involve both cognitive (ideational) components and material or behavioral components, the following samples may be provided:

1. Behavior both expresses and manufactures the sentiments.²⁵

2. Roles are both patterns of action and sets of expectations.

3. Institutions are both patterned relations between individuals and systems for "making sense" of the reality to which they relate.

4. Reference groups are both collectivities of individuals and perspectives on reality (or structures of relevancies).

²⁵This first point has been drawn from Invitation to Sociology. The others are paraphrasings taken primarily from The Social Construction of Reality but summarizing trends expressed in both works. As for the point on behavior, a similar idea is expressed in The Social Construction of Reality and is most important in relating to prototypical forms of symbolic expression. See the discussion of the knife and the "x" on the door in Social Construction of Reality, p. 35.

5. Societies are Both Structured Relations of Institutions and Canopies of Weltanschauungen Spread Over Human Reality.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of concepts and principles which incorporate both cognitive and non-cognitive components. "Social control," for example, must be understood as including both external, material constraints on behavior and internal, ideational constraints on alternatives considered by actors. The ultimate claim is that an effective sociological theory must not only give equal weight to ideas and material conditions but must actually consider these influences as inseparable and identical. Support for this claim will necessarily derive from the effective application of such theory.

Yet there are some who would persist in distinguishing between ideas and material conditions. For the benefit of such critics it would seem necessary to admit that Berger and Luckmann are idealists.²⁶ I would go even further. From a perspective which insists on a division between ideas and material conditions, all sociology and philosophy are necessarily idealistic. There is no such thing as materialism.

²⁶"Idealist" and "idealistic" in this section refer only to the emphasis on ideas in understanding social processes. The terms would probably be less confusing without the "l," i.e., "idea-ist" and "idea-istic."

One can talk or think about material conditions or social behavior exclusively if one desires. But this will in no way make such talk any less talk about, and not a direct dealing with, those "material conditions."

This same point can be made by looking at the materialistic conception of the sociology of knowledge. For the materialist, men's ideas, values, and perceptions are a function of material conditions in which they live. But so long as that position is strictly maintained,²⁷ the materialist is left hopelessly unable to specify the dynamics of that determination. As soon as an account of the material or economic "base" or "substructure" is offered, it is immediately challengeable as itself a part of the ideas or "superstructure" which is determined.* In other words, one can never provide anything more than an account of social processes. One can never get into "the things themselves."

If, however, one erases the distinction between "perceptions of things" and "the things themselves," between the "base" and the "superstructure," between "ideas" and "material conditions"; then one is free to inquire into the dynamics of social process. This section has attempted to

²⁷There is a great deal of waffling on this point by the materialists. Commentators and interpreters of Marx, for example, repeatedly deny that Marx insisted on some such strict materialism. Nonetheless they are quick to employ their determinism in locating "false consciousness" or in debunking competing ideologies.

show how one interpretation of Berger and Luckmann's dialectical approach to social theory can help in such an undertaking.

4. Consciousness, Ecstasy, and Existentialism.

These comments on the mutual implications of sociology and existentialism have so far emphasized sociology more than they have existentialism. This section and the one following will try to refocus on issues of existential importance.

The discussion of freedom, in the first section of this part of the thesis, insisted on consciousness of alternatives as a defining characteristic of "freely chosen acts." The more practical side of such consciousness goes beyond the mere awareness of alternatives, however. It may be true that, "success is not important to freedom."²⁸ But success is, nonetheless, certainly important to most individuals who would choose to act. Consequently, the individual's consciousness of his situation must include an awareness of as many elements of that situation as possible. Among these, of course, are the factors which would stand as consequences of various possible alternatives.

In addition, the actor must be conscious of himself as an element in the total situation of his existence. This point becomes particularly relevant in the light of the above attempts to see individuals and their "internal reality" as essentially identical with the context or "external reality" in which they act. In other words, consciousness of the

²⁸Being and Nothingness, p. 460.

situation in which one acts (considered as a precondition for freedom) must include consciousness of that situation insofar as it exists as internalizations of the actor himself. Nor are these internalizations independent from "external reality." Rather it is precisely the function of the dialectical approach in sociological theory to clarify the essential interrelatedness of individual consciousness and the "external" world.

Societies are canopies of Weltanschauungen spread over human reality. This means that in the course of the changing and developing construction of reality, a vast creation of interpretive guidelines and institutional legitimations is built. This "canopy" extends over all of social reality and renders the "chaos of infinite possibilities" meaningful for actors who share that reality. The thoroughness of this sheltering function is difficult to overestimate. Not only does it find expression in the grand scheme of religious or political ideologies and values and in the very language which forms men's thoughts and in the array of institutional legitimations operating in the society; but also, and as an intergral part of all these, the canopy of social definitions of reality also serves to define, legitimate, and construct the "selves" who hold it all together (and occasionally break it up!).

Within this framework, which is essentially the outgrowth of Berger and Luckmann's attention to the sociology of religion as a central element in general sociological theory,²⁹ the individual's consciousness of his situation, along with his general "internalizations" as a whole, appear located and "locatable" only by virtue of the ideal or cultural structure which is his society. The dialectical approach to social process does not eliminate that conclusion.

So far, then, our existential sociology includes a conception of individuals as profoundly dependent, for their very sense of Being, on the society in which they exist. We have come to the same point here, on the level of theory, as we came to earlier in our discussion of Berger's view that man is in society and that society is in man. The "location" spoken of above is only another way of describing the "imprisonment" which Berger impresses on his readers. The challenge faced is that of now integrating an existential response into this set of theoretical proposals. The key to that response lies in reasserting the other half of the dialectical interdependence of society and man.

²⁹Berger and Luckmann claim that general sociological theory demands a sociology of knowledge and, furthermore, that, ". . . the sociology of knowledge presupposes a sociology of language, and that a sociology of knowledge without a sociology of religion is impossible (and vice versa)." Social Construction of Reality, p. 185.

One does not deny that man depends on society. One only insists that society likewise depends on man. Berger puts it this way:

We need the recognition of society to be human, to have an image of ourselves, to have an identity. But society needs the recognition of many like us in order to exist at all. In other words, it is not only ourselves but society that exists by virtue of definition.³⁰

Or to put it on a more concrete level by looking at a specific aspect of society, such as social control, the point may be made this way:

. . . control systems are in constant need of confirmation and reconfirmation by those they are meant to control. It is possible to withhold such confirmation in a number of ways. Each one constitutes a threat to society as officially defined.³¹

Berger details the possible ways of withholding confirmation under the headings: "detachment," "manipulation," and "transformation." Detachment is described as both a method of individual resistance to social controls and as the basis upon which many counter-societies, such as those of deviant religious or political subcultures, are built. This tactic of resisting social pressures presupposes the abilities of individuals to liberate themselves from the

³⁰Invitation, p. 129.

³¹Invitation, p. 129.

predefinitions of the larger society. Manipulation is illustrated by various techniques which inmates or workers or soldiers have used in "working the system" in order to carry out individual purposes which deviate from those which are institutionally "acceptable." This mode of "withholding confirmation," implying at least a degree of psychological detachment, is defined as the ". . . deliberate use of [social structures] in ways unforeseen by their legitimate guardians" ³² Transformation, finally, goes one step beyond manipulation and detachment in consisting of systematic redefinitions of social reality. Transformation, like detachment and manipulation, is important because of its appearance, both on the level of individual action and on the level of group behavior. Berger cites Stephen Potter's material on the "ploy" to show how ~~A~~ individuals can transform social reality by redefining situations contrary to general expectations. He discusses social change in the southern United States and the French and Russian revolutions as large scale instances of the same phenomenon.)

Detachment, manipulation, and transformation are important to the present argument because they all presuppose a degree of human consciousness. We started with a conception of free-

³²Invitation, p. 133.

dom which depended on consciousness of situated alternatives. We then argued that in practical situations this consciousness must extend to an awareness of consequences. Within the dialectical conception of social reality both man and society are now seen as existing by virtue of mutual definition. In understanding the operative definitions of social reality, one has immediately the option available of withholding confirmation of those definitions through detachment, manipulation, or transformation. And finally, to the extent that the individual's understanding of his situation is correct, he will be assured of adjusting the consequences of his various projects. Consciousness is the key both to freedom and to successful social action.

We may summarize the importance of consciousness to an existential sociology by discussing ecstasy. Berger defines "ecstasy" as ". . . the act of standing or stepping outside (literally, ekstasis) the taken-for-granted routines of society."³³ The importance of ecstasy lies in its implications for the individual capable of adopting such an ecstatic state:

What others regard as fate, he looks upon as
a set of factors to reckon with in his operations.
What others assume to be essential identity, he

³³Invitation, p. 136.

handles as a convenient disguise. In other words, "ecstasy" transforms one's awareness of society in such a way that givenness becomes possibility. While this begins as a state of consciousness, it should be evident that sooner or later there are bound to be significant consequences in terms of action.³⁴

It must be remembered that on the issue of freedom Berger insists on keeping a kosher kitchen.³⁵ It is all the more remarkable, then, that the above quote is drawn from material which he places within the scientific frame of reference. If one accepts my presentation of freedom such that consciousness of the social situation is both a necessary and sufficient condition for freedom, then the very possibility of an ecstatic state such as Berger describes is enough to permit us to say that the ecstatic individual is free.

Indeed the material which Berger goes on to discuss ". . . within an anthropological frame of reference that recognizes man as free . . ." ³⁶ is equally meaningful within the so-called "scientific" frame of reference which sees ecstasy as a possible state of human consciousness. It is almost ironic that Berger should present Sartre's concept of

³⁴Invitation, pp. 136, 137.

³⁵See this thesis, p. 69.

³⁶Invitation, p. 142.

"bad faith" and Heidegger's notion of "authenticity" in the "non-scientific" portions of his sixth chapter. Since it is my intention to reintegrate the supposedly "disparate universes" of sociology and existentialism, Berger's choice of material is particularly convenient.

In part I of this thesis, we described the willingness of Sartre and Dostoevsky to distinguish between those who are, and those who are not, in "bad faith," on the one hand, or between those who are, and those who are not "too conscious," on the other. In the present context, I hope to show that this distinction is in exact correspondence to the distinction between those who are, and those who are not, existing in a state of "ecstasy."

Ecstasy is the act of stepping outside the "world-taken-for-granted." "As soon as a given role is played without inner commitment, deliberately and deceptively, the actor is in an ecstatic state with regard to his 'world-taken-for-granted.'"³⁷ But it is precisely in terms of such a relationship to the world-taken-for-granted that the existentialists draw the distinction between bad faith and authenticity or between the "'direct' persons and men of action" and the men who are "too conscious." This can be

³⁷Invitation, p. 136.

illustrated clearly by reference to Heidegger's analysis of authenticity. To live authentically is to accept openly the uniqueness of one's own individuality. Inauthenticity is the attempt to hide from such uniqueness by conceiving of the self in terms of abstract and anonymous generalities. Such generalities are epitomized by Heidegger's concept "das Man" - the impersonal "Everyman" of the statement "Man tut das nicht" ("One does not do that"). The whole vast framework of social definitions and legitimations has precisely the impersonal character of "das Man."³⁸ The existentialists are careful to emphasize the ways in which impending death serves to reveal the terror assuaging functions of inauthenticity based on such abstract generalizations as "Man is mortal."³⁹

It is clear, then, that inauthenticity and bad faith are like the normal, "non-ecstatic," forms of social existence in accepting social definitions and legitimations as real. The consciousness of the underground man, and the sort of authenticity which Sartre recommends, demand the same things demanded by sociological ecstasy; namely, a conscious "stepping

³⁸Berger does well in pointing out the similarities between Heidegger's Man and Mead's "generalized other." See Invitation, p. 146.

³⁹The classic illustration of this view is Tolstoy, Lev Nikolaevich. The Death of Ivan Illych, in Rahv, Philip (ed.) The Short Novels of Tolstoy, Dial Press, New York (1949).

outside" of social conventions. And yet it seems odd that such an obvious similarity should have been apparently overlooked by Berger. We must try to suggest reasons why Berger's discussion of freedom, authenticity, and bad faith were separated from his discussion of detachment, manipulation, transformation, and ecstasy.

5. Social Change and the Problem of Motivation.

In this section I will consider one important similarity between sociological "ecstasy" and the pinnacle of negative existentialism. My primary concern will be with the problem of motivation and difficulties which the ecstatic man has in providing reasons for his acts. In spite of these difficulties it will be possible to suggest some new approaches to the understanding of social change. Once more we shall start with the concept of freedom and reconsider Berger's reluctance to admit it into the scientific frame of reference.

Just prior to his discussion of the existentialists, Berger announces:

The closest we have been able to come [in discovering human freedom] is to show . . . a certain freedom from social controls. We cannot possibly discover freedom to act socially by scientific means. Even if we should find holes in the order of causality that can be established sociologically, the psychologist, the biologist, or some other dealer in causations will step in and stuff up our hole with materials spun from his cloth of determinism.⁴⁰

This quote reveals a clear persistence of the notion that freedom depends on the inability to establish a causal

⁴⁰Invitation, p. 141.

explanation. That point of view has already been rejected -- by Berger himself⁴¹ as well as in my own account. But the passage additionally draws a distinction between freedom from and freedom to, which has yet to be discussed.

Probably this distinction is itself part of Berger's frustration at the impossibility of discovering an uncaused act. Or, if it is more than that, it may be an expression of other frustrations like those described earlier.⁴² But whatever Berger has in mind with the distinction between "freedom from" and "freedom to," it does provide a convenient way of raising what I would call the existential problem of motivation.

The best literary presentation of this problem is by Dostoevsky in Notes from Underground. The man from underground is certainly the paradigm of detachment. Yet, for him, "being too conscious" led directly to inertia; to a conscious, "sitting with the hands folded." The freeing of oneself from the artificial "primary causes" which society offers as legitimate motivations does not by any means automatically suggest new purposes for existence or reasons to act. Once again the existentialist "picture" can be of service. At the pinnacle

⁴¹See again his comment that: "Freedom is not that which is uncaused." p. 123. One could also ask how scientific determinism could make freedom to act impossible without similarly rendering freedom from impossible.

⁴²See this thesis, p. 72.

of negative existentialism, one is faced with nothingness - with inertia and the void. The question "Why?" seems unanswerable. Within the sociological perspective being proposed, the state described as "ecstasy" is very much like the pinnacle of negative existentialism. At the same moment one is totally freed from preconceptions based on social definitions of reality, one is also left alone and without guidelines in choosing among the infinite variety of possible courses of action. It is to this observation that Berger refers in the closing sentences of chapter six:

Society provides us with warm reasonably comfortable caves, in which we can huddle with our fellows, beating on the drums that drown out the howling hyenas of the surrounding darkness. "Ecstasy" is the act of stepping outside the caves, alone, to face the night.⁴³

For the existentialist, of course, the nothingness which follows the pinnacle of negative existentialism is bridged by an irrational "leap of faith." It is not unreasonable to suggest that a similar phenomenon should be included in sociological theory. The ecstatic man brings meaning back into the world he has negated by simply choosing some course of action. That choice, from the perspective of an existential sociology, is essentially irrational -- it is unmotivated ("gratuitous," to use the label of some existentialists). That

⁴³Invitation, p. 150.

does not mean that someone could not locate such a choice within some causal scheme. It does not mean that some omniscient social scientist or God could not have predicted which path would be taken. It only means that the actor himself was conscious of the situation in which his choice was made and that he perceived his choice as essentially unmotivated.

For the ecstatic man "givenness" becomes "possibility," but possibility does not thereby automatically become actuality. It is furthermore necessary to admit that ecstasy is not an absolute state of affairs. Just as there are degrees of consciousness of situations, so too are there degrees of detachment, degrees of stepping outside the taken-for-granted routines of society. This is an important qualification, since an appreciation of the varying degrees to which men may be conscious of alternatives open to them will help us to see how new social arrangements and new social definitions come about. Within a sociological theory which unites internalization, objectification, and externalization into one common process of reality construction, the recognition that individuals may be variously detached from the world-taken-for-granted goes far in helping us to understand social change. In the remainder of this section, I will refer to three different examples which illustrate basic processes of social change.

These will be presented in order from those involving forms of consciousness which are relatively less detached to those which imply almost total detachment.

We may start with the socialization process itself since, in spite of the mundane character of social change at this level, it is paradigmatic for our understanding of all reality construction processes.

A father, who himself has doubts about the inherent respectfulness of "elders," will be unable to inculcate such respect to a son without the overtones of detachment which his own doubts imply. If his son refers to an aunt as an "old hag," for example, the father is certain to reprimand the son with some reference to the instrumental lack of wisdom which such a reference entails rather than to the ontological impropriety of the label itself. The reprimand may in part include: "Don't let me ever catch you saying that again!" But the repeated confrontation with similar "problems" will soon reveal the father's notions as to why the label is bad. In the long run it will not be so much, "Don't say that because your aunt (or other elder) is intrinsically a fine person" as it will be "Don't say that because if you do, certain undesirable consequences will follow." In other words, the instrumental conception of respect is bound to be externalized by the father in some form, object-

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ified in the relevant socialization processes, and internalized by the son. The son in turn, of course, may then develop his own consciousness of situations demanding respect; and externalize his own conception in some still further altered form.

A slightly greater detachment is sometimes discernable in the play-like character of some social interaction.⁴⁴ Discussion with students of Stephen Potter's "ploys" revealed that many people engage in pranks which may illustrate the effects of conscious detachment from social definitions. One student told of a favorite prank involving the misuse of library books. He would first locate an unwanted hard-cover book and then doctor the binder portion of the volume so as to make it appear typical of those kept in the public library. The book was then "planted" in the stacks near a study table. Later the student would remove the book and sit at the table with other students, appearing to take notes from the disguised book. From time to time, with only the barest pretense of concealment, he would quickly tear pages out of the volume and stuff them into his briefcase. The others at the table, needless to say, looked on with obvious amazement.

Such a prank is instructive for several reasons. In spite of the playful intent of the student's pastime,

⁴⁴For a thorough treatment of this mode of human behavior see Huizinga, Johan. Homo Ludens, Beacon Press, Boston (1955).

it is easy to generalize the incident to cover other, more significant, social acts. Such acts both illustrate the actors freedom from internalized social norms and show one important way in which such disengagement can directly effect the actions of others. One can almost chuckle at the prospect of other students huddled in carrells attempting to remove vital pages of reserved books. Although such redefinitions of social reality may be minor in themselves, one might consider, in a new light, other forms of social action which are more significant.

The final example I would propose, in illustrating basic processes of social change which derive from conscious detachment, is drawn from the activities of those in the new "youth culture." In a 1969 visit to Simon Fraser University, Jerry Rubin described a number of actions carried out by the "Yippies." In the course of these descriptions, Rubin claimed that the most revolutionary act possible in North America today is the public burning of dollar bills. Such a claim is plausible in the light of the previous example and with the awareness that such an overt attack on unquestioned symbols fits nicely with a whole range of redefinitions, or "transformations," being undertaken by various members of the youth culture. Ken Kesey's "pranksters," for example, had a consistent policy of engineering large scale social

pranks.⁴⁵ Indeed the whole life style of these "pranksters," as well as the life styles of various "hippie" predecessors and descendants, could be considered as significant attacks on the taken-for-granted values and routines of "straight" society.

To a general account of social change which results from degrees of conscious detachment, an existential sociology might add the suggestion that all forms of social change involve the negation of existing official definitions. In the social sphere, then, just as in the philosophy of the existentialists, the nihilism which characterizes the pinnacle of negative existentialism is an important precondition for truly free social action. It could even be claimed that negation, as a ^{generalized mode of being in existence} generalizable mode of consciousness, is internalized in more mundane forms of social existence and only awaits the ^{the opportunity} proper situations and circumstances for externalization in other broader social contexts. The conscious individual who learns how to say "no!" in one situation can easily enough transfer this "knowledge" to other situations - and eventually even to the total constellation of ^{life} social processes which is ~~his~~ society.

This section has not "solved" the problem of seeing how freedom from can be transformed into freedom to act. And yet the examples I have offered are intended to indicate

⁴⁵ See Wolfe, Tom. The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, Bantam Books, New York (1968).

that the best answer to this question is probably, "very easily." Nor is this the place to enter into a more complete analysis of the youth culture and its apparently transformational capacities. I would hope, however, that I have indicated that such an analysis can greatly benefit from the approach here being suggested. The next section will once again take up the problem of motivation. This time with reference to a sociological model already proposed for the explanation of motives.

6. On "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive."

Thus far I have endorsed the Berger and Luckmann concepts of "externalization," "objectification," and "internalization," and have argued that these ultimately blurs the distinction between internal reality and external reality and between ideas and material conditions. I have also offered some vague proposals for understanding social change in a way consistent with the recognition that freedom is a possible, and very important, form of human consciousness. But there has been little to indicate how one might engage in existential sociological research. If anything, such research would seem even more difficult by virtue of the rejection of formerly operative sociological dichotomies. Though this present section will do as much to raise new difficulties as it will to solve these older ones, it will, I hope, at least indicate that sociological approaches which recognize human consciousness are not entirely new.

I have in mind Mills' article, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive."⁴⁶ This article, published in 1940,

⁴⁶American Sociological Review, Vol. V, No. 6 (December, 1940), pp. 904-913. Reprinted in Mills, C. Wright. Power, Politics, and People, Oxford, New York (1963), pp. 439-452. Henceforth referred to as: Power, Politics, and People.

anticipates much of the position taken by Berger and Luckmann. In particular, Mills recognizes that the sociology of language and sociological psychology are very important to our understanding of social action and the explanation of motives:

It is the purpose of this paper to outline an analytic model for the explanation of motives which is based on a sociological theory of language and a sociological psychology.⁴⁷

The theory of language to which Mills refers is one which directly rejects the older view that language merely "expresses" some prior elements within the speaker. Instead, language is viewed as itself an integral and dynamic element in the social process. Vocabularies serve as guides for conduct and for the interpretation and judgment of conduct by others. The "sociological psychology" is a composite of views developed by George Herbert Mead, Karl Mannheim, and the pragmatists.

Very important for the present argument is Mills' insistence on studying vocabularies of motives within social situations where motives are being avowed or imputed.

What is needed is to take all . . . terminologies of motive and locate them as vocabularies of motive in historic epochs and specified situations. Motives

⁴⁷Power, Politics, and People, p. 439.

are of no value apart from the delimited societal situations for which they are the appropriate vocabularies. They must be situated.⁴⁸

In detailing the sorts of functions which vocabularies of motive may have in various social situations, Mills makes several important suggestions. For example he claims that social actors are influenced by anticipations of others evaluations.

Often anticipations of acceptable justifications will control conduct. ("If I did this, what could I say? What would they say?") Decisions may be, wholly or in part, delimited by answers to such queries.⁴⁹

He also offers suggestions which are clearly in line with my claims that distinctions between ideas and material conditions and between individuals and collectivities should be broken down. In the following quotes, motive imputation is again treated as an integral part of the social situation. Motives are effective, simultaneously, on both the actor and the others in the situation.

⁴⁸Power, Politics, and People, p. 452.

⁴⁹Power, Politics, and People, p. 443. For more detailed developments of this suggestion readers should consult Harold Garfinkel's article on decision making by jurors, see part III, f.n. 38, p. 154, and various studies of deviance, see part III, f.n. 29, p. 147.

Diplomacy in choice of motive often controls the diplomat. Diplomatic choice of motive is part of the attempt to motivate acts for other members in a situation.⁵⁰

Motives, furthermore, must be appreciated as themselves a form of action.

When an agent vocalizes or imputes motives, he is not trying to describe his experienced social action. He is not merely stating "reasons." He is influencing others -- and himself. Often he is finding new "reasons" which will mediate action. Thus we need not treat an action as discrepant from "its" verbalization⁵¹

There are other very astute suggestions made by Mills in this brief article including some with clearer socio-psychological relevance. For example:

One of the components of a "generalized other," as a mechanism of societal control, is vocabularies of acceptable motives. For example, a business man joins the Rotary Club and proclaims its public-spirited vocabulary.⁵²

As well as suggesting guidelines for a new sociological approach to the study of motives, Mills tries to apply his scheme to help in understanding various general changes in vocabularies of motive over time and from group to group in modern society. Since my main purpose here is only to show

⁵⁰Power, Politics, and People, p. 443.

⁵¹Power, Politics, and People, p. 444.

⁵²Power, Politics, and People, p. 446.

an example of a sociological approach which is consistent with the proposals outlined in this chapter, I will leave it to the reader to consult Mills' article for further details.

Mills' argument is of interest not only because of the sort of sociological attention he gives to motives but also because of the very fact that motives are chosen for attention at all. In the previous section we saw how the existential problems around finding "reasons" for action become central to an existential sociological theory of social change. Mills' article is, then, particularly relevant for suggesting a sociological understanding of human action in the face of existential possibilities.

And yet the complications created by conscious detachment or ecstasy are not well handled within Mills' model. We would expect that the greater an individual's detachment, from the official definitions operating in the situations in which he acts, the less we could rely on motive imputation and avowal as guidelines in understanding his action. At the furthest extreme, that of total ecstatic detachment, the individual's acts must be understood as essentially gratuitous. His employment of a vocabulary of motives in such a case would be totally manipulative. Whereas the non-ecstatic man, like "the direct persons and men of action" described by Dostoevsky's hero, is able to answer the question "Why?" with

sincere reference to socially acceptable motives;⁵³ the ecstatic man, like the man from underground who is "too conscious," would have to answer, if he is sincere, that for him "Why not?" is a reason. Nor is such a person likely to feel compelled to be sincere.

The presence of such "ecstatic" types within the society is bound to create particularly acute difficulties for any sociological attempts to understand human action. Nonetheless, I would argue that a sociology which integrates key insights of existentialism is at least better equipped to handle such difficulties insofar as it is able to see them as similar to the philosophical problems to be found at or near the pinnacle of negative existentialism.

I do not mean to imply in the foregoing remarks that Mills was unaware of such problems. In fact, as a footnote to the business man - rotary club member example quoted above, Mills makes the following explicit qualification:

Of course, since motives are communicated, they may be lies I am here concerned more with the social function of pronounced motives than with the sincerity of those pronouncing them.⁵⁴

⁵³The "primary causes" described by the man from underground. See this thesis, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴Power, Politics, and People, p. 444.

This qualification would seem to restore the applicability of Mills' model. He is simply not interested in the "real" motives of actors or in the social consequences of insincerity. And yet, if such insincerity becomes widespread in a society, it is hard to imagine "the social function of pronounced motives" remaining unaffected. A sociology of modern society must at least consider such a possibility.

I raise this point here for two reasons. The first of these is related to the subject matter of sociology and consists of noting that various modes of detachment, manipulation, and transformation are becoming increasingly common in society today. These range from the Madison Avenue variety of consumer manipulation to the social detachment characteristic of today's youth culture and include many forms of collective and individual action and inaction between these poles. Associated with this wide variety of social responses is an equally wide variety of motive vocabularies which are avowed and imputed with varying degrees of insincerity. I suggest that the sort of existential sociology here being proposed is uniquely equipped to at least describe, if not "explain," modern society.

The second reason for discussing the complications created by admitting "insincerity" into our sociological

theory of motivation is primarily methodological. The sociologist who would attempt even to describe social action while insisting that human beings are capable of conscious detachment must be prepared to adopt new methods and a new set of motives for his own activity as sociologist. The final section of part II will consider some of these methodological implications.

7. Verstehen and Compassion: The Method and Goal of an Existential Sociology.

The existential sociologist, more so than his colleagues who do not admit freedom into their scientific framework, must be prepared to abandon some of the traditional goals of the sociological enterprise. The attempt to produce "valid findings," for example, will have to be replaced by the attempt to "understand" the social process being investigated. There are two reasons why I think such a change in goals is necessary. The first is that "valid findings" is meaningful only in a framework where an outdated epistemology is still assumed.⁵⁵ The second reason derives from the existentialist element itself and consists of the simple reminder that human consciousness so complicates the social process as to render traditional attempts to gather and interpret "hard" sociological "data," meaningless and irrelevant. At one time, it seemed reasonable to seek sociological understanding through such methods. I have tried to show that understanding now must be quite different. In concluding this chapter, I want to elaborate on what is entailed by the term "understanding" as a method and as a goal for existential sociology.

⁵⁵This outdated epistemology will be discussed in part III of this thesis.

"Understanding" as a method rather than a goal for sociological research is familiar, if not uncontroversial. The method of understanding has also been called: "the interpretive method," "sympathetic introspection," "the documentary method," "the method of insight," "the method of intuition," "the clinical method," "the emphatic method," and so on.⁵⁶ In the literature of sociology this method has been consistently attributed to those who have maintained, explicitly or implicitly, that the best comprehension of social processes is achieved through developing an "understanding" of the ways in which social actors view their world. The best known source for this position is to be found in Max Weber's discussion of Verstehen.⁵⁷

Some modern theorists have argued that all sociological investigations, even the most "rigorous," must in fact rely on the method of understanding.⁵⁸ It is not my purpose here to support such an argument. I would, however, insist that the sort of existential sociology I am recommending can guarantee its relevance only by applying such a method. Any

⁵⁶This list of terminologies has been drawn from Garfinkel, Harold. Studies in Ethnomethodology, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey (1967) pp. 94-95. Henceforth referred to as: Studies in Ethnomethodology.

⁵⁷I understand this as a large part of the reason why Jaspers has called Weber an existentialist, as we shall see in discussing Verstehen as a goal.

⁵⁸Particularly Garfinkel in the above cited chapter of Studies in Ethnomethodology. See also Cicourel, Aaron. Method and Measurement in Sociology, Free Press, New York (1964).

particular inquiry into motivation (such as might be patterned on the Millsean principles outlined above) must include, in any description of the "situations" or the "motives" of situated acts, an interpretation of the meanings, or lack of meanings, which are attached to the situations and motives by the actors involved.

Aside from the necessity of Verstehen for any applications of existential sociology, there are good theoretical reasons why such a method is imperative. Sociology, as I have already argued,⁵⁹ is necessarily itself a form of consciousness. The theoretical position which sees ideas and material conditions as essentially identical is bound to imply that validity can only be based on an accurate "understanding" of the social process by the observer.

There are also good reasons for emphasizing Verstehen as a goal for sociological work rather than as merely a method. Since existential sociology rejects notions that there is a way-things-are in the social world, the search for validity or correctness must give way. "Validity" and "correctness" are based on a correspondence theory of truth. ~~Traditional-~~ Traditionalists have assumed that the "correctness" of a sociological explanation was a function of its relative "closeness" to the "reality" which it describes. The sort of existential sociology

⁵⁹ See this thesis, pp. 89-90.

being proposed here explicitly rejects such a concrete conception of "reality." It must therefore substitute attempts to achieve "plausible" or "interesting"⁶⁰ accounts of the social process for attempts to "explain" or "predict" that process. As a personal orientation for the sociologist, the desire to "understand" would, consequently, replace the desire to "know."

Verstehen, as a goal for existential sociology, is also appropriate because of more directly philosophical considerations. Weber's concept of Verstehen bears a striking resemblance to a kind of total compassion common to many existentialists, but best typified in the literature of Albert Camus. The choice of literary works by Sartre and Dostoevsky, in the first part of this thesis, was in part intended to illustrate the peculiar abilities of the novelist to achieve a kind of "understanding" of his characters which is extremely relevant sociologically. Among the more formal writings of the existentialists, it is Heidegger who deals most specifically with the notion of understanding. For Heidegger, understanding is a total openness to existence -- a total awareness of the Being that encompasses and includes the self.⁶¹ In Camus, however, understanding seems almost

⁶⁰For an example of an account which is offered as "interesting," see the discussion of Goffman in part III, particularly p. 159.

⁶¹See Heidegger, Martin. "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," in Kaufmann, Walter. Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, pp. 206-221, and also William Barrett's treatment in Irrational Man, pp. 221ff.

better described as total compassion. Camus' understanding is a much more "human" thing. His compassion shines forth in all his works, but in none of them more clearly than in The Plague.⁶² No perceptive reader can fail to see in The Plague a kind of total acceptance of everything and everyone. The physical horrors of the plague only serve to highlight the compassion illustrated by the acts and attitudes of the citizens of Algiers.

By seeing that Verstehen can be as radical and almost religious as Camus' style of compassion, one arrives at the final unification which is implied by an existential sociology. A complete understanding of social reality depends as much on an emotive and compassionate humanness as it does on a cognitive understanding which is simply adopted as a methodological device. One of the ironies in the history of disciplines which have studied human society is that they have appeared to move further and further from a recognition of themselves as humanities. The unique access to human reality available to us because we are human would, I think, be made reavailable within the framework of a consciously existential sociology.

⁶²Camus, Albert. The Plague, Stuart Gilbert (tr.), Knopf, New York (1964).

III. THE PROBLEM OF REALITY

This thesis has thus far been organized around problems created by existentialism for sociology and by sociology for existentialism. The proposals of the last chapter were suggested as additions to the theoretical position taken by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann; additions, that is, which were designed to make more explicit the awareness that human beings are conscious, purposive, "free" agents engaged in the dialectics of social reality construction. But the very most central assumption of the Berger and Luckmann position, namely, that reality is socially constructed, has been largely taken for granted. It would be absurd, however, to pretend that that assumption is itself non-controversial. On the contrary, by granting it we have been able to pass over a number of very important problems which are still exercising the efforts of social scientists and philosophers throughout the intellectual community. This third part of the thesis is intended as a partial review of these efforts and could be considered as an important prerequisite for the proper appreciation of all of the previous discussion.¹

¹The material to follow has not been presented as an explicit response to positions already taken by philosophers of the social sciences. The "traditionalist" view (outlined in section 2) roughly resembles the position taken by the empiricists, but my intention has been to describe contrasting epistemological assumptions as these are embodied in social scientific theory and research, rather than as they are explicitly articulated by the philosophers.

1. The Social Construction of Reality and Epistemological Relativism.

Berger and Luckmann summarize the opening comments of their treatise with the following remarks:

It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such knowledge. And insofar as all human "knowledge" is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted "reality" congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.²

By setting out their task in these terms, Berger and Luckmann have avoided facing the extremely thorny central philosophical issue which I have called "the problem of reality." Metaphysical and epistemological questions such as "What is real?" "How does one know?" and "What determines the validity of human knowledge?" are all conveniently avoided. They are not concerned with ". . . the ultimate validity or or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of . . . knowledge." They are content to keep terms like "knowledge," "valid," and "real" in quotation marks.

²Social Construction of Reality, p. 3.

But this is certainly not the case with the vast majority of sociological and philosophical writing. On the contrary, and despite many token denials,³ most such intellectual effort has been expended "in search of truth," in attempts to make sense of "the way things are." In other words, philosophers and social scientists, including most sociologists of knowledge, have sought to conduct their inquiries so as to contribute in their own way to the clarification of knowledge about reality.

It has been this sort of motivation which has led to the obvious reluctance of previous sociologists of knowledge to go "all the way" in claiming that "knowledge" is socially determined. Karl Marx, for example, made room for traditional epistemological assumptions by insisting that certain social perspectives provided for correct perception of reality.⁴ Even Karl Mannheim, who took a far more radical and inclusive approach to the sociology of knowledge,⁵ balked at the terrors of relativism. Both his attempts to locate a social segment whose knowledge is uninfluenced by social determiners (the freischwebende intel-

³Such as the use of quotation marks to indicate the questionable epistemological status of others' views.

⁴See Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. The German Ideology, International Publishers, New York (1947).

⁵See Mannheim, Karl. Ideology and Utopia, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York (1936).

ligenz) and his proposals for a "relational" epistemology, testify to his reluctance to abandon all forms of absolutism.

The spectre of relativism has so haunted sociological theorists that they are led at times to an almost a priori denial of any relativistic conclusions which crop up. Talcott Parsons presents us with a good example of such absolutist ad hocery in his discussion of Weber. He is discussing Weber's methodology and particularly the proposal that all sociological approaches depend on some selection or another of the data to be considered. This data selection will proceed, says Weber, from the interests, or value relevancies, of the social scientist himself, and will result in the development of various "conceptual schemes" for making sense of social reality. Social scientific knowledge then appears as a function of the values and conceptual schemes of various investigators. Parsons comments on this state of affairs as follows:

And however different from each other the conceptual schemes are, in terms of which such knowledge has been formulated, they must if valid be "translatable" into terms of each other or of a wider scheme. This implication is necessary to avoid a completely relativistic consequence that would overthrow the whole position.⁶

⁶Parsons, Talcott. The Structure of Social Action, McGraw Hill, New York (1937) p. 601. A valuable collection of equally ad hoc rejections of relativism can be found in Schoeck, Helmut and Wiggins, J.W. (eds.) Relativism and the Study of Man, Van Nostrand, Princeton, N.J. (1961).

Rather than considering the possibility that "translatability" cannot be achieved, and, hence, that the whole position of traditional sociological theory must be overthrown, Parsons seems to simply reject relativism because he insists on some sort of traditional conception of attempts to make sense of reality.

A precise understanding of the defensiveness displayed by supporters of a traditional conception of epistemology is difficult to achieve. What is needed is an outline of the ordinary position taken by such supporters.

2. Traditional Epistemology and Its Problems.

Unfortunately such an outline will necessarily involve oversimplifications of the epistemology and ontology of the traditionalists. As a simple heuristic device, and with the express qualifications: a) that I am not attributing such gross naiveté to any theorists and b) that the list is neither comprehensive nor sufficiently defined, I will offer the following list of basic, traditionalist assumptions about reality, perception, knowledge, and language:

1. Reality is the sum total of the way things are. It is singular and comprehensive. This is not to deny that only certain portions of reality may be available to various individuals.

2. Reality, or portions of it, are comprehended by human beings through their senses.

3. Knowledge, which is always knowledge about the way things are, that is, about reality, is obtained through perception in connection with certain operations of reason.

4. Knowledge is distinguished from belief or opinion above all by the fact that knowledge, if it is really knowledge, cannot be false.

5. People can be deceived; error is possible. Perhaps error is even the commonest state of affairs. People can be deceived by their senses as well as by a

number of other extraneous influences upon their comprehension. Nonetheless, the elimination of error and deception is, at least in principle, possible.

6. Language is the vehicle through which knowledge (as well as belief and opinion) is expressed and communicated. Hence, language is related to reality by expressing propositions or statements about reality.

7. Statements or propositions are true by virtue of some correspondence they have with reality, i.e., with the way things are.

8. In summary, it may be said that: Through the perception of reality one has knowledge which is expressed in language.

One very important feature of this idealized and simplified outline of traditional epistemologies is the linearity of the connection between reality, perception, knowledge, and language. The primary direction of flow is as follows:

reality → perception → knowledge → language

where items to the right of the arrows presuppose items to the left. It is furthermore important to note that only certain reverse influences can be granted. It might be granted, for example, that the state of knowledge of some knower can effect his powers and accuracy of perception. It might even

be granted that a number of reverse influences actually operate (for example, that the language of an actor may effect what he knows or believes). What must not be affected, however, is the nature of knowledge itself. That must depend only on some unspecified correspondence with "the way things actually are." Hence what above all cannot be altered, (in any direct way) by the other elements of the epistemological progression, is the singular, basic quality of reality itself. Reality is the fundamental standard against which all candidates for the status of "correct perception," "valid knowledge," or "true statement" ~~must ultimately be compared.~~

This is, of course, precisely the reason why Berger and Luckmann's claim that reality is socially constructed constitutes a total rejection of traditional epistemology. For what they mean is nothing so innocent as the claim that societies constitute organized attempts to change the physical world. Rather they take it for granted that "reality," as the elemental substratum of ordinary epistemology, is the direct production of the individuals who "perceive," "know," and "describe" it to one another. To contend that reality is socially constructed is tantamount to contending that each different society or social situation, i.e., each different collectivity of individuals, will entail a different reality. In other words, Berger and Luckmann take it for granted that

"reality" is in no way singular or unitary. For Berger and Luckmann one must always speak of "realities" rather than "reality" or of "a reality" rather than "the reality" and one must always keep the quotation marks.

As I have said above, Berger and Luckmann, and this thesis itself, begin with the granting of this radical revision. What must now be done is to look at some of the reasons why such a revision has seemed necessary. We may start by considering the work of Alfred Schutz, whose phenomenological inquiries into the philosophical foundations of the social sciences have pointed out several important reasons why these "sciences" must especially be concerned with the epistemological complications of considering reality as socially constructed.

. . . there is an essential difference in the structure of the thought objects or mental constructs formed by the social sciences and those formed by the natural sciences. It is up to the natural scientist and to him alone to define, in accordance with the procedural rules of his science, his observational field, and to determine the facts, data, and events within it which are relevant for his problems or scientific purposes at hand. Neither are these facts and events pre-selected, nor is the observational field pre-interpreted. The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not "mean" anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein. The observational field of the social scientist, however, namely the social reality, has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking therein. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted

this world which they interpret as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behavior by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world.⁷

With the help of one more lengthy quote, this time drawn from the introduction by Maurice Natanson to the Collected Papers of Alfred Schutz, we will be squarely into the problems posed for traditional epistemologies by recent intellectual developments. The following quote can be read as almost a continuation of the quote above, and should be carefully considered both for its explicit reference to "the problem of reality" which I have tried to outline and for its closing reference to an important existentialist's awareness of this problem:

If the primary concern of the social scientist should be the meaning which the actor bestows upon his own act, it follows that the actor is responsible for defining that meaning as well as the situation of which it is part. The situation of the actor is primarily his problem, not that of the scientific observer. Moreover, the way in which the actor locates and interprets a given situation is a function of his subjectivity and corresponds to elements of his biographical situation. The social world is constituted by a multiplicity of actors, each of whom defines that world in related but individuated ways. Whether or not an actor defines his

⁷ Schutz, Alfred. "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," Journal of Philosophy, LI (April 1954) pp. 266-267. Quoted in Cicourel, Aaron. Method and Measurement in Sociology, Macmillan, New York (1964) pp. 49-50. The work of Schutz is at the very center of such sociological theories as have been developed by Berger and Luckmann and by the ethnomethodologists to be discussed later.

situation in a manner that tallies generally with what we call "objective" facts, his action is meaningful and quite relevant to the social scientist. However an actor defines his situation, his action is a datum for inquiry. That there is not only a multiplicity but a relativity in the definition of a situation by different actors or even by the same actor at different times is a part of the essential structure of daily life. Understanding the social world means understanding the way in which men define their situations. Here Dr. Schutz turns to the sociology of W.I. Thomas as an American and more recent complement to Weber's subjective interpretation of meaning. "If men define situations as real," Thomas writes, "they are real in their consequences." If I define a situation as pleasant, threatening, boring, challenging, or fantastic, the way in which I have defined it establishes the status that situation has within my world, for the time being at least. Rather than treating such definition as a "response" or "reaction" to certain objective states of affairs, the social scientist, Dr. Schutz suggests, has to understand that definition means action and that interpreting the world is a prime mode of acting in it. That I may define the "same" situation in a radically different manner than does my fellow man leads philosophically to the problem of reality. Insisting as common sense does, if questioned, that there is an objective reality which is the "same" for all normal observers is not to be confused with demonstrating that this is indeed so or even understanding what is implied in such a claim. Men living in the paramount reality of everyday life are enmeshed in situations as they define them in the context of their lives. It is idle for the neutral observer to point out to committed actors the "objective" situation. As Sartre puts it: for the Romans, Carthage was conquered, but for Carthaginians, Carthage was enslaved.⁸

⁸Natanson, Maurice. in the introduction to Schutz, Alfred. Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague (1962) p. xxxvi.

The social scientist, then, seems compelled to give up the basic assumption that reality is singular, at least insofar as he works to comprehend the forces operating in society. His very "data," his own thought-objects, must be constructed on the basis of various definitions of reality which the social actors he seeks to study have constructed in the course of their own social activity. If the knowledge of social actors is based in "a reality" which they define and construct, then the knowledge of the social scientists, which can only be based on such socially constructed data, must itself be without the single and unitary "reality" which it formerly depended upon to "make sense" of social action.

3. Some Material Which Challenges Traditional Epistemology and the Response.

But this conclusion urged by Schutz is itself based on a large volume of studies in such fields as linguistics and social psychology as well as in sociology itself. W.I. Thomas' concept of "the definition of the situation" is only one example of material which challenges traditional epistemology.

In linguistics, for example, we have the now famous arguments of Sapir and Whorf⁹ which challenge the assumed order of epistemological elements outlined above. Instead of seeing language as an expression of knowledge gained through perception of reality, they insist that linguistic patterns determine knowledge, affect perception, and, hence, go far in determining the sort of "reality" which is constructed. It is as if they claim that reality is linguistically constructed.

Social psychology on the other hand has had a long history of inquiry into the ways in which reality is constructed. Above all one must consider the work of George Herbert Mead¹⁰ whose attention to the dynamics of the social-

⁹See Sapir, Edward. Language: an Introduction to the Study of Speech, Harcourt, Brace, and World, New York (1949) and Whorf, Benjamin Lee. Language, Thought, and Reality, John B. Carroll (ed.) M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. (1966).

¹⁰Particularly Mead, George Herbert. Mind, Self, and Society, University of Chicago Press, Chicago (1934).

ization process is heavily relied upon by Berger and Luckmann as well as by C. Wright Mills (in his earlier theoretical work); the ethnomethodologists, such as Cicourel and Garfinkel; and even Alfred Schutz. To take only one small part of Mead's total work we can consider what epistemological implications his concepts of the "I" and the "me" may have.

For Mead, the "I" is always the subject of any action, the "me" the object. The relationship between the two is highly dialectical, for the self is continually involved in action in which both aspects appear the problem of the "I" and "me" aspects of the self leads to a conception of the fragmentation of the ego.¹¹

Thus we have to face not only a fragmentation of "reality" in general, but also we must be aware of fragmentation even within that most intimate sector of "reality" -- the "self." The insights of role theory offer further support for the view that there is no "real me," but that, instead, there are as many selves as there are roles performed by the actor.

Social psychologists have also been instrumental in attacking traditional conceptions of perception. Countless studies have complicated this basic element of traditional

¹¹Natanson, Maurice, in the introduction to Schutz, Alfred. Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague (1962). p. xl.

epistemology by showing how perception is influenced by the biography, social location, and group affiliations of the perceiver. One might take as an example, the work done by Leon Festinger in developing his theory of cognitive dissonance.¹² Festinger systematically shows how the group and ideological allegiances of his subjects operate to alter their evaluative perceptions and assessments of reality. The experiments of Solomon Asch would appear to go even further by showing that even judgment of "material" aspects of "reality" can be influenced.¹³ Berger mentions these experiments in discussing the influences of reference groups. His claim is that, "An individual confronted with an object that is, say, thirty inches in length will progressively modify his initially correct estimate if placed in an experimental group all the members of which keep repeating that they are quite sure about the actual length being ten inches or so."¹⁴

But I should pause here to consider an obvious objection. One who insists on maintaining the traditional absolutist epistemology may well insist, in the face of all these considerations, that they give us no grounds for rejecting the assumption that there is "a real way things are." He could

¹²See Festinger, Leon. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California (1957).

¹³See Asch, Solomon E. "Opinions and Social Pressure," Scientific American, Vol. 193, No. 5, (Nov., 1955).

¹⁴Invitation, p. 120.

easily claim that the man who says an object, "which is really thirty inches long," is only 10 inches long, is simply wrong and not a proof that we ought to abandon our accepted notions of objective reality. Such an objection is, of course, easy to appreciate, even if it does not meet Schutz' argument that subjective meanings and definitions are the very stuff of sociological understanding. The objection I am imagining is clearly characteristic of the common sense understanding of reality. What I have characterized as "traditional epistemology" and "common-sense" are not far apart. Nonetheless, one must wonder just what function this tenacious holding on to the common sense belief in objective reality can possibly serve for social science. If, as Schutz says, subjective definitions of reality are all we really need, then stubbornly clinging to such an objective conception can only be a hindrance. In fact, it is just this hindrance which Berger and Luckmann have avoided by starting their theory building with the assumption that reality is socially constructed.

Nonetheless there are many, even among those who have conducted researches of the sort I have alluded to above, who would rather put up with the awkwardness of traditional epistemology than abandon it entirely. This is not the place to attempt a detailed explanation of their reluctance. I

would suggest, however, that it is probably rooted either in the desire to emulate the natural sciences,¹⁵ or in a felt inability to continue one's work without the hope of eventually finding, or approximating, "the truth." But whatever the reasons, some social scientists would not go as far as has been suggested here. In fact a division among social scientists seems to be developing between what could be described as "radical" and "moderate" elements. The "moderate" wing is composed of those who would still insist on some sort of traditional epistemology. The "radical" wing is composed of those who are willing to abandon entirely the assumption that there is a "reality," "out there," to be described. With a little practice one can usually place social scientific writings in one camp or the other. Seldom is the task quite as easy, however, as it is with the article by Hastorf and Cantril entitled "They Saw a Game: A Case Study."¹⁶

I bring this article to particular attention partly because it provides yet another instance of social-psychological research contributing to the attack on traditional epistemology, and partly because it so clearly illustrates the "radical"

¹⁵This is, of course, a misconception. The "reality" of natural science is as much constructed as any "reality." Nor do serious natural scientists much concern themselves with the epistemology of their enterprise. They are too busy doing science.

¹⁶Hastorf, Albert and Cantril, Hadley. "They Saw a Game: A Case Study," The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 49 (January, 1954). Henceforth referred to as: "They Saw a Game."

alternative. The subject of the study is a "football game" (the authors use quotes even around "football game") between Princeton and Dartmouth in 1951, and the differential perception of "the game" by students of the respective universities. For my purposes it is not necessary to go into the details of the study. Rather, I would like to simply quote from the "interpretation" provided by the authors. Consider the following:

It seems clear that the "game" actually was many different games and that each version of the events that transpired was as "real" to a particular person as other versions were to other people. A consideration of the experiential phenomena that constitute a "football game" for the spectator may help us both to account for the results obtained and illustrate something of the nature of any social event.¹⁷

and further:

. . . there is no such "thing" as a "game" existing "out there" in its own right which people merely "observe." The "game" "exists" for a person and is experienced by him only insofar as certain happenings have significances in terms of his purposes.¹⁸

The extensive use of quotation marks to indicate questionable ontological status together with the explicit denial of the "external existence" of social events, type these researchers as "radical." Thus, we may add these transactionalist social

¹⁷"They Saw a Game," p. 132.

¹⁸"They Saw a Game," p. 133.

psychologists to the list of social scientists whose work further aggravates the problem of reality.

But the explicit recognition of this problem is certainly not necessary in order to raise important issues which concern reality construction. My own favorite subject area in sociology for locating material on social definitions of reality, the study of deviance, is a good case in point. Relatively few of the sociologists who have studied deviant subcultures could be classed as "radical" in the above sense. Nonetheless their attention to social processes involving deviant behavior has revealed numerous details of social reality construction.

4. Reality Construction and the Study of Deviance.

By far the best collection of deviance studies for attention to the definitional quality of social processes is Howard S. Becker's, The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance.¹⁹ Attention to a few of the studies included in that anthology will illustrate this claim.

Some of these articles give specific attention to ways in which individuals define themselves as "deviant" or "normal" and attempt to engineer the definitions of others around them. The article by Fred Davis entitled "Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visably Handicapped"²⁰ goes into some of the fine details of these processes. Davis' discussion of "breaking through," as the point in developing social relations between the handicapped and normals at which recognized "abnormality" ceases to be a chief feature of the shared definition of the situation, is excellent and insightful in showing how the "reality" for such situations is socially constructed.

¹⁹Becker, Howard S. The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance, Macmillan, New York (1964). Henceforth referred to as: The Other Side.

²⁰In The Other Side, pp. 119-137. The article by Hughes, Everett C. "Good People and Dirty Work," The Other Side, pp. 23-36, deals with similar phenomena in discussing the post-war reactions of German citizens in their disavowal of responsibility for the Nazi atrocities.

Other studies look at the same phenomenon of social definition, but attend to broader social aspects rather than to intimate, face-to-face, processes. Richard Schwartz and Jerome Skolnik, in their study of the social affects of legal accusations,²¹ and Harold Sampson et al., in their study of the domestic implications of official labels of "mentally ill,"²² show important ways in which socially legitimated "typing" of individuals can have profound effects on the quality of their social lives. The Schwartz and Skolnik study shows the differential stigmas which result from the criminal court records of unskilled workers on the one hand and from the medical malpractice suites of doctors on the other. Both studies conclusively show that the "reality" of guilt is almost totally irrelevant for all practical sociological purposes. Concrete, negative economic consequences correlate solely with the social acceptance of relevant definitions. That social acceptance of "negative" definitions can also ^{bring about} affect "positive" consequences is shown by Sampson and his colleagues who describe the increased "toleration" ^{by} which a spouse ~~may have~~ for his mate once the mate is "officially" defined as "mentally ill."

²¹Schwartz, Richard and Skolnik, Jerome. "Two Studies of Legal Stigma," in The Other Side, pp. 103-117.

²²Sampson, Harold, et al. "The Mental Hospital and Marital Family Ties," in The Other Side, pp. 139-162. See also Winick, Charles. "Physician Narcotic Addicts" in The Other Side, pp. 261-279, for references to the reflexive effects of certain social definitions.

Other studies in the collection relate both to the consequences to individuals of deviant definitions and to the social processes within deviant subcultures which operate to construct counter definitions of reality. The article entitled "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers" by Albert Reiss²³ is an excellent example of this dual focus. Reiss carefully describes the in-group ideology and allegiances developed by groups of "delinquent" youth for the definition and management of members' relations with adult "queers." It is shown how encouragement toward "detachment" in the sex act and strict rules of "propriety" operate to ". . . protect the boys from self-definitions either as prostitutes or homosexuals."²⁴

Another grouping of articles in Becker's anthology deals more directly with deviant subcultures as reality defining mechanisms. These include both articles centering on the development of group self-conceptions and in-group typologies and articles which show ways in which special segments of society may come to define the world outside their own sphere. In the first division I would place the very fine articles by Harold Finestone and Irwin and Cressey

²³Reiss, Albert. "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers" in The Other Side, pp. 181-210. A related and very valuable study is Ray, Marsh B. "The Cycle of Abstinence and Relapse Among Heroin Addicts," pp. 163-177.

²⁴The Other Side, p. 209.

entitled respectively "Cats, Kicks, and Color"²⁵ and "Thieves, Convicts, and the Inmate Culture."²⁶ Finestone's study amounts to a detailed portrait of the group constructed self-conception developed by young, negro heroin addicts. The Irwin and Cressey paper attempts a more theoretical approach but remains most interesting for its characterization of inmate values and prisoner-held conceptions of one another in terms of various "types." Both studies are valuable for their illustration of ways in which the "interpretive method" can be applied in gaining an appreciation of radically different conceptions of "reality."

Articles relating to subcultural perceptions of the outside world include two papers on gambling -- Irving Zola's "Observations on Gambling in a Lower Class Setting"²⁷ and George J. McCall's "Symbiosis: The Case of Hoodoo and the Numbers Racket."²⁸ This attention to gambling as a social phenomenon is particularly relevant to the problem of reality in that the ordinary scientific epistemology rejects notions of "luck" or predictability in games of chance. Zola, however, shows us some of the ways in which status can be

²⁵Finestone, Harold. "Cats, Kicks, and Color," The Other Side, pp. 281-297.

²⁶Irwin, John and Cressey, Donald R. "Thieves, Convicts, and the Inmate Culture," The Other Side, pp. 225-243.

²⁷Zola, Irving. "Observations on Gambling in a Lower Class Setting," The Other Side, pp. 247-260.

²⁸McCall, George J. "Symbiosis: The Case of Hoodoo and the Numbers Racket," The Other Side, pp. 51-66.

accumulated through the successful "explanation" of betting successes and failures. What is sociologically significant is not the "reality" of abilities to pick winning horses but the persuasive skills of the bettors in convincing their peers that such an ability is possessed. McCall's article, on the other hand, shows how ghetto dwellers' faith in Hoodoo "dream-book" advice is bolstered by their believed ability to beat the numbers racket while at the same time their expectations of winning are enhanced by their faith in Hoodoo. So long as the two systems are mutually legitimated in the minds of their victims, their perceptions of the "realities" of both are systematically "distorted." The interpretive analysis of gambling and collectivities of gamblers seems to me an ideal approach to the better understanding of general reality construction processes.

Many of the articles just described not only fail to see their efforts in terms of a Berger and Luckmann brand of sociological theory but also fail to argue for the generalizable quality of their observations in terms of any general theory.²⁹ The fact that so many relevant articles are collected in one volume, however, testifies to the theoretical orientation of their editor, Howard Becker. Becker's own

²⁹A particularly important exception is the article by Kitsuse, John I. "Societal Reaction to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method," The Other Side, pp. 87-102. Kitsuse's discussion of "evidence" for imputations of deviance and his use of the concept "retrospective interpretation" are particularly relevant to the present argument.

studies are primarily in the field of deviance (his "career" approach to the analysis of developing deviant behavior is well known), but he also makes specific reference to the stress which must be placed on actors definitions of reality in studying any social process. The reader should recall particularly his paper on "Becoming a Marihuana User" for its emphasis on the necessity of the users developing a conception of the experience as pleasurable and its emphasis on the social support generally required for such a development.³⁰ Becker even goes to the point of explicitly presenting his general theoretical position when he reacts to the hypothetical charge that his participant observation method distorts reality:

What we are presenting is not a distorted view of "reality" but the reality which engages the people we have studied, the reality they create by their interpretation of their experience and in terms of which they act. If we fail to present this reality we will not have achieved full sociological understanding of the phenomenon we seek to explain.³¹

Nor, of course, do the contributors to Becker's anthology make up all of the sociologists concerned with social reality construction process with or without explicit

³⁰In Becker, Howard S. Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, Free Press, New York (1963) pp. 41-78. ". . . a person will feel free to use marihuana to the degree that he comes to regard conventional conceptions of it as the uninformed views of outsiders and replaces those conceptions with the "inside" view he has acquired through his experience with the drug in the company of other users." p. 78.

³¹Outsiders, p. 174.

alterations in their theoretical positions. As just one further example of such sociological work, this time not drawn from the field of deviance studies, one could consider the lengthy article by Shils and Janowitz "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II."³² This study, like much of the sociological and social psychological analysis of the "brainwashing" phenomenon, has the additional value of treating social structural conditions and information control as integral parts of the reality construction (and reality destruction) processes.

All of these treatments, and many others like them, share the common feature of either expressly or by implication attacking the epistemological position I have characterized as traditional and absolutist. As I have said above, it is not impossible for supporters of the traditional view to insist, in spite of all such studies, that it still makes sense to speak of the way things really are. Thus far my point could be the more modest one that such insistence is unnecessary and methodologically cumbersome. Sociologists could still maintain the conviction that their knowledge remains on a sound epistemological foundation even if the "knowledge" of their subjects is entirely constructed and

³²Shils, Edward Albert and Janowitz, Morris. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 12, no. 2 (1948).

relative, i.e., not "real knowledge" at all. Some recent developments in sociological theory and research call even this conviction into serious question, however.

5. Ethnomethodology.

The work of the ethnomethodologists is particularly relevant to the problem of reality and the understanding of reality construction. Harold Garfinkel explains ethnomethodology as follows:

Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visible-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., "accountable," as organizations of common place everyday activities Their study is directed to the tasks of learning how members' actual, ordinary activities consist of methods to make practical actions, practical circumstances, common sense knowledge of social structures, and practical sociological reasoning analyzeable; and of discovering the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, "from within" actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings.³³

Ethnomethodology constitutes a two pronged attack on traditional sociological assumptions. On the one hand, there is an implicit claim that the burden of proof for the contention that sociological knowledge is "real" falls on the traditional sociologists. On the other hand, they broaden their attention to reality construction processes so as to include the ordinary everyday activities of social members and not merely their activities in "exceptional" circumstances or settings such as are so often dealt with by sociologists like Becker or Shils and Janowitz.

³³Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. vii-viii.

Perhaps the best summary of the first sort of attack is presented in Aaron Cicourel's book, Method and Measurement in Sociology.³⁴ Cicourel's work includes a critical review of methods used in field research, questionnaires, demographic studies, and content analysis. Nonetheless the best sort of general statement of the challenge presented by ethnomethodology to ordinary sociological knowledge is provided by Harold Garfinkel in his book, Studies in Ethnomethodology:

Much of "core sociology" consists of "reasonable findings." Many, if not most situations of sociological inquiry are common sense situations of choice. Nevertheless, textbook and journal discussions of sociological methods rarely give recognition to the fact that sociological inquiries are carried out under common sense auspices at the points where decisions about the correspondence between observed appearances and intended events are being made.³⁵

This contention by Garfinkel amounts to the claim that sociological knowledge has exactly the same sort of "constructed" epistemological status as the everyday knowledge of ordinary members of society such as are discussed in studies of deviance. Garfinkel repeatedly draws the distinction between "lay" and "professional" sociology and by doing so intends to imply that the only difference in their "validity" is the difference

³⁴Cicourel, Aaron. Method and Measurement in Sociology, Free Press, New York (1964).

³⁵Studies in Ethnomethodology, p. 100. Emphasis in the original.

self-attributed and self-defined by the "professional sociologists." For a full appreciation of this point of view, the interested reader must refer to the specific studies of Garfinkel and Cicourel. All I can reasonably do here is a) note that these men persistently attend to the actual decision making procedures used by professional sociologists in selecting, gathering, and interpreting their "data" and b) claim that their analysis is extremely plausible. In Cicourel's case the analysis is general in consisting of a critical survey of standard research techniques and standard writings on methodology. Garfinkel is more explicit in analyzing the particular, "scientific" activities of social scientists involved in such tasks as determining the "real" cause of death in circumstances of possible suicide,³⁶ or in selecting patients for psychiatric treatment.³⁷

But in addition to explicitly studying practical social scientific activity, they also contribute to the general understanding of reality construction processes by focusing attention on the ordinary methodological activities of men in everyday life. Garfinkel's book contains, for example,

³⁶Garfinkel's study is of staff members of the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center. See Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 10-18.

³⁷Here, the study is of activities at the U.C.L.A. Outpatient Clinic. See Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 18-24 and Chapter 7, pp. 208-261.

a penetrating analysis of decision making by jurors³⁸ as well as an extremely valuable study of the ways in which sexual identity is managed and maintained.³⁹ Cicourel, on the other hand, has attempted a major application of the ethnomethodological approach in his book, The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice.⁴⁰

³⁸See Chapter Four, "Some Rules of Correct Decision Making That Jurors Respect" of Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 104-115. The study includes reference to "retrospective definitions," a concept which bears a close resemblance to Kitsuse's concept of "retrospective interpretation" used to describe processes by which individuals come to define others as deviant. See footnote (number one, p. 23) of this part of the thesis.

³⁹See Chapter Five, "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an Intersexed Person," Studies in Ethnomethodology, pp. 116-185 and appendix p. 285-288. This research deserves particular attention in that it shows the "constructed" nature of something as "real" as sex, while simultaneously concentrating on the social scientific methodology of those (including the author) who were to make decisions regarding the subject's "real" sex status.

⁴⁰Cicourel, Aaron V. The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice, John Wiley and Sons, New York (1968). The book persistently focuses on the processes of definition which operate to determine the typing and treatment of juvenile delinquents.

6. A Rhetorical Perspective on the Problem of Reality.

Thus far I have presented this review of philosophical, linguistic, psychological, and sociological writings as a collection of works which explicitly, or by implication, are critical of the traditional epistemological and metaphysical position outlined at the first of this third part.⁴¹ But such a presentation poses an interesting philosophical problem in itself. I have characterized the traditional position as one basically committed to the view that there is a singular unitary "way things are." This position could be paraphrased as follows: "The single most important feature of the way things are is that there is a single unitary way things are." The position taken or implied by the studies I have surveyed could be paraphrased as follows: "The single most important feature of the way things are is that there is no single unitary way things are." If the conflict is presented in this way, it appears that both the absolutists and the

⁴¹The review I have presented is by no means exhaustive. My intention, rather, has been to select representative material drawn from various disciplinary areas. Perhaps the greatest failure to represent all areas adequately is in my lack of attention to the more analytic and linguistic areas of philosophy. While I do feel that the vast majority of such work almost entirely lacks significance for the present discussion, there are some notable exceptions. One of these, and a particularly important one for the discussion of rhetorical theory, is the book by Stevenson, Charles L. Ethics and Language, Yale University Press, New Haven (1944). The reader should note particularly Stevenson's discussion of "persuasive definition" defined on p. 210. See also the examples on pp. 214-215.

relativists are compelled to ground their arguments in an assumed absolutism (the first "way things are" in both paraphrasings). This is, of course, a prime example of the absolutist bias which is woven into the very language we use.⁴²

It could, of course, be argued that the absolutist position presupposes its own absolutism and is hence illegitimate. Likewise, however, the relativist position presupposes absolutism and is consequently self-contradictory. Apparently, what is needed is some independent standpoint from which to describe the situation. Such a standpoint is the one which sees all intellectual debate as rhetorical confrontation.

From this point of view, which I see as derived from the elementary theory of rhetoric, both the absolutist position and its relativist counterpart are seen as the located extremes of the continuum of positions taken by various intellectual "speakers" and "audiences." The valuable contribution of the rhetorical perspective consists in its refusal to concern itself in any way with the ontological or epistemological status of any position which it analyzes. Such lack of interest is not then to be confused with either the absolutism of the traditionalists nor the relativism of those who would oppose them through explicit denial.

⁴²And, I might add, in the very structure of our way of thinking which sees things in terms of "problems" and "solutions." "Solutions" are always to be sought in a "better" understanding of "the way things are." I have made references to similar kinds of cultural and linguistic bias elsewhere in this thesis.

Four important features of rhetorical theory must be laid down, each with the understanding that my own interest in this subject demands a more general conception of "rhetoric" than the one which usually concentrates on public discourse:

1. Rhetorical theory is concerned with understanding the persuasive effects which discourse has on its audience. The basic model of the situation to be analyzed has these parts -- the speaker, the speech, and the audience.⁴³

2. "What makes a situation rhetorical is the . . . accomplishing [of] something predetermined and directional with an audience."⁴⁴

3. That accomplishment is achieved by the simultaneous tactic ". . . of adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas."⁴⁵

4. "Rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, must always appeal to the people upon the basis of whatever beliefs they may happen to have."⁴⁶

⁴³This three part division is usually referred to as the Aristotelian Triangle. See Cooper, Lane (tr.) The Rhetoric of Aristotle, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York (1932). The similarity between this model and the dramaturgical one suggested by Goffman -- "actor," "performance," "audience" -- in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life is well worth noting.

⁴⁴Bryant, Donald C. "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech (December, 1953) p. 411.

⁴⁵Bryant, Donald C. "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech (December, 1953) p. 413.

⁴⁶Hunt, Everett Lee. "On the Sophists" in Schwartz, Joseph

From a rhetorical perspective assuming these general features, one can make better sense of the general debate surrounding the problem of reality described in this part of the thesis. What I am contending is that there are, among theorists and practitioners in the social sciences today, a range of individuals who will take a stance somewhere along the continuum between traditional and relativist inclinations. I would also contend that recent developments, such as those I have reviewed, both a) stand as attempts to adjust the ideas of the social scientific community ("audience") toward an increased acceptance of relativism and b) testify to the growing adoption, within that community, of such a position.

These points can be illustrated by discussing the contribution which Erving Goffman has made to the debate about "reality." The important thing about ⁵¹Irving Goffman's work⁴⁷ is that his sociology of interaction imputes to the actions of individuals the sort of ontological status which a significant portion of today's sociologists are ready to

and Rycenga, John A. (eds.) The Province of Rhetoric, Ronald Press, New York (1965) p. 82. Reprinted from Hunt, Everett Lee, "Plato and Aristotle on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians."

⁴⁷In using Goffman to illustrate the present points about the rhetorical nature of sociological writings, I do not mean to imply that his substantive contribution is less important than the work of others described in this chapter. On the contrary, Goffman's studies are of the utmost relevance. Nonetheless Goffman's work is so well known and widely appreciated as to make any substantive presentation of it here unnecessary.

accept concerning the "reality" of their subject matter. Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors provide "explanations" of the actions of individuals, precisely because those social scientists who accord these metaphors the status of "valid theory" are themselves willing to recognize such metaphors as appropriate. Again it must be insisted that their importance is not at all a function of their "fit" with the "facts." Goffman's case is especially enlightening in this respect because it seems particularly ridiculous when a Goffman critic argues, in effect, that, "That just is not the way people actually behave."⁴⁸ In my opinion, Goffman has never maintained that people actually behave like actors on the stage.⁴⁹ In any case such a challenge misses the point. It is much more relevant to consider Goffman's work as a suggestion which could be paraphrased as follows: "Try looking at it this way and see how much more interesting it all appears in this light."

It is also my opinion, of course, that all theory and all attempts at "explanation" can be profitably considered as ultimately asking the same thing of their prospective

⁴⁸One such critic is Messinger, Sheldon L. with Sampson, Harold and Towne, Robert D. in the article "Life as Theater: Some Notes on the Dramaturgic Approach to Social Reality" reprinted from Sociometry, XXV (1962) pp. 98-110 in Truzzi, Marcello, Sociology and Everyday Life, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey (1968) pp. 7-18.

⁴⁹In this connection one should consider his specific remarks to the contrary in the preface to The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Doubleday, New York (1959) pp. xi-xii.

adherents. [The unique thing about Goffman's "theory" is that, by appealing to a "stage" world, in recommending his viewpoint to others, he is explicitly alluding to a world which those others will acknowledge as having a less-than-absolute ontological status when compared with traditional conceptions of "reality." The metaphor, drawn from a world which is itself one of "make-believe," constantly reminds us of the "make-believe" status of that which it purports to "explain." Quite clearly, then, those who reject the Goffman "explanation" are likely to be those unprepared to consider even the most ordinary and everyday sorts of realities as socially constructed. And those who are attracted to the Goffman position are, conversely, likely to be those who are prepared to accept some such relativistic view of "reality."

It is perhaps also clear that my own inclination to use a rhetorical perspective in describing Goffman's significance amounts to an attempt to transfer to the consideration of sociological "knowledge" the degree of epistemological detachment characteristic of rhetorical theory. Such a rhetoric approach could almost be said to constitute a sort of sociology of sociology. All the material reviewed in this portion of the thesis could be profitably considered as a set of rhetorical counter-arguments offered by those who take a relatively radical line on the problem of reality.

At times the rhetorical nature of interaction within the sociological community becomes particularly transparent. Garfinkel, for example, whose ethnomethodological approach is one of the most outspokenly troublesome to traditional "core sociology," specifically denies that ethnomethodology is ". . . directed to formulating or arguing correctives." He also says, "They are useless when done as ironies." Yet, in the very sentence prior to these disclaimers, Garfinkel offers what is both an extremely effective rhetorical comment and itself a most ironic claim, ". . . except that quarrels between those doing professional inquiries [by which he means standard "core sociology"] and ethnomethodology may be of interest as phenomena for ethnomethodological studies, these quarrels need not be taken seriously."⁵⁰ The very claim that the quarrels may be subjects for ethnomethodological studies is an assertion of ethnomethodological superiority and disdain for the "opposition."

The general theoretical position of Berger and Luckmann, which has been so central to my own arguments, could likewise be viewed as constituting a rhetorically very effective posture. They, too, virtually presuppose the superiority of their perspective by taking as their starting point the assumption

⁵⁰ Both quotes from Studies in Ethnomethodology, p. vii.

that reality is socially constructed. Sense can be made of this tactic if we recall Bryant's point that all persuasions are accomplished by the simultaneous adjusting of ideas to people and people to ideas. The Berger and Luckmann position is effective because an audience exists (similar to Goffman's audience described above) which is, at least latently prepared to start with similar assumptions about "reality." Their explicit formulations then operate to move such people toward a manifest acceptance of their views.

The understanding of Berger and Luckmann is also enhanced by an appreciation of their arguments as like Goffman's in urging "a new way of looking at things" which is "more interesting." From the rhetorical perspective here being suggested, the Berger and Luckmann position is "right," not because of some closer "fit" it has with "empirical reality," but because it embodies the sort of perspective which a growing segment of the sociological community of today is willing to accept as "right." Much of this present chapter could be viewed as a departure from, or, a going beyond, Berger and Luckmann in its guess that that community is also ready (or almost ready) to accept that account as well. And that is a qualitatively different matter altogether!

CONCLUSION: EXISTENTIAL SOCIOLOGY AS
A MATTER OF ATTITUDE.

The label "existential sociology" has been used from time to time in this thesis. I have implied that the recognition of conceptual similarities between sociology and existentialism would lead to the development of analytic tools for such a sociology. I have implied that a dialectical approach to the analysis of social process could be used to integrate existential elements into general sociological theory. I have explicitly associated Verstehen with "compassion" in trying to describe the methods and goals of an existential sociology. And in the final portion of this thesis I have implied that an existential sociology was best suited to provide solutions to "the problem of reality."

But I have been reluctant to describe an existential sociology as such or to argue explicitly that an existential sociology is "better" than other approaches. There is a reason for such reluctance - a reason, which is, in fact, derived from existential sociology. It would be possible, I think (and, in fact, very interesting) to go about designing an existential sociology by looking closely at such topics as "despair," "authenticity," or "the leap of faith" and developing models of social actors and social processes which consciously integrate these existentialist concepts. But to

call such a resulting set of models, components of an existential sociology, would be misleading. It would be a bit like using terms of endearment to describe the movements of atoms and calling the result an "emotive physics."

The central elements of existentialism, like those of human love, are grounded in a total appreciation (and apprehension) of human life and all its contingencies. One can play with sociological models, but not at the same moment one contemplates meaninglessness and death. A full integration of existentialism could not remain on the level of conceptual manipulation or even on the questionably more profound levels of metaphysics and epistemology. A full integration, as I understand it, means an integration of the emotive content of existentialism (the "pinnacle" and the "void") not just its more detached analytic elements. Indeed, without the radical consciousness of existentialism's emotive elements, its own brand of cognitive tools are no different, really, from those of any other perspective on man in society.

The even more interesting fact is that with the emotive elements - the consciousness of death, the contingency of life, the meaninglessness of social definitions, the irrationality of commitment - existentialism is equally compatible with all positions. From the pinnacle of negative existentialism, all existence appears as a meaningless flat terrain. It awaits the irrational leap of faith; the step into the void; the choice among infinite alternatives.

There is no reason to believe that the sociologist, who would integrate existentialism -- that is, the emotive essence of existentialism -- into his sociological approach, would choose any one among all the other possible ways of doing sociology. It is quite conceivable that existential sociology could include anything from straight statistical analysis, questionnaires and other "data" collection, to participant observation, ethnomethodology and Parsonian grand theory. Existential sociology is nothing or it is anything. Anything, that is, which retains that note of irony, that lingering scepticism, that special detached attitude which is characteristic of all thought in existentialism's "positive phases."

It is for these reasons, then, that I am reluctant to describe an existential sociology.¹ It is also for these reasons I have limited explicit references to existential sociology to the comments on Verstehen and compassion in part two. These, it seems to me, are matters of attitude which somehow are closely related to the irony, scepticism and detachment of the existential consciousness.

¹Though, I repeat, a simple integration of existential concepts would probably produce more "interesting" sociology (a function of our special historical period, its uniquely non-rational modes of social action, and the sorts of sociology which are considered "interesting" today, rather than of the ontological superiority of existentialism).

I say "somehow related" because it is certainly not clear how totally assuming the role of the other, or completely accepting all things and all people, can be related to irony, scepticism, and detachment. There is probably something very profound about the relationship. Probably something mystical and closely related to the cosmic laughter of Mozart in Hesse's Steppenwolf.² On the other hand, it might be just ordinary nonsense.

²Hesse, Herman. Steppenwolf, Holt, Reinhardt, and Winston, New York (1929), especially p. 245.

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