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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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THE DIALECTIC: TOWARD  
A NEW OBJECTIVITY

*Seventh Geary Lecture, 1974*

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## *The Dark Side of the Dialectic: Toward a New Objectivity*

The older notion of "objectivity" in the social sciences, as crystallised in Max Weber's classical formulation of the value free doctrine, stressed an epistemology that premised a radical separation between the formal justification of assertions, on the one side, and the origins, genesis, or "mode of production" of these assertions, on the other. For my part, however, I do not believe that a *radical* distinction between genesis and justification is tenable. At the same time, I reject a relativistic and nihilistic solution. In order for us to have *rational* grounds for believing in the truth of specific assertions about the social world, we must suppose them to have been produced by certain kinds of people, "normal" people, people having certain talents and training, working with a genuine commitment to certain *justified* Criteria with certain Methods, who accept these C and M, and who, also, apply them with technical competence and moral sincerity.

This means that in order to have rational grounds for believing in the truth of certain world-referring assertions, we must also have some knowledge of how the social system of scholars must be organised for its work; it means we must have some grounds for confidence that the social system of science is working as it should, effectively sanctioning conformity with methods aiming at the fulfilment of its criteria. If, for instance, we see a community of scholars using a reasonable method to appraise the truth value of assertions about the world, but if this community has an internal structure placing disproportionate power in the hands of entrepreneurs or commissars, if it is subject to venal temptations or vulnerable to coercion and terror, then it would be prudent to doubt the warrantability of this intellectual community's specific

assertions, even though its formal methods and criteria were rationally defensible. For they may be cheating or unduly giving themselves the benefit of the doubt, interpreting ambiguous outcomes in conformity with their wishes and needs.

The classical, older notion of objectivity stressed that truth was the product of applying specific *methods* to particular intellectual tasks and data. Its focal assumption was that truth was produced essentially by an individual scholar whose fallibility was diminished by his disciplined conformity with a rational method. Truth was thus the product of a right relation between the individual scholar and the approved method. But what grounds were there for a confidence in the scholar's motives for *conformity* to the right method? What was de-focalised here was the social aspect of the process: namely, that the scholar as a scholar was the product of a social system that had trained and awarded him his credentials; that as a mature scholar he worked as a member of a scholarly community; that he had to convince its members of the warrantability of his assertions, and that he sought to do so by employing the rules, methods, and criteria that this community sanctioned, as a rhetoric. The modern view then, sees truth as the product of a rhetoric and collective appraisal of the warrantability of assertions about the social world, as a world-referencing judgement that is collectively constructed and which does not have an unmediated availability, either as subjective "intuition" or as objective "evidence".

Modern notions of objectivity, then, are sensitive to the manner in which truth is speech about reality, that truth is speech-mediated reality, and is aware that the judgement of truth must be a judgement of the warrantability of specific speeches.

If the older form of objectivity focused unreflexively on references to the social world, the modern form of objectivity seeks to link speech to the dialogue of the speaking subjects who constitute the community of scholars. Here the imputed warrantability of a speech is not simply a matter of individual judgements about correspondence between it and the social world, but rests on the consensus of speakers socially related to one another *in specific ways* allowing confidence in their capacity and willingness to learn and employ the requisite methods required by justified criteria. Over and above these concerns for the formal *correctness* of speech, our imputations about the warrantability of truth claims must also rest

on a confidence in the willingness and capacity of this community of scholars to speak *truly* about the social world. The focus here, then, is on the nature of the social arrangements and cultural commitments conducive to speaking truly.

It cannot be reiterated too often, or too emphatically, that the sociology of cognition is not primarily interested in the reliability of facts or isolated propositions. For it, reliability is an avenue to truth, but truth is not seen as limited to facts; the factual remains vulnerable to partiality. Things claimed may be factually so, and statements made may be logically and factually correct; but that is not necessarily "truth". For the sociology of cognition, truth comes down to the perspectives by which even logical and factually correct propositions may be limited. Truth has to do with the limits of reason. It may, for example, be correct that colonially subjugated people are, on the average, less willing to work than their overlords. I can imagine that some researches might yield such a conclusion; but if they did not also assert *why* that was, or what it was that had made the subjugated less willing to work, or did not inquire into the source of this, the analysis would, from our standpoint, be lacking in truth *qua* "objectivity". For it would have failed to affirm the *limits* of the factual and was, therefore, unable to give a larger, more "balanced" understanding of the subjugated persons' unwillingness to work. Assertions, then, can be "correct" without being "true". In this view, *truth* necessarily implies correctness; but correctness does not necessarily imply truth. So truth, from the perspective of a sociology of cognition, means the clarification of the limits of actuality, the clarification of the conditions of the actual. This, in turn, is a question of counterbalancing "good news" with bad, and of seeing that the determination of "what is" is not just a technical interest (to pure scientists) but always has implications for everyday life. Events, then, are not just either cognitively correct or incorrect; they are, also, happenings that confirm or frustrate the expectations that men develop in their everyday roles.

"What is" is not merely information technically relevant to scientific hypotheses, but is also always "news" relevant to everyday life. The reception of "news" is structured by how it impinges on people's hopes and aspirations in the various everyday roles they play. The reception depends in part on whether it is "good news" that is welcome, or "bad news" that is unwelcome and therefore denied or readily forgotten. One more readily credits good news.

News consonant with a person's beliefs about the world, and about the self holding them, will be more readily credited as true and remembered; news dissonant with beliefs held about the world and about the self is more likely to be resisted and doubted; judgements concerning its correctness are more likely to be tabled until further tests of its warrantability may be made.

To put it otherwise: good news tends to be credited *more* readily—by those to whom it is good news—than bad news, because it is dissonance-reducing.\* Bad news is credited *less* readily—by those for whom it is bad news—because it is dissonance-generating. So the actual process of crediting and discrediting of a “report” never depends only on “evidence” but also depends upon its character as “news”—which is to say, upon the implications and relevance of the report for the interests, ambitions, policies, commitments and plans of men in their everyday life and as meaning—endowed by ordinary language. Information is *news* when it has relevance to men's intentions in their everyday world; and it is this relevance that also influences its reception. News is the information of the *Lebenswelt*. Good news will be “credited”; that is, it will be more loosely tested and appraised—whatever the criterion employed—before being accepted, than bad news. Bad news will be more loosely tested, before being *rejected*, than will good news. Whether a report is credited or discredited, tested loosely or tested rigorously, varies with the power and prestige of those persons or groups affirming it, and also with its implication for the everyday life of those *to whom* it is asserted.

It was in this vein that Immanuel Kant remarked: “. . . the balance of the understanding is not wholly impartial and one of its aims which bears the inscription, ‘hope for the future’, has a mechanical advantage such that even a slight reason falling onto its pan will raise the other, loaded with speculations far weightier in themselves. This is the sole error which I cannot and indeed would not wish to remove.”

Here, it would seem, Kant speaks to a structure of sentiments—“optimism”—appropriate to, required by, or at least tolerable within, the limits of inquiry pursued by practical reason, and whose

\* Here dissonance is an aspect of the syntagmatics of language. It is the perception of a conjunction or combination of “things” at variance with those permitted by a grammar or culture—i.e., dissonance is the grotesque.



whole point of course is aimed ultimately at that survival of men in everyday life which requires the maintenance of their morale. Truth implies survival, suggests Kant, but survival does not necessarily require truth. Precisely. We will return to that point shortly. The implication seems to be that sometimes, if men are to continue to strive to live, they must sometimes lie to themselves and to one another.

Still, the issue is not just a general, abstract choice between a life-giving myth and a life-wearying truth. We would be foolish, indeed, to forget the practical danger of a self-sealing optimism that, all too ready to discount difficulties and to find hope in the world, underestimates the costs and overestimates the rewards possible in given projects, thus generating the very disappointment and pessimism whose debilitating dangers to survival had already been foreseen. The issue, then, is never actually that of hope versus no-hope-in-general; it is always a question of the specific estimate of the *grounds* for pursuing one concrete commitment as against others. The problem is always that of making an accurate and hence realistic judgement of specific policies; of being able continually to see that some reports are consonant with one policy or command, but dissonant with another.

The problem, then, is to avoid censorship: selective silence about, or repression of, those reports dissonant with our policies, and the selective, dramatic focalisation of reports confirming our policies. The Kantian problem, if it is to be stated more explicitly, is that of maintaining a realistic appraisal of *our own* specific policies and, especially, of not ignoring reports that augur our failure, nor of overstressing events that intimate our success—and, conversely, in judging our *adversaries'* situation. The problem is to be able to maintain this realism in the concrete appraisal of specific alternatives without, however, fostering a cumulative pessimism that diminishes the energies men are willing to expend to achieve their goals and their survival.

In this view, "objectivity" comes down to a question of the relation between the theorist, on the one side, and the nature of his relationship to "good news" and "bad news", on the other. More specifically, objectivity has to do with the continued openness or access of persons to "hostile" reports; the lack or loss of objectivity is an underestimate of the negative implications of reports; it is an *under-estimate* of our *adversary's strengths* and an *over-estimate*

of *ours*, so that one remains silent about bad news and is redundantly communicative about good news.

In broaching the problem of objectivity, the *initial* question, of course, is that of its *meaning* and not whether any doctrine it advocates or implies is true. On this limited issue, i.e., the meaning of "objectivity", let me say at once that there is little ground for interpreting it as part of, and from within the standpoint of some technical, extraordinary, language. "Objectivity" is fundamentally rooted in everyday concerns, indeed, in the most mundane of concerns: it is tacitly grounded in our interest in whether those who speak are our friends or enemies, and whether they share or oppose our purposes.

From the standpoint of ordinary language, there is not, and never has been, anything particularly mysterious about the meaning of objectivity. Most ordinary language speakers will agree, and I fully concur, that in this framework objectivity correctly refers to "seeing the whole picture" in the specific sense *not* of seeing all its innumerable *details* but, rather, in the sense of "not taking sides" among adversaries. Objectivity thus means not being biased in favour of one's own side or against our adversaries, particularly in our *cognitive work*. Objectivity in cognition thus means something parallel to "realism" in politics. It means, in short, facing the bad news and not exaggerating the good news.

Objectivity, then, is *not neutrality* which, in the conventional sense, means taking no sides between adversaries; nor does objectivity mean indifference to or lack of preference for the survival or victory of one side as against another. It is precisely because men want their side to triumph that their need for "realism" may at times counter-balance their tendency to ignore bad news or over-emphasise good news. Indeed, it might well be argued that objectivity is useful, if not always necessary, to the victory of our own side. Objectivity is a critique of the cognitive vulnerabilities generated by people's struggle on behalf of their everyday interests. A concern with objectivity is a concern with the limits of rational discourse that are grounded in (but often obscures) the vulnerability of truth to subversion by interests or desires. "Desires" or "interests" refer to circumstances that some speakers take as "givens" and are therefore not mediated, or produced by, rational discourse. "Interests", therefore, may be either practical, economic interests, or an interest in a theoretical or scientific paradigm; in

both cases, these set limits on what may be made problematic.

To affirm objectivity as a morality of cognition, however, is not, of course to suggest that the effects of interest (and desire) on cognition have in fact been vanquished by reason, and that rational discourse is without a non-rational limit. Quite the contrary. The legitimate implication of affirming objectivity focalises the *common* vulnerability of truth and reason to desire and interest; it calls attention to the limits imposed on what may be made an object of rational critique. Still, to problematise objectivity is not only a warning; it is also a promise. If it is, on the one side, a critique of the pretensions of the rational, it is, on the other side, the Utopian vision of a rationality that would be superior to that which is. Problematizing objectivity *intimates* the *possible* existence of a common interest in universal reason that may transcend particular and divisive group interests. However groups are riven, a concept of "objectivity" implies that they have a common interest in reason that will abide even when their particular, divisive interests wane. For example: to acknowledge a virtue in the enemy is to exhibit a generosity of spirit that no defeat may extinguish. To affirm the importance of reason in the midst of struggle is to speak on behalf of the human species' *long-range* interests; it is to raise questions about the relative value of what men may be dying for at that moment; it is surely to make reference to a dignity that the victors may not strip from the vanquished and in which the latter may indeed excel their conquerors. To speak of objectivity, then, reminds us that there will be a time *after* the struggle; a time when men will once more have to make peace with themselves and what they have done, or have had done to them. To speak of objectivity, is to raise a question about whether we can live with and through victory alone. It is to speak of "reconciliation".

Still, it is one thing to say objectivity *is*, but quite another to project it as an Utopia. Since scholars are pledged to truth-speaking they will want, and will lay claim to, objectivity. Paradoxically, their claim to the reality of their objectivity thus makes an ideology of objectivity; they affirm objectivity *now* partly because it is to their *interest* to do so, when it is often the case that it is only the *morality* (rather than the reality) of objectivity that can be affirmed. In this, the scholar, like other men, bends truth to need; he conceals the bad news whose very affirmation is of the essence of objectivity. In claiming that objectivity *is*, in taking the promise of it for the

achievement, the scholar *exhibits* his lack of objectivity. He thereby makes objectivity an ideology that functions to conceal his lack of objectivity.

Bad news or "hostile information", is news discrepant with a man's purposes; good news or "friendly information" is news consonant with, and confirming of, men's values and intentions. In short, information by itself is neither hostile nor friendly; it is not in itself bad news or good, but depends on its implications for the intentions of some specifiable men. The same bits of information may be both hostile or friendly, bad news and good, to different persons or different groups. The power and the stability of a government is thus hostile information to a revolutionary who has given his life to the hope of a revolution. Indeed, any report that limits the possibility of world-transformation, whether suggesting that society or human nature inherently limit the amount and variety of social change possible, is hostile information and bad news to revolutionaries. Correspondingly, reports of the fragility of government are hostile information and bad news to the conservative who favours the *status quo*. It is thus not information about the state of the world *per se* but, rather, reports about the social world in *relation* to the purposes of some men that makes a report either good news or bad news.

What is bad news, we have said, depends on people's purposes. There is, therefore, no news that is glad tidings for *all* persons and in *all* times. What is repressed and, therefore, what needs speaking must then vary with each group and with the historical position in which that group finds itself. To speak the truth, then, or to be "objective", is not to say the same one thing to all persons. It is not to repeat the same message at all times. The truth is not something that can be spoken, once for all.

In Peter Berger's *Invitation to Sociology*, he argues that the utility of sociology derives from its truth. Forgetting Kant, he suggests that knowledge is useful because true, and that people are helped by sociology only if it is true. This, of course, premises that there is no ideology in sociology, the very assumption that should be questioned rather than merely posited, and makes very dubious assumptions about the nature of usefulness. It is only if we *define* the useful as the true, and thus commit a tautology, that we must suppose only the true to be useful. But persons are disposed to reject bad news, and to welcome good news, quite apart from their

truth. And indeed, they are disposed to define news as truth when it is good news, and as untruth, as hypothesis, or as mere opinion, when it is bad news,

The "good" spy, says Berger, is the one who tells it as it is, rather than telling the spy-master the good news he hopes for or suppresses the bad news he fears. But the point is precisely that some people do press us for good news and wish to avoid hearing the bad, and indeed, such people are often located at the top and have power over us. In this hierarchical setting they can *impose* their preferences upon news gatherers and bringers, whether they are spies or sociologists. Those managing any hierarchy have a common and limiting interest: they want to show that *their* management of affairs is successful; that under their administration the group is achieving its goals and is forging ahead of its competitors. They, therefore, do not welcome news of their adversaries' achievements and of their own failures, and they generate costs for those who bring them such news. They will tell them: "Go back and look again!" And again! Essentially, it is not simply information useful for the instrumental achievement of their objectives that the managers of groups seek. They also want information that is consistent with an image of themselves as managers who are successful. Commonly, then, they prefer those who support their public credibility, rather than truth speakers.

This is obviously not a peculiarity of spy organisations; it is true of any organisation with its own special interests, whether venal corporations or revolutionary parties. There is, therefore, a grave difficulty in speaking truth to those by whom one is employed, for whom one "works", or on whom one is dependent. This danger is not simply the concrete hazard of employment with its economic dependence; the hazard is common to all who are dependent on those pursuing goals other than truth. Certainly it is a hazard of "capitalist" economic systems; but it is surely as true of "socialist" societies as well.

There are two points here. First, the question of how a commitment to other desires or interests imposes limits on true speaking and, secondly, how these other values limit truth speakers through a dependence that can take diverse forms, whether economic, political, or certain more "psychological" forms of human bondage. "Desire" no less than interest can foster dependencies; as Willard Waller understood, those who love most, are dependent on those

loving less. Bad news is not appreciated by those on whom we are dependent, either for love or money; and any truth we may seek is subject to the hazards of such dependence. "Smoke gets in your eyes", says the song, when we are in love. We are blinded by venality, property interests, and the wish to secure material advantage; we are no less blinded by lust, passion, love, our need to believe in our loved ones, our fears of death and hopes for immortality.

Those on whom we are dependent have leverage through which they may require news carriers to speed good news and to hesitate to bring the bad at all. The favourable medical diagnosis is heard clearly the first time, is rejoiced in, and it firmly closes the painful question. Unfavourable diagnoses, however, need to be repeated and double-checked. A fundamental social function of reflexive social theorists, then, is to help people deal with the interest-related and desire-related character of news. Fundamentally, the task of the reflexive social theorist is to help people to remain critical and sceptical of *good* news, to insist that even this be double-checked and, correspondingly, to help people to accept bad news and to *remember* it. The function of the reflexive social theorists, the Socratic theorist, is to stress the connectedness of news and of men's interests, and to remind us of how news is grounded in interest and desire.

A central function of such theorists, then, is to help a society develop and maintain a consciousness of the connection between interest, desire, social being, material groundedness, on the one side, and information, reports, news, and all references to social worlds, on the other. On another level, the task is to re-integrate the theorist-and-his-life-in-society with theory, theory-products, and theory-performances. The task of a reflexive, Socratic theory is to help people maintain access to what their society is silent about, and to what they, as members of that society or as some limited part of it, will regard as bad news.

"Objectivity", then, is not neutrality; it is realism concerning our own situation, desires, and interests. Here "realism" means being aware of the continual vulnerability of reason to interest and desire, of the limits that interest and desire impose on rational discourse. Objectivity, then, is a wholeness paradoxically pursued by stressing insistently and *one-sidedly* the repressed and silenced side of things. It is the effort to overcome the varied and changing limitations of

persons and groups through the recovery of what their lives have systematically repressed, distorted, and lost.

At this point, then, it becomes obvious that there are really two tasks for reflexive social theory. One is to know what is, and to speak it. The other is to convince and persuade the other, to help him be and remain *open* to what *is*, particularly to reports hostile to his purposes, to bad news. There is little point of knowing and asserting truths to those who do not want to know them, who will not hear or understand them, and who are disposed to reject them, who will soon conveniently forget or distort them. There is no solution to this unless we know *how* "what is" bears on people's purposes, and unless we know what to do about distortions of *hearing* as well as of speaking. Clearly, it would seem that a critical and Socratic social theory differs from "normal" academic social theory precisely in its *reflexivity*; in its concern with whether we know what is knowable, with whether we use what is known, if we think about it at all or why we do not, and with what social arrangements are conducive to knowing or inhibiting it. An emancipatory and Socratic social theory is centrally concerned with maintaining an openness between technical discourse and everyday life, between extraordinary and ordinary languages, between pure reason and practical reason.

I do not wish to be taken to suggest that bad news is only news bearing on injury to base and selfish interests, and that it is particularistic interest alone that distorts truth. Ideology is not the only failure of truth. Our most noble values often corrupt knowledge by making us want to seem to be living in conformity with our theory and morality. The shame and guilt at failing to achieve our *highest* values, as well as threats to our meanest interests, both dispose us to distort communications that are discrepant with the person we hope to be taken for.

It is commonly and correctly stressed that systems of social domination and hierarchy foster vested interests among the privileged elite and that these in turn may limit their receptivities to truth, distort their communication, and result in ideologised belief. Ruling classes and other elites will, if they can, conceal what injures their interests and they will publicise what advances them. Here truth is certainly limited by selfish interest.

Yet truth is also impaired by love and altruistic caring. One distorts communication to protect comrades, friends, and loved ones.

One sometimes lies even at the cost of injuring one's own narrow and personal interest, in order to protect a larger group. The protection of a community, like the pursuit of any other value, is by no means identical with the requirements of seeking, seeing, and saying the truth. The difficulty in securing the truth about social worlds is only partly (and perhaps only trivially) inhibited by the weakness of our technical instrumentation or our mathematics. Far more penetrating in their distorting effects on our knowledge of social worlds are our selfish *and* our altruistic concerns, our interests *and* our desires, our hates *and* loves, our meanest *and* noblest intentions. The pressure to distort truth is grounded in both our private and our communal commitments, and not only in the disparity between them. In short, "ideology" is not the only distortion of speech.

Can we suppose, then, that what is called an "emancipatory critical theory" is itself devoid of impulses to distort communication? Can we suppose that a theory seeking the universal emancipation of mankind entails no contradictions with truth and embodies no motives to distort communication? In so far as human "emancipation" means something more than an interest in truth and undistorted communication, we must suppose that these other values will generate tensions and contradictions for truth speaking. Should we not expect that even a critical emancipatory theory will shy away from bad news, will repress or distort it. Is this not one implication of Kant's contention that hope for the future is the source of an "error"—one he does not and cannot wish to remove.

The problem, in short, is that of the relationship between various values, between saying what is, on the one hand, and other values—such as survival or community, on the other—which this may be intended to further or which may be necessary if it itself is to be furthered. A key question is always *why* does one want to know the truth? Is it sought for its own sake alone, and without regard to its other cultural consequences? Or is it sought also, at least in some part, because it is believed that speaking truly will further other ends which are also viewed as desirable. Essentially one must suppose that, for critical theory, emancipation and truth are not totally *identical*; one must suppose that truth serves emancipation and life, the part the whole. Otherwise, critical theory would simply be a social theory of rationality—and it must be confessed that in Jürgen Habermas' brilliant version of social theory, this seems to



be its *tendency*. "Emancipation" is to critical theory what "goodness" was to Platonism. It is grounded in, but *not* limited to, reason. It implies the presence of certain other (than cognitive) values and thus implies that these must somehow be integrated with truth.

Yet anyone who accepts other values as transcending (or independent of) truth and reason, for example, emancipation, human survival, or social cohesion—is under pressure to be silent about, or to distort communication concerning, events dissonant with these values. Indeed, he may even—as Plato was, with his "noble lie"—be led deliberately to assert as true what he knows is not. In so far as we take responsibility either for maintaining a social system that exists, the *status quo*, or seek to construct a new society, we necessarily create certain hazards for truth speaking. In opting for emancipation, then, we do not avoid all such hazards, but most probably generate certain new ones.

But there are hazards on all sides, and dangers to truth in each commitment—whether to the *status quo*, or against it and in favour of change and a new system. Moreover, if we say truth and reason are *limited* by interest and desire, we must also add emphatically that interest and desire *generate* motives and energies for efforts at rational discourse. The dialectic of rational discourse is this: as Nietzsche correctly saw, with no such interests and desires there would be little and certainly less truth and reason; but the very interests and desires that *promote* reason simultaneously *limit* it. Interests and desires give birth to a reason and truth that are born with a limit, and on whose birth certificate there is also written in an invisible ink a death sentence. This, then, is far from an argument for the *status quo* or against changing it. Nor is there any intention of suggesting an equivalence of dangers to the truth in each choice. What is intended however, is to deny unequivocally that an emancipatory theory does not create distinctive dangers of its own for truth speaking. These may be comparatively negligible when an emancipatory theory operates within the confines of an "old regime", within some *status quo* that it seeks to transcend. For, *then*, its task is to speak the silences maintained by the old society and to display what has been concealed, so that its own "one-sidedness" may not deter it from exposing the bad news which the old society wishes to repress.

Correspondingly, the standpoint offered here provides a basis for judging those social theorists who claim to make an uncon-

ditional commitment to truth. Such a commitment to an "unconditional" truth is a kind of false consciousness, unless the theorist also loosens his attachment to the *status quo*, limits or rejects his own responsibility for its welfare, and reduces or liquidates his investments in social roles grounded in the *status quo*. In actual fact, then, the practical alternatives come down to these: (1) the social theorist accommodates himself to the *status quo* or some variant of it, while affirming his commitment to objectivity and truth, thus inevitably involving himself in truth-qualifying and speech-distorting social circumstances that lend support to the already great credibility of the *status quo*. That is *one* possibility. The other (2) is that the theorist accepts truth-seeking and speaking as in part contributive to a larger social emancipation, sees the hazards this poses for truth-speaking, pursues a role for himself as breaking the silences systematically imposed by the *status quo*, while all the while aware that he is gradually imposing new silences that may later grow into institutionalised repressions, with the advent of the new society he seeks. The first is the most likely and realistic of alternatives. The second is a transcending possibility.

It may be contended that the reason our communal involvements distort communication is because they are not really altruistic, being only a species of slightly expanded egoism, and that if our communities were not selfishly "ours", and if they were not at war with others, then they would not distort truth. In other words, it may be held that without conflict between universalistic and particularistic interests, there would be no motives to distort communication. But this would be mistakenly to suppose that ideology is the only pathology of cognition. At least three things may be briefly mentioned in this connection: First, that the idea of a unity between particularistic and universalistic interests is a regulative ideal toward which men may strive; but if we wish to remain armed against the hazards to truth, we had better not confuse this ideal with the reality of the social conflicts that exist. To strive toward a social reconstruction which will not induce distorted communication is quite different from fantasising that this reconstruction has already been accomplished. Such a reconstruction can only be deterred, not advanced, by a confusion between our hopes for human unity and our appraisal of what is.

Second, even if all social conflicts within the human species were eliminated, this is no reason to suppose that the interests of

the human species and those of *other* species are identical. There remains the problem of the imperialism of the human species *vis-à-vis* others. What is called the unity of particularistic and universal interests is usually only a universalism of *human* interests—in other words, it is a limited “humanism”. Universalism is the ideology of humanistic imperialism.

Third, and finally, even if we suppose the total elimination of all conflicts within the human species *and* between it and other species, the problem of bad news remains. To eliminate conflict is not to eliminate all limits. For example, the point is not only that a man rejects the bad news of *his* death, but the news that *all* men are mortal. That death is universal does not make our own particular death any more acceptable. There is also ageing; there is failure even among the loving and co-operative; there is entropy; there are suns that burn out. To deny this is to hold that there are no limits on men; and nothing is so certain as the limitedness of men who think themselves without limits. Often enough, an acknowledgement of the tragic dimension is little more than apology for not exerting ourselves to make life better; it is thus an accommodation to what is, and an ideology congenial to the advantaged. Often enough, however, the denial of any place for the tragic is little more than an inability to face the bad news that all change is a “slow boring of hard boards”. The denial of the tragic in part expresses a fear that men will fail to do all they can unless they are made to believe that what they bring is total Utopia. But this is much the same kind of distorted estimate of men as was premised by those “enlighteners” who believed that men would obey no moral rules at all unless they believed in god and hell.

The problem of objectivity is, in the first instance, grounded in a socially constituted, historically emergent, distinction between technical languages and ordinary (or as they are sometimes called natural) languages. Objectivity is grounded in the claim of the technical language to have, and be able to live by, a set of rules independent of those of ordinary, everyday life. In effect, to evaluate a technical discipline in terms of its autonomy is to evaluate it in terms of whether it conforms to its own claims and values; it asks that the technical discipline dance to its own music.

To allege a *breach* of objectivity is to imply that the rules of the ordinary language have infiltrated a situation which, according to the rules of the technical language game, should have been controlled

by the technical grammar. The fundamental self-image of a technical discipline,—as Heidegger says of the “mathematical project,”—or at least its most fundamental aspiration, is toward a self-groundedness.

The critique of “ideology” launched by Marx and Engels was above all meant to expose the speciousness of that aspiration, to reveal that the technical language game was not self-grounded as claimed, but was actually grounded in the ordinary language game. Marx and Engels’ critique of self-groundedness, however, was blunted by their own Promethean vision. In effect, Marxism argued that the social “sciences” were not self-grounded; that this claim was an expression of a false consciousness serving to occlude the reality: i.e., that the social sciences expressed partisan interests rooted in the society’s everyday life, and served to further the interests of the society’s hegemonic class and, indeed, to transform its “power” into a legitimated authority.

Marxism held that the social sciences were grounded in class interests and that its technical performances were shaped by *extra-technical* interests. Marxism contended that, on the one hand, the hegemonic class constituted a grounding for the social sciences and that the latter served to strengthen their class hegemony. On the other, Marxism also held that the *proletariat* and its different, anti-hegemonic and anti-capitalist interests, provided a different grounding for the social sciences; a grounding not bound by the limits of the hegemonic class, and instead permitted a critique of that hegemonic class and of the society it dominated.

This, at least, is one reading of the Marxist theory of ideology and critique. That theory fails, however, if and when it implies that the proletariat-in-being is a universal class; when it assumes, that is, that this class can transcend all limits or already does so; that it can, therefore, ground a social science that will not have its own impulse to avoid bad news and over-dramatise good news.

To raise the problem of objectivity is to focus on the interface between technical and ordinary language games. Specifically, to allege a failure of objectivity is to reproach a speaker with speaking the wrong language in some situation. The reproach is that he has not limited himself to the technical language game and to the special interests and desires it sanctions; that he has allowed an intrusion of rules of the ordinary language game thus implying that the social

scientist has become like any ordinary man, surrendering to his everyday partisanship or egoism.

The reverse situation can, of course, also occur. The technical language game and its interests and desires can spill over into the ordinary language game. But this is not defined as a failure of "objectivity". Sometimes it is seen as a failure of "communication" and expressed as a critique of "jargon". It is also often viewed, by the ordinary language speakers, as a failure of commitment, as a kind of callousness to their needs or suffering and as an effort to maintain distance from these. To claim a failure of "objectivity", however, commonly means that the speaker has become *too* involved in everyday life, rather than having "detached" himself from these. To repeat: an alleged failure of objectivity is an allegation that those claiming to have transcended ordinary language games have not actually done so; have failed to play the technical game by its own rules because of the imputed intrusion of the self-interests and personal desires grounded in their ordinary language game.

To charge someone with a lack of objectivity is to define him as a deviant who fails to play the game properly. It is primarily those who speak technical languages and who have publicly claimed themselves capable of being above partisanship in their truth claims that are vulnerable to such reproach. In *ordinary-language* games, players are commonly expected to be concerned with advancing their own interests in everyday life; they are expected to accommodate truth to these interests, i.e., to "compromise". The normal, ordinary-language speaker is normally expected to see and say what furthers his interests and desires, and he is not regarded as unnatural for doing so. High values that demand more "altruism" tend to be confined to segregated situations, occasions, or roles.

Objectivity, then, is the sought virtue of those who claim to have transcended the normal limits on truth in everyday life. The *lack* of objectivity, correspondingly, is the deviance of those who, it is claimed, have failed to keep that promise. If the claim to objectivity is often a specious claim grounding elite pretensions, the critique of objectivity is often an *attack* on elitism as such, on the claim to a kind of superiority; still, while not intending to do so, it may nonetheless come to see *any* effort toward a strengthened rationality as the grounding of a new elite. It may, therefore, counterpose to "objectivity" a Protagorean relativism in which it is held that truth rests on interests and hence each man's truth is as good as another

and which may then culminate in nihilism. For its part, Marxism sought to avoid such a relativism, not by denying that truth was grounded in interest, *but by denying that all interests were equal*, particularly in their effects upon truth claims.

Various interpretations of the failure to adhere to the rules of a technical language game are, of course, possible and common. One is that the failure is sometimes due to "cheating", that is, deliberately violating the rules to procure a personal advantage: to "score". Here, it is certainly implied that the deviant player might have behaved otherwise. It is also sometimes understood that deviance from technical rules might not be deliberately intended because, it is held, a player "lost his head", or became "tired". This is not a technical error but more nearly like an "accident" or an inadvertence. The paradigm of a lack of objectivity, however, is neither a deliberate violation of technical rules, such as lying, nor an inadvertence. It is, rather, an unintended and unaware conformity to rules of the ordinary language when one should have been, and indeed, assumes he has been, heeding the technical rules alone. Here, the ordinary language game is seen as exerting an unrelenting but subliminal pressure on the technical language game.

The assumption required is that the former, ordinary language is just more elemental and paleo symbolic, more fascinating or involving, and less escapable than the technical language game. One can well imagine men giving up technical language games, indeed, all technical language games, and still surviving. But one cannot imagine human survival without playing some ordinary language game. Such an estimate of the relative positions of technical and ordinary languages, as respectively *linguistic* super and infra-structures, seems essentially correct. As Roman Jakobson remarks, technical languages are transforms of natural languages. Technical languages are grounded in ordinary languages, they are elaborated linguistic codes grounded in restricted linguistic codes, but not the other way around. We must thus suppose that there is continual pressure and temptation to violate or surrender the rules of technical languages and to conform to ordinary usage when we should be (or think we are) conforming to technical usage.\*

\* Elsewhere, in a paper on "Revolutionary Intellectuals", I develop the theme that this "regression" to ordinary language may be rational, when problem-solving in technical languages reaches an impasse. It is precisely this "regression" that is one major source of "creativity".

This view of their inter-relationship leads to two different (but not contradictory) judgements. In one, we can say that it is possible for men to hew to the rules of technical games; we can say, it is possible to be objective. In the other view, we make problematic the capacity to fulfil that resolve, and we exhibit the forces undermining objectivity. In individual cases, we hold, some men will be more objective than others, and some efforts at objectivity will be more successful than others. Still, in considering a *set* of cases, it seems likely that intrusions into the technical language game will commonly occur from the ordinary language game. In some part, but only in *part*, objectivity depends upon moral commitment and resolve and thus its failure is, indeed, partly a moral failure. But a moral commitment to objectivity may or may not coincide with other conditions. The moral resolve may be reinforced or undermined by, may be made more rewarding or more costly by, certain social, cultural, political and economic forces. Increasing or decreasing "bias" is thus not just a matter of a moral resolve, for that resolve in itself is grounded in other conditions. From this standpoint, then, the strengthening of objectivity is a matter of building all those other social institutions and structures that reinforce men's resolve to speak truly and strengthen their *ability* to accept and remember bad news and critically to examine good news.

Having raised the problem of speaking "bad news" we must also address the question of the "negative dialectic". There are, we might say, different kinds of negative dialectics. One of these negative dialectics is not ours; the characterological infrastructure of this other negative dialectic is the eternal return of Oedipal rebellion. In this negative dialectic, eternal repetition creates the illusion of development; there is an eternal youth killing an eternal old king who is eternally reborn and killed once again. In this negative dialectic, the youthful slayer never grows up, never grows old and ugly, and never needs to be killed in his turn. This is the negative dialectic for those Peter Pans who never grow up, but merely age. This negative dialectic is a Nietzschean fantasy, unenlightened by Freud. It regresses to a pre-Hegelian romanticism of infinite yearning; it is lacking, therefore, in a transcendence of youth for it has no vision of wisdom; it has little talent for existence in the present; slyly hiding its pleasures, it embroiders them as dutiful rebellion.

In this negative dialectic, which is *not ours*, there is resentment

and rage at sad endings; there is no gut-courage to see that bad news—the really terrible and tragic news—is in the end unavoidable; in this negative dialectic there is an inability to carry on in the face of what is, after all, only an ancient horror. This alien negative dialectic, then, proclaims a *Götterdämmerung* of endless struggle, denying all possibility of reconciliation. For, to it, only struggle is real. Such a negative dialectic generates an infinite rage against the world because it rejects and denies all fulfilment in the present, and can therefore have no hope for the future. This negative dialectic is the desperate ideology of those strange souls who are brimful of life-energies, yet who remain without hope, which may sometimes happen to those who are stranded historically. It is a disguise by which energy conceals that it has failed to make its rendezvous with purpose; that it has lost touch—in Alfred North Whitehead's terms—with the "upward trend". Having its faith in reason sorely shaken, this negative dialectic invokes "life" against reason, claiming that even movement without a rational goal is better than none. For this desperate, nerve-torn, negative dialectic, movement becomes edged with a streak of the diabolical, with a readiness for mad alliances; for better these, it believes, than the surrender to a death-welcoming passivity and to the rot of the nerve. It rejects reconciliation, then, as the façade of surrender-to-death.

I sympathise. Yet I have differences with that negative dialectic. It is not my form of the negative dialectic; it is kith, but not kin. For one thing, I would launch no critique of *What Is* with the bland confidence that I differ profoundly from what I reject. Our own negative dialectic knows that it shares a common human corruptibility, whose sprouting only waits. We do not think ourselves better men but only later men. We know that those whom we oppose are our fathers and that we, their enemies, are their children. We know, in short, that the struggle is internecine. We are certain that the past has taught us the most cultivated vices; but doubt that it has bequeathed us *only* its corruptions. We know that our virtues as well as our vices have a certain inherited grounding, and that if the past has taught us obedience, it has also fostered our courage to rebellion. We know, then, that some forms of the negative dialectic are grounded in compulsiveness and that this is not emancipation but part of what we need emancipation from.

Above all, we know that our fathers will die and that we do not



always need to kill them. Our kind of reconciliation cultivates the capacity to wait, as well as to strike.

To be reconciled:

to accept ourselves as the product of a past that we reject, while knowing that our skill and will in conquering it are past-grounded too;

to recognise that we will not accomplish all that we had sought, without struggling for it the less;

to know that we often act in more anger than the target itself deserves and to know that in this respect, too, we reproduce the *limits* of that enemy-past;

to accept the defective and crippled destiny that is ours without self-pity, without blinking at its defectiveness, and without denying our duty to resist the present.

To be reconciled: to have grasped that reconciliation is only one modality of existence and is not the culminating terminus, but the ever-present, sweet underside of struggle. Reconciliation and struggle are the mutual groundings of human existence. It is not that it is only the strugglers who need reconciliation, yet it is only they who can achieve it, but not *through* struggle. A life without struggle would need no reconciliation, nor be capable of it; for reconciliation is the transcendence of struggle. Struggle and reconciliation: the Yin and Yang of social being.

The strength of the present, and its capacity to resist its enemies, is profoundly protected by its control over and readiness to use its power; to use open force if necessary with that steady callousness sometimes sanctified as tradition. The power of the present, however, derives also from its ability to co-opt and to corrupt its opposition. Correspondingly, that power has its reciprocal condition in men's fear of violence, in our need for parents and gods to protect us, in our egoistic ambitions, and in our reluctance to forgo sweet comfort. We are there, trained, ready and waiting to respond appropriately to the terrors and the temptations that are also there. Our own desires and interests are the underside of the system's power and brutality.

But add this: there is an element of reason even in opportunism, venality, and madness. The system does not control simply through its brutalities or corruptions.

Is it selfishness and irrationality if we choose our sensuous existence, the sight of swaying flowers, the smell of baking bread, the touch of a willing lover, the fulfilling care of a wanting child; is it irrational of us to prefer our enjoyment of these to *their* asceticism, to *their* hatred of enjoyment, to their eagerness for dying and killing? Their words promise a better world. But for whom? Is it for *us*? Are we so irrational to choose their untestable words against the evidence of our experience?

Consider the countless complaints that some intellectuals have lodged against the Western working classes, against the "corruption" of the American working class, its "consumeristic fetishism", its apolitical privatisation, its toleration of labour bureaucrats. Or again, consider similar complaints against the working classes of Italy and France; their accommodation to the *status quo*; their docile acceptance of the Communist parties in these countries; their betrayal of the events of May 1968, and so on. But yet, is this corruption or prudence? What are the concrete alternatives they face? To whom should the French proletariat have gone over in May 1968—to bearded striplings whom they had never seen before; or to those like themselves who shared their work, their lives, and their tastes.

In France and in Italy, the Communist parties are, *compared to some of the alternatives*, not just pillars of the social order but veritable paragons of rationality; *at least, relatively and comparatively speaking*. To say they have "betrayed the revolution" is the accusative semantic of an alternative translation that says: one can still talk with them. The charge against them now is not merely that they are "the agent of a foreign power"—that was the critique of an older generation—but, most fundamentally, that they have not yet killed their enemies. The charges now come from a younger generation, being their critique from the "left"; it boils down to saying that the Communist parties have lost their taste for killing and that *they still continue talking with the agents of the system*: that they vowed to bury.

Who, then, has more sanity today? Who, more rationality? Ché's rationality lies buried with his bones in Bolivia. Is it not rational to distinguish between courage and *machismo*? What of the ritual political murders by Indian Naxalites (4,000 of them within one year), the invocers of instant revolution? These holy murderers randomly slaughtered the class enemy, chanting litanies as they slit

their victims' throats, literally dipping their hands in their blood; proclaiming revolutionary slogans, they symbolically fuse the vermilion of the Tantras and the red of revolution and blood. (Richard Schechner, *A Letter from Calcutta, Salmagundi*, Winter 1974, p. 56.) Are the Naxalites, the Tupameros, the kidnappers, the mailers of letter bombs, the urban machine-gunners, the hijackers, the gunmen with cyanide bullets; are they the agents of a higher rationality than the system they seek to destroy? It is hard to believe.

It is more likely by far that the system they oppose *also* survives for some *good* reasons: because it has a measure of rationality; because it gives some people some of the things *they* want, whether or not others hold they should want them; because, to some degree, it enables most people to live the way most people have wanted to live since time immemorial; caring for their families, raising their children, doing their work. Beyond the callousness, repressiveness, and brutality of the system, there are shreds of rationality that protect it; and when that thins there remains the obvious *lack* of rationality of so many of the visible alternatives. Who can blame the Italians, the French, and the American proletariats, including the Communist masses, for lacking a revolutionary ardour when such ardour might simply succeed in reproducing another Russian "socialism"? Would it be an expression of these proletariats' rationality were they to spill the river of blood required on behalf of another grey, paranoid, dull, bureaucratic monstrosity?

The old regimes survive, then, *partly* because of their own rationality—and *their own brutality*—and partly because of the irrationality and brutality of the alternatives. Perhaps the western working class might create a new political order better than those. But would it be rational for the Communist masses themselves to suppose that the Stalinist bureaucracies that still largely control their own party apparatus could achieve that something better, or even have a will to do so? What is rational is to countenance and to encourage their party's *betrayal* of *such* a revolution, precisely because had they made it, it would have had no rational issue. In short, much of the proletariat's accommodation to the present is, given its alternatives, rational. It is intellectual arrogance—the arrogance of some intellectuals—to suppose that the accommodation of the proletariat is merely an expression of their "false consciousness" or their political gullibility.

In the West (and it is primarily of this I speak and not of the great depressed and exploited sections of Asia or Africa), a strange world situation has developed: The dominant society, a bourgeois society that transformed itself into corporate neo-capitalism, produced a revolutionary critique of itself in a Marxism and socialism; but this was never enacted there, in the land of its birth, but only elsewhere, in relatively "undeveloped" societies. For the West, the "contradictions" of capitalism produced a socialist solution that only men gasping *in extremis* would grasp at. In the *West*, the imperialist brutality, scandal-ridden, and domestic callousness of corporate capitalism are all too evident. But so, too, are the pathologies and political monstrosities of its supposed antithesis, the Socialist States that were supposed to transcend the ills of Capitalism.

The uniqueness of our era in the *West* is this: we have lived, and still live, through a desperate political *malaise*, while, at the same time, we have also *out-lived* the desperate revolutionary remedies that had been thought to solve it. The old illness remains, but it is now complicated by the fact that the remedies proposed for it have not really improved upon it at all. We live at a time, then, when the *West's* political past and its political future, have, for the time, exhausted themselves. In such a time, it is difficult to hope for a reconciliation with what is, or for rescue from it even by some painful but necessary remedy. In such a time, then, it is easy to understand how a bitter negative dialectic, such as that discussed critically above, could flourish.

Fundamentally, that negative dialectic was the last gasp of Enlightenment progress; its despair was the despair of those whose deepest instincts are always to go forward, to transcend, to climb, but who, once having seen Stalinism at close hand, simply saw no way forward. Worse than that, having also seen Naziism close-up, they had seen vividly how much horror the present might yet spew up. Caught between the barbarism born of the old societies and the barbarism of the new society supposed to transcend it, they had little to hope or to reach for; stranded and abandoned by history they were left with only the "great refusal" of the negative dialectic. The lineal logic of their residual belief in progress, sublimated and rationalised as a hoped-for transcendence of the present by a future born of it, had simply collapsed. How could one think of any reconciliation with a society that could produce Naziism, that still retained this once realised potentiality? And if

during the war against Naziism one had remained quiet about Stalinism, to ensure that nothing would mar the unity of the forces needed to stamp out Naziism, in time the disciplined silence left many with a burned-out deadness, without hope for a future. There was nothing to which one could any more say, yes. That negative dialectic exhibits that a belief in history, as the site of hope, had come to an end.

Our own different standpoint is not that of a negative dialectic, but rather, of what we may call a *dark* dialectic. Its hopes for the future are slim. It expects an increasing grimness and greyness. Rather than pushing forward with confidence that we know the way, we see the growing failure of the most visible historical alternatives, which all seem profoundly flawed. We think that what is necessary is an effort, once again, to re-think the historical position; this, of course, must be anathema to those "friends" to whom history has already confided its intentions. As the new Chinese say, "Build deep shelters, stock it with grain, and never seek hegemony". Rather than sounding the call for a new forward march, we suspect that the time is coming fast when we had better build new kinds of fortresses, to husband some of the intellectual goods that we still have, and to prepare for a long siege.

It is only when the present dissolution of traditional cultural patterns is seen through the pre-vision of a residual Enlightenment expectation of progress that the deteriorating present is taken to be the precursor to transcending revolution. Without the granny spectacles of progress, however, all that we may be sure of is the deepening crisis and dissolution of the old order. It is a time of *anomie* that is upon us in the *West*, and of that only may we be sure. Only those with faith, however, will be confident that this *anomie* is the birth pangs of a better social order. There is only the thinnest line, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, between the loot-seeking criminal and the political rebel. But random urban murders do not, surely, pre-figure barricades; rape is not necessarily the royal road to revolution. When Marx said that the choice was socialism or barbarism he did not count upon a situation in which the forces of barbarism might out-speed those of socialism, let alone conceive that socialism itself might pioneer new styles in barbarism (although the Paris manuscripts seem at points to suggest just that). A dark dialectic does not believe "history is on our side" and, therefore, it looks elsewhere than to history for reconciliation.

The problem of reconciliation arises of course in the relation between ourselves, our ambitions, and the world. If the world was totally at our disposal there would be no problem of reconciling ourselves. To make the world "ours" is a matter of work, reflection, and struggle. But may we suppose that given enough time, these would indeed make the world ours? And if we do, if we are victorious in work, thought, and struggle, and finally win the world, is there any guarantee that it will be all that we had *wanted*? Is there any compelling reason to assume that possession of the world ensures its loveability?

Of course, we can always assume that if the world once conquered turns out not to be what was wanted, we will simply remake it. We are then faced with the following choice: either we assume that no reconciliation is necessary, since men can always make the world what they want it to be; or we accept the need for some reconciliation, simply because there really are others in the world; beings who like us want to be *themselves*, and not us, and not be subject to our dominion. If the world is more nearly like *that*, reconciliation is a requirement of reason. Above all, it means an acceptance of the *limits* of our own power. The rejection of reconciliation is the modern fantasy of newly empowered persons who, released from an ancient bondage, now imagine they have unlimited power. But this is an illusion and an *anomie*. Our reconsideration of reconciliation is no new plea for an ancient resignation; it is a post-modern opposition to a humanistic imperialism; it is a struggle against the anomic quest for power; it is an argument that men must transcend the idiot dialectic between slavery and godhood. But this will not satisfy those eternal youths who still place their highest hopes in politics, nor was it meant to.

The problem of reconciliation is a great and hallowed topic, a form of intellectual heroism, we might say, that philosophy inherited from theology. Perhaps, rather than talking about reconciliation in the grand manner we would do better to speak quietly, as *witnesses* of our time, about the need for modesty. To talk of "modesty" is the witnesses' way of talking of reconciliation. Modesty is a key requirement as compelling in its claim on social theorists today as "objectivity" or "rigour" and is perhaps particularly appropriate for the grim period ahead. It deserves to have just a word said about, and for, it.

To begin with, we might remember the modesty of the "pro-

fessional"—and let us say at once, it gave modesty a bad name. The professional's "modesty": to operate within the narrow confines of his technical interests and departmental boundaries; to accept these excruciating limits at the cost of all human relevance and even of simple human liveliness; and patiently to mould one's little "brick" of knowledge contentedly adding it to the "wall" of "science"; making one's contribution to the future anonymously—modestly? The professional's modesty is to accept the paradigm he has received, along with the limits it embodies, and to wish to be no more than a "normal scientist". The modesty of the sober professional is a thing that really needs "remembering". For it is questionable whether, or how much, still exists now after the heady era of the professional sociologist as confidant and guide to statesmen; as prime contractor for the sociological pyramids of the welfare-warfare State; as Great Publicists who publicly eulogise their own fictitious achievements chanting "Happy Birthday To Me, Happy Birthday Dearly Beloved, Happy Birthday To Me".\*

Modesty requires us to renounce, what Pierre Bourdieu calls, "the logic peculiar to the French intellectual field that requires every intellectual to pronounce himself totally on each and every problem. Every intellectual felt himself perpetually put on notice by all others . . . to justify his intellectual status by a political commitment in keeping with his public image, and, more specifically, to examine all the political consequences of his political options. . . . 'We must miss nothing of our time,' Sartre wrote in the Manifesto with which he introduced the first number of *Temps Modernes* . . . it is always the same chasing after the latest alienation." (Pierre Bourdieu, "Sociology and Philosophy in France since 1945: Death and Resurrection of Philosophy Without A Subject," *Social Research*, Spring, 1967, pp. 174-75.)

Modesty, however, is not ambition castrated. Considering the calamity of things today, we cannot be too ambitious. True "ambition" is only the unity of theory and practice on behalf of hope.

What, then, is the modesty needed? It is "pessimism of the

\* If anyone thinks this an overdrawn parody, let him consult Irving Louis Horowitz's "novelised" account of the first ten years of *Trans-Action*, magisterially self-entitled, "On Entering the Tenth Year of Trans-action: The Relationship of Social Science and Critical Journalism," no less. *Society*, Nov.-Dec. 1972, Vol. 10, no. 1.

intelligence and optimism of the will". It is the ferocious struggle to keep a clear mind in the face of terrible news. Modesty is a striving for *personal* objectivity; for that objectivity which begins at home. Modesty, then, is a realism about our own work that knows that the measure of its achievement is neither proportionate to the world's need, *nor to our own*.

Modesty is also admitting one's mistakes. In public. How can one even *imagine* that an intellectual discipline can have an institutionalised norm of modesty when none of its members *ever, ever*, admit a mistake publicly. Modesty is the certainty that one must make mistakes, because one has tried so hard. Modesty is not the avoidance of mistakes and the protection of one's ego by pedestrian, risk-free undertakings. Modesty is not like atheism. The atheist claims he does not believe in God, but he acts like Prometheus. The truly modest know that they are neither God *nor* Prometheus. Modesty is to know that one cannot trust oneself, and to trust that this condition is improving.

In the decades ahead, it behoves theorists to eschew Comteian or positivistic sociologies that compare themselves to the high and exact sciences. Whatever else it is, surely that is an all too familiar *im-modesty*. And it is immodesty, too, when it is said that we shall make no assumptions, but simply "tell it as it is". This is the immodest delusion of those who think they are self-grounded and self-created, and whose minds, like God's, can shed themselves of all presuppositions. To be modest is also to reject the pretentiousness, the sham, and the shop-worn excuse which claims that sociology's weaknesses are due to its being a "young" and "immature" discipline. The modest remember that they are part of a human effort at self-knowing whose antiquity is attested to by a certain inscription on a certain temple at Delphi.

There is, of course, more than one form of immodesty. For example, there are those who feel that they already possess all that is needed to be the makers and shakers of entire worlds. Who feel powerful (and righteous) enough to bring the old world crashing down and a new, better world into existence. Yet if their's is not the virtue of modesty, neither is it the vice of complacency; and sometimes it is the virtue of compassion for man's suffering. But even that oaklike human virtue can be suffocated by arrogance. The personal integrity and courage of many Marxists deserves to be respected, but not their claims on behalf of their theory. Concerning



these, we may say what we have said about the claims put forward by academic, "normal" sociology: No one will ever accuse you of being too modest!

Marxist immodesty: When Louis Althusser speaks of Marx as having made "the greatest discovery of human history . . ." (*Lenin and Philosophy And Other Essays*, p. 7). And what of the wheel?—Of fire or agriculture?

The modesty called for here, then, says simply: Let others present themselves as the practitioners of a high and rigorous science of society; let others present themselves as the Tarzans of revolutionary politics. An ape is still an ape, as Hans Werner Henze tells us, even if it has been taught to cry "Geist! Geist!" Exaggerated claims are not a mark of genius; Engels told us long ago what they are symptomatic of, in his last words on Dühring.

Were we proper pagans we might make a sacrifice to the building of a better world, and circumcise our illusions about ourselves. We believe the truth must be, or might be made, just barely enough to live by. In any event, in this project for modesty, it is certain that we will receive the unstinting encouragement of our critics.