

## NOTES AND DISCUSSION

*Alvin W. Gouldner*

### ROMANTICISM AND CLASSICISM: DEEP STRUCTURES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

The “modern” only begins to manifest itself when, in answer to the question, What is distinctively human?, Romanticism replies not by referring to man’s eternal capacity for reason and universal rationality, but, ‘instead, to his creative originality, to his individuated capacity to feel and to dream uniquely. The modern begins to emerge when man is seen, not merely as a creature that can *discover* the world, but also as one who can *create* new meanings and values, and can thus change himself and fundamentally transform his world, rather than unearth, recover, or “mirror” an essentially unchanging world order.

The thing to see is that Romanticism was not only an aesthetic doctrine, but that it was a many-faceted and enduring social movement. It was a movement for the revitalization of European culture in all of its manifestations—artistic, literary, philosophical, religious, and even scientific.

Faced with a changing social reality, in which the social structure to be understood as well as the traditional ways of understanding it were both dissolving simultaneously, and faced with

the collapse of the conventional hierarchies of value, the Romantics sought to rescue a world of meaning by “romanticizing.” That is, by endowing the ordinary, everyday world with the pathos of the extraordinary—by “idealizing” mundane reality. The “ordinary,” the everyday, the lowly, the fleshly, and the deviant were to be rescued by viewing them from a perspective that endowed them with new and enhanced value, rather than being routinized, ignored, or “thingified.” As Novalis said, to romanticize was to see the infinite in the finite—the universe in the grain of sand, in Blake’s terms. It was to gaze deeply into the “blue flower” and to see eternity in it.

Hierarchy and value were in the eye of the beholder. There were no longer things that were inherently lowly but only pedestrian *perspectives* on the world. The “Classical” view of the world had generated excluded enclaves of underprivileged reality, whose neglect it had no hesitation in justifying. The Romantic view believed that the insignificance of things was born of a failure of imagination. Reality was now democratized.

Above all, Romanticism rejected bourgeois, vulgar materialism’s tendency to “deaden” the universe and men with it. In the words of Georg Lukács, Romanticism was a rejection of “reification”<sup>1</sup> and, in part, we might add, it expressed a refusal to equate modernity with reification. In short, it sought a path to a *non-reifying* modernism. If bourgeois reification transformed men into inanimate objects, no different from other passive “things,” Romanticism tended toward an animism or Pantheism that sought to transform even inanimate objects by a de-thing-afying “spiritualization.” To “romanticize” was thus to endow those parts of the world that had been exposed to a deadening reification with a new enlivening by insisting that all things were loci of *self-movement*, of potency, and of value. To this extent, Romanticism was profoundly *anti-bourgeois*; it was thus by no means exclusively “reactionary,” despite its sponsorship by

<sup>1</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, New York, 1971, p. 214. Here Lukács suggests (and it is no more than that here) that “the concept of ‘organic growth’ was converted from a protest against reification into an increasingly reactionary slogan.” Lukács would later stress the reactionary outcome of Romanticism. But this creates grave difficulties for him as a Marxist, particularly an Hegelianizing Marxist, for he sees that both Solger and Friedrich Schlegel’s work on “irony” make them pioneers of the “dialectical method between Schelling and Hegel...” *Ibid.*, p. 215.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

aristocratic and other Old Regime elites and expressive of their defensive maneuvers against the emerging bourgeoisie.

It is clear, then, that this interpretation of Romanticism differs from that of Karl Mannheim, who tended (as did the later Lukács) to overemphasize Romanticism's backward-looking conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as Romanticism rejects a reification of men and provides a basis for a critique of reification, insofar as Romanticism expresses a resistance to historically obsolescent and unnecessary rules or limits, then it is indeed an *emancipatory* standpoint. It provides leverage for the breakthrough into a *Subject*-sensitive modernism, as distinct from the *Objectivistic* modernism of the Enlightenment which sought to free reason from superstition that it might better mirror the world. However, insofar as Romanticism seeks to *replace* (rather than complement), this with a new *Subject*-sensitive modernism, then the latter becomes a *subjectivism* vulnerable to irrationalism and anti-intellectualism.

All this, by way only of the faintest outline of Romanticism. It is all that space will permit here. This preface completed, we now turn to the relationship between Romanticism and the social sciences.

### POSITIVISM AND ROMANTICISM IN FRANCE

Both sociology in France, and anthropology in Germany and England, emerged as elements in a romantically-tinged, European-wide movement for cultural revitalization.

F. M. H. Markham observes that "in 1830 there was the first performance of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*: in 1831, that of Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*. Paris experienced an orgy of grandiose and romantic ideas." Leaving aside Markham's Goethian inclination to see Romanticism as a pathology, he is quite correct in noting that the Saint-Simonians, "like the rest of their generation . . . were intoxicated by the . . . romantic movement . . ."<sup>3</sup> Henry Lefebvre is also correct in characterizing Saint-Simon as

<sup>2</sup> Mannheim's main analysis of Romanticism, convergent with the later Lukács, deals with it in the framework of an analysis of conservative thought; see Ch. V of K. A. Wolff (ed.), *From Karl Mannheim*, London, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> F. Markham (ed.), *Henri Saint-Simon: Social Organization, The Science of Man and Other Writers*, New York, 1964, p. 42; see also pp. xxx-xxxi.

belonging to the “left wing of romanticism.”<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, we might distinguish Comte from Saint-Simon by conceiving of the former as belonging to the “right-wing” of Romanticism. In what follows, however, I want to focus not on their differential politics but on certain common elements in their Romanticism.

Like the German Romantics, French Positivism—particularly in its Comtian version—held constitution-making in contempt. It stressed the weakness of reason and the power of sentiment, and, parenthetically, it thus agreed with the Schlegels and other Romantics on the heightened significance to be accorded women as the bearers and guardians of sentiment. In the modern era, “Women’s Liberation” begins with the Romantics. In their conceptions of man and society, both German Romantics and French positivists thus agreed on the unique value of sentiment, as well as on the vulnerability and limitations of reason.

Both also looked to the past for their models of a hierarchical and coherent society. The French positivists, however, were more ambivalent in their attitudes toward the past, since, after all, they, unlike the Germans, lived in a society in which the middle classes had succeeded in making a revolution, even if this was stalemated and threatened during the Restoration. The French positivists thus created a *new* religion of humanity rather than returning, as did some of the German Romanticists, to the venerable Mother Church.

Still, France under the Restoration was a stalemate society in which the middle classes could not go forward, while the returned Royalists could not go back. Saint-Simon and Comte responded to this by creating Positivism as a fusion of religion and of science. They wanted to be modern without rejecting religion. The positivists’ new “religion of humanity” was patently a patchwork compromise; its new priests would be scientists, but its scientists would also be priests. And it aimed at progress, no less than order and love. French Positivism was, thus, in the beginning a characteristically Romantic compromise between older images of hierarchical order and the new bourgeois order, spurred on by the conflicts of the Restoration, but subject to the more powerful modernizing influences of a French middle class that was far stronger than the German.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, New York, 1968, p. 22.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

It would be utterly wrong, then, to think of Positivism and Romanticism as two entirely separate and altogether opposing responses to the crisis of their time. Both, for example, sought to find new bases for social norms and authority, to replace those of their discredited old regimes. The Positivists sought to find this new authority in science; for all their critique of the Enlightenment, they carried forward the Enlightenment's effort to emancipate men from reason-shackling superstitions, and it is this which lurked behind their rejection of the non-empirical and metaphysical. The Romanticists also sought a new basis for crumbling authority, but they sought it in the certitudes of inner feeling and artistic imagination. Both the positivists and Romanticists wanted to be modern without relinquishing religion. The positivists identified the modern with the scientific and they sought to accommodate religion to science by creating a new religion of humanity. The Romanticists identified the modern with the emancipation of the sentiments or feeling, not of reason or science; and defined sentiment as at the core of religion. That Romanticism and Positivism were not altogether exclusive may be seen even on the grossest level, if we recall that the father of Positivism, Saint-Simon himself, made the "grand" gesture of offering to marry Madame de Staël, the propagandist and interpreter of German Romanticism. Nor would it be amiss to remember Saint-Simon's less illustrious followers, Enfantin and Bazard, whose epistemology stressed the importance of intuition, hypothesis, and of the genius that produces these; or Saint-Simonism's search for *la Femme libre*, and its agonizing over the question of "free love." Initially, French Positivism was a blend of science and of Romanticism; it was an intellectual marriage that Saint-Simon consummated even without benefit of de Staël's consent. It was a blend, however, in which the scientific element was the more focal and dominant. In short, what Positivism was in the beginning and the colorless enterprise that it later evolved into are two different things.

In its initial structure, French Positivism was a social movement based upon and attractive to the *new* professions—engineering, medicine, and science—while German Romanticism was at first largely created by artists and by humanistic scholars of an *older* vintage. Positivism was from the very beginning intricately and profoundly linked to the emerging new *infrastructure*—to the

new industrial society whose prophet Saint-Simon was. Romanticism, however, was from the very beginning the vocalized *ressentiment* of those in a devalued *superstructure*. Positivism, in short, was a social movement led by a new technological elite whom the new industrialism had almost immediately advantaged, who had better prospects in bourgeois society, and who could, therefore, be more easily integrated into it. Romanticism, however, was the product of older, culture-creating elites—artists, dramatists, poets, musicians—who at first had hardly any place in the new world of business, industry, and science, and who would not be needed widely in this new world until the media of mass communication developed.

But if Positivism was a compromise between science and Romanticism, it was a compromise in which its *methodology* was developed under the hegemony of a natural science model, and in which natural science methods became in time progressively dominant. So far as the later development of Western sociology is concerned, the Positivists “religion of humanity” was defrocked and was gradually secularized as a tool of the Welfare State. The most Romantic and religious components of Positivism were thus increasingly subordinated. This is not to say, however, that they disappeared altogether, but only that they were ultimately suppressed or repressed. In other words, the Romantic and religious components in academic sociology lost out as elements in the focal awareness of its practitioners; but they did not disappear, as the work of Robert Friedrichs makes clear.<sup>5</sup>

#### GERMAN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ROMANTICISM

In Germany, however, something more nearly like the opposite process occurred. That is, the German social sciences also developed out of a dialectic between Romanticism and science; but here, in Germany, the Romantic component was far more influential than in Western Europe, even if not unchallenged. The power of the Romantic component in Germany may be

<sup>5</sup> R. W. Friedrichs, *A Sociology of Sociology*, New York, 1970; see especially his discussions of the “prophetic” and “priestly” modes of sociology. See also A. W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, New York, 1970, esp. 254, etc.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

appraised if it is remembered that the German social sciences matured in the shadow of the triumphant natural sciences in Germany, with their very great public and university prestige. Yet, despite this, the German social sciences were not dominated by a natural science model.

The Romantic influence on German social science was both manifested in and preserved by the German development of a systematic distinction between the human or cultural sciences, on the one hand, and the natural sciences, on the other hand. This distinction was consonant with another that had been persistently produced by German social scientists, that between "culture" and "civilization." And this, in its turn, also resonated a still deeper distinction in German culture between *Geist* and *Natur*.

The distinction between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* remains central to the contemporary School of Critical Theory at Frankfurt. In one of its basic dimensions, Critical Theory is surely rooted in a hermeneutics that seeks to formulate "interpretations" that enhance "understanding" of social worlds, rather than to develop "laws" that "explain" phenomena. And there is little question but that hermeneutics' roots in the modern era are traceable to Romanticism. Indeed, we have it on the authority of the leading modern philosopher of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, that "hermeneutics came to flower in the Romantic era . . ."<sup>6</sup> It did so, it might be added, most specifically in the work of the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher,<sup>7</sup> who was associated with the Schlegels and the Berlin-Jena Romanticists.

In a European discussion of recent developments in the Critical School, it is quite obvious that many Europeans, whether positivists or hermeneuticists, share an understanding of Critical Theory's relation to Romanticism. Thus Gadamer says of Jürgen Habermas' position: "I believe this is pure romanticism, and such romanticism creates an artistic abyss between tradition and the reflection which is grounded in historical consciousness."<sup>8</sup> (It

<sup>6</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," *Continuum*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spr.-Summer, 1970, p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, Evanston, 1969. See esp. Ch. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, op. cit., p. 90.

is characteristic that Gadamer uses "romantic" as a dyslogism, despite his own indebtedness to it; ever since Hegel, romantics have expressed their sense of distance from others by condemning them as "romantics.") This judgment on Critical Theory is shared by Ernst Topitsch, although his own neo-Positivism is far removed from Gadamer's Heideggerian phenomenology. Topitsch holds (according to Paul Lorenzen) that "All Marxists and neo-Hegelians, including the dialectical philosophers and sociologists of the Frankfurt School . . . belong to this group of left Romantics."<sup>9</sup>

If Critical Theory and Hermeneutics are in part rooted in Romanticism, they are only the most recent expression of the continuing creativity of that infrastructure for social theory. Earlier, the continuing effort of German social science to work out the relationship between Romanticism and science had manifested itself in the sociology of Max Weber and, still earlier, had found a powerful expression in the work of Karl Marx.

#### KARL MARX

In this connection, we may be reminded of Marx's aphorism to the effect that "philosophy is the head of emancipation, and the proletariat is the heart." Certainly, for Marx, reason alone could not liberate the world or the proletariat; reason had to be embodied in and liberated by a theory-correcting *praxis*. For Marx, *praxis* was not simply a scientific experiment to be conducted in the laboratory. It was a commitment of the whole man, to be expressed in the world and in the course of his everyday life. It was a commitment of his passions as well as of his cognitive faculties, to change the world and, through this, to change himself.

Marx's abiding aim to transcend "alienation" is a characteristically Romantic effort to mend the split *between* and *within* men, and to reunite the sensuous with the rational man. In the end, Marx wanted a society in which *all* of men's faculties and senses—and not only his intellect—would find a home. Marx, therefore, counterposed to the Socratic rule—one man-one task—and to

<sup>9</sup> Paul Lorenzen, "Enlightenment and Reason," *Continuum*, *ibid.*, p. 5.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

medieval organicism, the new vision of a society in which one man could play *many* parts, not simply during his lifetime, but even during a single day, uniting manual and intellectual, aesthetic and cognitive activities.

Like the Romantics, Marx also stressed a pluralism of perspectives. Unlike them, however, he situated this pluralism not in the will or imagination of the individual, but rather in the social location of the individual's group or class, thus laying the foundations of the sociology of knowledge. At the same time, however, Marx also sought a universalistic transcendence of pluralism by conceiving of certain social perspectives as entailing a "false consciousness." In short, Marx's pluralism of perspectives was counterbalanced by the universalism of human reason.

The very concept of a "capitalist society," that we owe to Marx, bears witness to his abiding effort to transcend the conflict between Romantic and Classical perspectives. For, in insisting that capitalism was only one *type* of a society, Marx is here attempting to combine the Romantics' concern with concrete *uniqueness* and historical individuality with the Classical concern for abstracted universals. Marx's emphasis on *types* of societies is in the nature of a half-way house between the Classical abstraction and the Romantic concrete.

Again, for Marx, like the Romantics, the future remains to some degree an emergent: its full character cannot be seen or predicted except insofar as one approaches it. It is therefore useless to attempt to predict it in blueprinted detail. Thus, Marx polemicizes against the French socialists, whom he terms "utopians," and rejects the idea of blueprinting the future. This is consonant with the Romantic component in Marx's politics which insists that political outcomes depend on struggle, on individual commitment and effort, as well as on class solidarity and revolutionary will.

On the other hand, there is also the Classical component in Marx's politics that calls for patient waiting until there is a maturation of the appropriate *objective* conditions for social change. From this perspective, then, the revolution for Marx is not waiting in the wings of history, ready to be ushered in at any time through a merely willful *coup d'état*. Here, then, there is a *rejection* of political Romanticism. Since Marx's time, the history of Marxism has been a cyclical oscillation between these

two versions of politics, but this oscillation occurs around a long-range *trend* toward an increasingly Romantic politics. This Romantic upsurge in Marxism begins with the Leninist breakthrough in Russia,<sup>10</sup> and continues today in the still more Romantic strategies of Mao and Ché Guevara.

When Marx spoke of the "contradictions of capitalism," he was giving voice to an essentially Romantic sense of the grotesqueness of modern life, in which incongruous cultural elements cohabit, in which things give birth to their very opposites, in which death comes with life, and things bear the "seeds of their own destruction." Here we might note the remark by that authentic fountainhead of Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel, who observed that "States disappear; the most powerful often bear within themselves, from their very origin, the germ of their own decay."<sup>11</sup> This also converges with Marx's critique of modern science and technology, which he saw as leading to increased misery, suffering, unemployment, and to the reserve army of the unemployed. Under the conditions of a capitalist society, science and technology do not liberate man, says Marx, but rather enslave him, and at the height of these technological triumphs man becomes a tool of his machines. Man becomes a marionette, while the marionettes take on life. Here, Marx is in the tradition of the Romantic critics of the grotesque. Yet something more is involved, for he also sees this grotesque condition from a Hegelian perspective, as something that will give rise to its own negation, and whose own tensions guarantee an ultimate transcendence by a more harmonious order.

In discussing Marx's relation to Romanticism, I have not intended to say and I have not said that he was "a Romantic." I have, however, intended to show that there were important components of Romanticism in his thought and to suggest that if Marxism is to be understood as a whole, then these components must be firmly grasped. It is not, in this connection, amiss to notice that Marx was actually a student of August Schlegel at

<sup>10</sup> George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel*, New York, 1971. Lichtheim speaks of "the introduction by Lenin of a species of voluntarism which had more in common with Bergson and Nietzsche than with Engels' own rather deterministic manner of treating historical types," p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> F. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Modern History*, London, 1849, p. 298.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

the University of Bonn, although one should not make too much of this in understanding the *sources* of Marx's Romanticism. Marx is a crucial episode in the effort to accommodate Romanticism and science within the framework of a *social* theory. Essentially similar efforts had been earlier made within the framework of German philosophy, where the culminating formulation had been Hegel's. It was Marx's historical task to formulate the Hegelian synthesis in the idiom of a political economy rather than that of academic philosophy.

On those few occasions that Marx mentions Romanticism directly, his comments are undoubtedly negative. (This also seems to be true of Nietzsche!) But such remarks usually focus on Romanticism as the ideology of the German monarchy, as something reactionary and ineffectual. Marx's critique of "true" socialism, of its stress on the role of sentiment as a source of social change, converges with his critique of Romanticism as ineffectual. Here Marx's rejection of the sentimentality and political ineffectuality of Romanticism is, in one way, a critique of *Romanticism's* feminine component. (There is little question but that Romanticism placed a particularly *high* value on what were then culturally defined as distinctly feminine qualities—sentimentality, affective expressivity—and, indeed, was associated with earliest efforts at the liberation of women from male-dominated sexual standards, in the family and in private life generally.) In viewing the Romanticism of his period as lacking in resoluteness and "hardness," Marx is in effect rejecting a feminized Romanticism. Conversely, Marx's mission, we might say, was not to reject but to "masculinize" Romanticism; he adopts much the same masculinizing mission toward historical Romanticism as Max Weber and Nietzsche later did, and as Hegel earlier had.

Hegel's relation to Romanticism has much in common with Marx's. Hegel, like Marx, took the Romantics to task, criticizing their effusive expressivity, their lack of a hard-edged clarity and system, and sought to make philosophy more scientifically serious. Like the Romantics, however, Hegel held that men never achieve anything great without passion, that history develops through struggle and conflict, and, as epitomized by the master-bondsman paradigm, is characterized by ironic reversals. Most basically, in the end the Hegelian Subject discovers *himself* in the Object-other.

## MAX WEBER

The effort of German social science to accommodate Romanticism and science to one another is renewed and brought to a new development in the sociology of Max Weber.<sup>12</sup> As Weber conceived it, social science was far from the generalizing, universalizing, and externalizing social science formulated in the tradition of Comteian Positivism. Rather than stressing its cultural autonomy, Weber's social science conceived of social science as changing, both in fact and with propriety, as historical problems themselves changed. Its starting point was the cultural-value interest of the social scientist and not necessarily a purely technical hypothesis. Weber's social science was thus conceived as responsive to changing cultural perspectives, and thus as a science to which "eternal youth was granted," rather than as one that grew progressively and continuously with age.

Weber's social science focused on understanding individual events and historically located entities, conceived in their uniquely given individuality, rather than searching for universal generalizations about classes of units or events. For all its comparative method, Weber's concern was primarily with the unique development and destiny of Europe. And it was a comparative method that was to proceed with the use of "ideal types" that focused on extreme cases rather than on the *average* case, and which were formulated intuitively, rather than through statistical induction.

Such a manifestly Romantic conception of social science also stressed the significance of *verstehen*, of intuition and insight, through which the "inwardness" of other men would be apprehended, and the importance of the "mental experiment," through which the consequences of changes in values, ideas, and meanings would be gauged. In other words, Weber's focus was typically Romantic both in its ultimate objective as well as in its methodology.

Here, then, there was no image of the social scientist as a

<sup>12</sup> Cf. George Lichtheim, *ibid.*, "Max Weber's sociology was taking shape as part of an attempt to overcome the cleavages between scientific rationalism and romantic intuitionism," p. 201. Of all those currently concerned with such matters, Lichtheim has by far the best insight into the importance of Romanticism for modern social theory, academic and Marxist, although he has not yet consolidated his understanding of Romanticism and is far too ready to reduce it to Nazism.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

bloodless intellect, isolated from his culture and operating primarily with well-codified procedural rules. Here there was no conception of the social scientist painstakingly molding his little brick, and modestly adding it to the growing wall of science. Instead of conceiving of the social scientist as a kind of brick-layer, the Weberian image is much more heroic. There is an image of the dedicated scholar who must find his lonely way without wellcharted rules; who must rely on his own inner and very personal resources of empathy and intuition; there is an image of a man whose own unrelenting self-discipline sacrifices his other, science-irrelevant passions or political ambitions to his calling and to his culture. This, then, is the protean and recurrent image of the German scholar, where scholarly work is conceived as a form of suffering and entails the "tormented surmounting of self."

The creation of a social science is, in Weber's view, seen as contingent ultimately on the exertion of essentially *personal* powers rather than professional skills. Its focal concern is on the quality of a man's inwardness, his sense of responsibility, individual intuition and empathy, rather than on the cumulative resources of the scientific community outside of himself. The Weberian conception of social science, in short, entailed a systematic application of Romantic premises.

Weber's theory of plural perspectives, of plural values and plural ideal types, comes down to the Romantic assumption that each man makes his own world and fights for it, rather than searching for a more universal map. The unity of the world is, in characteristically Romantic style, not vouchsafed by anything external to the individual but is created, rather, by his own personal and passionate commitment.

Here there is no one overarching order or *Logos* in the world that awaits discovery or in which the sociologist, like others, participates. On the contrary, the world is one of cosmic conflict among divergent, heteronomous values. It is a grotesque world, therefore, in which the highest values may and do compete with the lowest, and live alongside of them without being able to command distinction. It is a cosmos in which good and evil are intertwined, and often mutually productive of one another; in which, for example, *Geist* is defenseless without *Macht*, but is, at the same time, perpetually corrupted and threatened by it.

It is a grotesque world in which there is no way to choose one's path, except to feel an inner certainty that the path is one's own.

There is nothing more deeply Nietzschean in Weber's perspective than his injunction to fight only for what is one's own. Yet, while Nietzsche was contemptuous of the German state and of German *kultur*, Weber, in contrast, seems to have been sure that only these were his very own. He thus gave his commitment to the German nation-State as his highest value. And at this point, the tragic is grotesquely mixed with the comic. The story ends in a kind of black humor. Weber's exaltation of the local and the contingent as the very highest value is characteristically Romantic; but it is a Romanticism through which the winds of an invisible madness had begun to blow.

#### TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL ROMANTICISM

An analysis of the historical development of anthropology in the nineteenth century would similarly reveal the profound impress of the Romantic movement. This will be particularly clear to those familiar with the German development of the concept of "culture" which, early in the nineteenth century, began to replace the classical doctrine of a "uniformitarian" human nature with a view that stressed the reality and value of a cultural variability that was seen as something more than changes in external stage props and customs that overlay a constant human nature, pursuing essentially similar motives in merely different garb. Similarly, so far as nineteenth century evolutionary theory in England is concerned, J. W. Burrow stresses that it was "very largely . . . the outcome of a tension between English positivistic attitudes to science on the one hand and, on the other, a more profound reading of history, coming to a large extent from German romanticism . . ."<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that the history of anthropology has been and can be further illuminated by exploring its connections with Romanticism.

Rather than pursuing such historical concerns here, however, I should like to change course. Having spoken about the relationship between Romanticism and the social sciences in the past

<sup>13</sup> J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, Cambridge, 1966 p. xv.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

century, I now want to explore briefly some of their present connections. In particular, I want to shift over to a concern with the sociology (rather than the history) of Romanticism in its bearing on the contemporary social sciences. To suggest just a few of the possibilities here, it may be useful to attempt a brief, impressionistic sketch of some of the current differences between American cultural anthropology and sociology today.

Looking at American anthropology and sociology today, not only as theoretical and research activities, but as differentiated occupational subcultures, it seems reasonable to suggest that anthropology, even today, still remains the more Romantic, and sociology the more Classical, discipline. In suggesting this, let me reiterate that I mean to refer not only to differences in their articulated theories and focalized methodologies, but, also, to differences in their infrastructures: in their more inarticulate background assumptions and to modal differences in their occupational subcultures. It is in this sense that I believe it may be said that anthropology is a much more Romantic discipline than sociology. For example, anthropology is based upon and also prizes a much more diffuse (less role-segmented) involvement in "field work." The anthropologist's is a more personal method, both in the intensity of involvement it permits and in the diversity of personal attributes that it requires the anthropologist to use.

The sociologist, however, is commonly seeking to extricate his person from his research, to deny or to reduce their connection, and to depend upon more impersonal and codified rules of work—that is, on a more formalized and externalized methodology. Anthropologists, however, are *less* likely to deny the significance or the value of the anthropologist's *person* for the results he produces. One way in which this is often expressed is to say that anthropology retains a greater linkage with the humanities than does sociology, and that it entails a form of creativity more nearly akin to the humanities, while sociology, in its turn, is more consistently—if not compulsively—bent upon the use of a natural science model.

The very activities of the anthropologist require him to go to more exotic and romantic locales; sociology, however, remains, for the most part, a study of the familiar, the everyday, and the commonplace. The anthropologist himself is more likely to surface

to public attention as a more highly individuated person, in his dress and in his manner, and he is more readily conceived there, as John Bennett puts it,<sup>14</sup> as a romantic hero. In contrast to the anthropologist, who is still felt to be rather more of a glamorous, adventuresome, and colorful person, the sociologist blends increasingly into the apparatus of the Welfare State and becomes one more species of staff expert and bureaucrat.

The writings of the anthropologist frequently take a less generalized form than those of the sociologist. The anthropologist is more concerned to present concrete ethnographic detail than the sociologist who, instead, is more inclined to elaborate on his abstractions. The anthropologist writes about events that have color and vividness, in contrast to the sociologist's greater proclivity for the matter-of-fact and the prosaic. The anthropologist persuades and convinces his reader through his presentation of an interlocking set of mosaic details, which testify to his intellectual authority because they imply his personal presence in the locale under discussion. To the anthropologist, the concrete details are often regarded as valuable in their own right; but to the sociologist the concrete details are often stage props subordinated to a more general problem, or to the development of generalizations.

In contrast to anthropology, sociology is a much more Classical discipline which remains based, tacitly if not nominally, on a uniformitarian doctrine of human nature, of a human nature which, being everywhere alike, may therefore be legitimately studied in the convenience of the sociologist's nearby laboratory or by observing his own easily accessible students. Cross-cultural study by sociologists, although increasingly regarded as an ideal, still remains relatively rare.

#### G. H. MEAD AND CHICAGO SCHOOL ROMANTICISM

In characterizing American cultural anthropology as relatively more Romantic than American sociology, I am well aware that anthropology has important Classical and Enlightenment aspects, and, also, that its emerging "Structuralism" now manifests increasing tendencies to converge with sociology. Conversely, I

<sup>14</sup> J. W. Bennett, "Myth, Theory, and Value in Cultural Anthropology," in Count and Bowles (eds.), *Fact and Theory in Social Science*, Syracuse, 1964.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

am also aware that there are certain schools of thought within American *sociology* that are relatively more Romantic and, in fact, sometimes emphatically so. The purest vein of Romanticism in American sociology is, I believe, to be found in the "Chicago School," which had the most concentrated exposure to the German tradition and was, in fact, established by many (A. W. Small, W. Y. Thomas, and R. E. Park) who were directly trained in it. Currently, its leading exponents are Anselm Strauss, Erving Goffman, and Howard S. Becker.

I think it notable that much of the focus of their work is not simply on the study of occupations and deviant behavior, but that these Chicagoans' studies often produce a blending of the two. From this Chicago standpoint, the prostitute is just as much an *occupational* role as it is a manifestation of *deviant* behavior. More generally the style of these Chicago sociologists seems to have a greater tolerance of conceptual ambiguity; its conceptual distinctions are usually also deeply embedded in a rich texture of ethnographic detail; in fact, they commonly prefer an anthropologically informed style of field work. In this methodological vein Becker has been an advocate of participant observation and has sought to entrench the method by codifying it, while Strauss (together with B. Glazer)<sup>15</sup> has spoken for the merits of "data-grounded theory," which is primarily a polemic against deductive, formal styles of sociological theorizing and an argument for inductive theorizing—once again revealing the paradoxical but abiding affinity of certain forms of Positivism and Romanticism.

To many of these Chicagoans, the *demi-monde* is not only a fact of life, to be treated like any other, but also provides a *standpoint* for pronouncing a judgment upon respectable society. Indeed, they seem to speak on behalf of the *demi-monde*, and to affirm the authenticity of "disreputable" life styles. This Chicago standpoint embodies a species of naturalistic Romanticism: it prefers the offbeat—i.e., the extreme case, to the familiar or average case; the evocative ethnographic detail to the dispassionate and dull taxonomy; the sensuously expressive to dry, formal analysis; informal naturalistic observation to formal questionnaires and rigorous laboratory experiments; the standpoint of the hip

<sup>15</sup> B. G. Glazer and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago, 1967.

outsider to that of the square insider. In short, and as the nineteenth century Romantics might have said, they prefer the standpoint of Bohemians to that of Philistines.

Crucial to this Chicago approach to deviance in particular, and to the social world in general, is its use of Kenneth Burke's device of "perspective by incongruity," which is to say, of seeing and understanding some part of the social world by looking at it from an unusual or incongruous perspective. Thus, respectable occupations are seen as kin to deviant occupations; correspondingly, the pimp is viewed as just another type of salesman. In effect, "perspective by incongruity" is Kenneth Burke's pragmatic routinization of the Romantics' concept of the grotesque—that is, it is the Americanization of the grotesque.

The strategy of perspective by incongruity has, of course, been most fully applied by Erving Goffman. In Goffman's work, for example, the relationship between psychiatrists and patients, or between priests and parishioners, are held to be akin to the relationship between "con men" and their "marks"; the behavior of children on a carousel becomes a device for understanding the "serious" word of adults; the stage becomes a model which is not merely casually but systematically exploited for understanding social life in all its complexities. Here, in Goffman's work, perspective by incongruity becomes a central method and as a result, the world as unified hierarchy is shattered and abandoned.

The linkage of this Chicago School of sociology to Romanticism is a complex and authentic one, and indeed it is the closest by far of any important American School of sociology. The major transmission belt for the penetration of the Chicago perspective by Romanticism was the social psychology of George Herbert Mead, as developed by Herbert Blumer.

More than any other major figure in modern sociological theory, and more than any of the other founders of the Chicago School, Mead was the most thoroughly in command of the technical details of Romanticism;<sup>16</sup> he was the most deeply appreciative of its originality and viability, as well as being most knowingly sympathetic with its animating spirit—and this despite the fact

<sup>16</sup> Mead's fullest confrontation with Romanticism and his most systematic expression of his understanding of it is to be found in his much neglected *Movements of Thought in the 19th Century*, M. H. Moore (ed.), Chicago, 1936.

## *Romanticism and Classicism*

that he did not receive his formal training in Germany. As Anselm Strauss says, "The Romantic writers had a profound influence upon Mead . . ."<sup>17</sup>

The convergences between Mead and the Romantics, to outline them simply and briefly, consist in the following:

- 1) They commonly feel that there is some tensionful *difference*, between at least a private component of the self and some other more socially oriented part of the self, which is expressed by Mead's distinction between the "I" and the "me."
- 2) They also commonly believe that the self and the not-self are bound up together in and constituted by one single process; so that the objects of the experienced world cannot stand apart from "subjects" who constitute them as objects.
- 3) Mead and the Romantics also agree that a crucial aspect in the development of self depends upon its capacity to look back upon the *past*, and to claim certain events in it as its own.
- 4) Again, both agree that the forms, no less than the concrete contents of awareness, of self and others, are continually evolving rather than being statically given.
- 5) Both, therefore, stress that the self is an evolving and changing process.
- 6) Again, both Mead and the Romantics agree that the "past" has no one fixed significance but varies instead in its relationship to ongoing or contemplated action; one therefore does not discover but rather one reconstructs and creates pasts, seeing them differently at different points in the action process.
- 7) Furthermore, both believe that the self is not a passive recipient of outside forms but is, rather, an active and selective agent, changing itself as it acts upon and toward others.
- 8) So far as both Mead and the Romantics are concerned, moreover, at the end of an action, the self is always somewhat changed, as is the object world it perceives, and hence,

<sup>17</sup> A. Strauss (ed.), *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead*, Chicago, 1959, p. vii.

9) The future is always somewhat unpredictably emergent from action that is continually seeking to surmount the ambiguities that it confronts.

Mead, then, like the Romantics, rejects an image of the social world as a given, neatly arranged static order; both view it instead as a tensionful, changing, open-ended, loosely stranded, somewhat indeterminate and fluid process. Mead's emphasis that a plurality or multiplicity of selves is a *normal* and creative phenomenon may be regarded as an effort to transcend the fragmentation of the self and to deny that this fragmentation constitutes *grotesqueness*. In this respect, Mead's social psychology of the self is akin to the Hegelian dialectic which, too, seeks to transcend the grotesque, and invest it with meaning.

For all his convergences with Romanticism, however, Mead was not—and we should not expect him to be—a nineteenth century, German Romantic. He is, of course, a post-Darwinian American, who understood Romanticism in an optimistic mood and conceived it as a philosophy of evolution. As Anselm Strauss says, "The Romantic treatment becomes in Mead's hands divested of its mysticism and is given biological and scientific traits." Strauss is also substantially correct in interpreting Mead as seeking to provide an "empirical underpinning for the revolutionary but inadequate notions of evolution" that the Romanticists had inaugurated, on the one side, while, on the other, as using Romanticism as a lever to pry open the deterministic framework of modern science and to "restate problems of autonomy, freedom and innovation."

It was largely through Mead's influence, I believe, that systematic Romanticism permeated one wing of the Chicago School of sociology, gave it its coherence and its unique character and marked it off as a School apart from—and, indeed, often in conflict with—the scientific orientations more characteristic of American sociology. The coherence and the vitality of this wing of the Chicago School of sociology derived as much from the unmistakable imprint of Romanticism, as from its own creative adaptation of Romanticism to distinctive American traditions and ideologies.