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The Concept of Social Science

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This brief exposition of the concept of social science is based on the postulate that the logical nature and the methodology of a science follow from the nature of the reality (problem, phenomenon) which is the central concern of that science. One may, however, object that such a formation begs the whole question; for one may say, that it is the task of the sciences themselves to define and explain the nature of different levels and dimensions of reality. It may be argued, for instance, that we cannot determine the nature of physical reality except through physics itself.

It is to be admitted that this kind of self-reliance or circularity is inherent in all methodological investigations. One may attempt to avoid this circle by postulating an independent set of canons of scientific methods and then defining and explaining the nature of reality in accordance with them. But this in the last analysis, leaves the question of the origin, derivation and validation of these basic canons quite obscure: thereby it fails to avoid self-reference. In fact, such a theory has an even worse consequence: it makes reality wholly dependent upon and relative to the method by which it is studied. Thus, in terms of such a theory, laws and principles of science can treat “only of the network and not of what the network describes¹”.

In the social sciences there is perhaps only one systematic attempt to get round this fundamental logical problem, namely that of the phenomenologist Alfred Schuetz. I, therefore, give a brief analysis of his concept of social science in order to show how the failure of this theory points to the need for a fundamental shift in our social science thinking. An examination of Schuetz’s philosophy of the social

sciences is, in my opinion, of fundamental importance because the validity or invalidity of the phenomenological concept of social science has important consequences for Winch’s recent attempt to construct a philosophy of the social sciences in terms of linguistic philosophy. The common basis of both is the concept of the givenness of “forms of life”. In the following critique I have, therefore, attempted to show the inadequacy of Schuetz’s approach to this concept. If sound, this should bring out the fundamental weakness of Winch’s position, too.²

I

In Schuetz’s view, the concepts of social science are designed to supersede the constructs by means of which commonsense interprets human actions. They are, in this sense, second-order concepts. The thought-objects constructed by the social scientists refer to and are founded upon the thought-objects constructed by the social scientist refer to and are founded upon the thought-objects contracted by the commonsense thought of man living his everyday life among his fellow men. Thus, the constructs used by the social scientist are, so to speak, “constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene whose behaviour the scientist observes and tries to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science”.³

Next the phenomenologist considers this commonsense world with a view to come to what he thinks are its invariant characteristics. According to Schuetz these are:

- (i). The social or intersubjective nature of reality *ab initio*.
- (ii). The individual’s commonsense knowledge of the world is a system of constructs of its typicality.
- (iii). The reciprocity of perspectives of the structural socialization of knowledge.
- (iv). The social origin of knowledge or genetic socialization of knowledge.
- (v). The social distribution of knowledge.⁴

For the purpose of this essay a discussion of these phenomenological discoveries is not necessary. I shall, however, summarise the main features of Schuetz's phenomenological method in the context of the key problems of social sciences (as formulated by Schuetz himself).

The method of social scientist for the scientific treatment of "subject-meaning structures and unique individuals acting in unique historical situations" is as follows: First, he discovers with regard to any given social reality the system of commonsense constructs in terms of which it is interpreted. Next, he works on this material scientifically and arrives at an explanation of the social reality. In other words, what the social scientist has to analyse, interpret or generalize about are the commonsense constructs of human action, and not the human action directly. The scientific standpoint differs from the commonsense view in some important respects. Firstly, unlike commonsense, the social scientist views the social world not from any particular but from a somewhat general or neutral standpoint; he stands, so to say, outside the social space. Secondly, the system of relevancies which guides the generation of scientific constructs is entirely different from that which is implicit in the commonsense interpretation. Another important characteristic of the scientist's perspective is rationality.

However, the necessity of validating the scientific concept of human action remains. This is achieved, in Schuetz's view, by requiring the scientific interpretation to be harmonious with the system of commonsense constructs as established by the phenomenological method.

Schuetz lays down the following three postulates adherence to which will ensure the consistency of the scientific and the commonsense systems of interpretation⁵.

(1) The Postulate of Logical Consistency:

The system of typical constructs designed by the scientist has to be established with the highest degree of clarity and distinctness of the conceptual framework implied and must be fully compatible with the principles of formal logic. Fulfillment of this postulate warrants the objective validity of the thought-objects constructed by the social

scientist and their strictly logical character is one of the most important features by which scientific thought-objects are distinguished from the thought-objects constructed by commonsense thinking in daily life which they have to supersede.

(2) The Postulate of Subjective Interpretation:

In order to explain human actions, the scientist has to ask what model of an individual mind can be constructed and what typical contents must be attributed to it in order to explain the observed facts as the result of the activity of such a mind in an understandable relation.

(3) The Postulate of Adequacy:

Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the lifeworld by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct would be understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellowmen in terms of commonsense interpretation of everyday life.

In examining Schuetz's phenomenological view of social reality and the methodology of its study, let us begin with his first point namely, that the social scientist can work only with second-order concepts. There are two implications of this view. The first is that the task of social science becomes one of clarification and systematization of the commonsense world. Sociology thus becomes a philosophical discipline. The procedure adopted by Schuetz involves actually two methods: one, the phenomenological: for arriving at the system of commonsense constructs, and the other, the scientific (or non-phenomenological): for superseding these by other superior concepts.

The second implication is somewhat complicated. According to Schuetz the natural scientists unlike the social scientists, have a direct access to their subjects of study: "It is upto the natural scientist to determine which sector of the universe of nature, which facts and events therein and which aspects of such facts and events are topically and interpretationally relevant to their specific purpose. These facts and events are neither pre-selected nor pre-interpreted; they do not reveal intrinsic relevance-structure. Relevance is not inherent in nature

as such, it is the result of the selective and interpretative activity of men within nature observing nature. The facts, data and events with which the natural scientist has to deal with are just facts, data and events within his observational field, but this field does not “mean” anything to the molecules, atoms and electrons therein”.⁶

I have quoted this passage in full because here we have once again the expression of an outlook which is, so to say, embedded in the modern consciousness. It is difficult to see how a phenomenologist (unless he is concerned with the consciousness of the modern “scientific” man only) can believe that natural events and facts are not pre-interpreted and that nature does not reveal relevance and value-structure. It is well-known that precisely the opposite is true about archaic consciousness of nature. “For the primitive, nature is not simply natural, it is at the same time supernatural, that is, manifestation of sacred forces and figures of transcendental realities.”⁷

One can reject such a view of nature as magical or superstitious, but that does not mean that the modern scientist can start with an uninterpreted “original” nature. To strip a phenomenon of all its previous interpretations is not to see it as uninterpreted or “original” phenomenon for the rejection of previous interpretations is already a negative interpretation. It is rather surprising that Schuetz should fail to notice that he is describing not the commonsense view of nature even of modern man, but the modern physicist’s technical model of nature. Atoms and electrons etc., scarcely enter the worldview of the “common man”.

It seems Schuetz is saying two different things. He is saying that Nature can be caught in its pristine state unencumbered by commonsense interpretations. He is also saying that nature reveals no intrinsic relevance. But the one does not follow from the other. Both traditional and modern man experience Nature in terms of relevance and purpose. That traditional man views Nature through myths, hierophanies and rituals, while modern man’s view is experimental and exploitative, shows not that ‘Nature reveals no intrinsic relevance’, but that our eyes are shut to it, and this is because for us,

as modern man, relevance or meaning is not inherent in anything, natural or human.

Schuetz goes on to say that the observational field of the natural scientist “does not ‘mean’ anything to the molecules, atoms and electrons therein”. Let us waive the question whether it is at all sensible to talk of ‘meaning’ in connection with Nature if ‘meaning’ is an exclusively human category. But are molecules, atoms etc. ‘Nature’? Are they not, more correctly, the names of the scientist’s constructs in terms of which he analyses ‘Nature’? Could not one also ask: Does the observational field of the social scientist mean anything to the Ideal Types, The Economic Man, The Representative Firm, ‘Standard of Living’ and so on? One may, however, counter this objection by saying that the Ideal type etc., are abstractions while the atoms etc. are real. However, the atoms and electrons are obviously not real in the same sense in which a mountain or a river is: and it is by no means easy to give a sense to the word ‘Real’ in this context, granting however, that atoms, etc., are real in some ultimate sense, the proper contrast should be between atoms and the point-instants into which human life can be, and has been analysed to the Buddhist logicians. And then the contrast will certainly not hold.

The justification for ignoring the meaning from which nature has been inseparable from the prehistoric times until today, while trying at the same time to preserve it in the human words, is perhaps, the ideal that the ‘meanings’ which man projects upon nature are not intrinsic to it, they are not natural meanings but human meanings superimposed upon Nature; on the other hand, the meanings of the human world (“commonsense constructs”, “Subjective meanings” etc.) are intrinsic to it, for they are given by man himself, they arise from within. The assumption, accordingly, is that when the anthropomorphic, theomorphic or the hieratic view of Nature is given up, there still does remain a substantial ‘something’, and that is real Nature, on the other hand, if we abstract the human world from its meaningful context, it will no longer be specifically human.

Such a position rests on erroneous arguments. If the significance of the Natural and the Human-cultural worlds is the free creation of man, it cannot be intrinsic to either Nature or culture. Just as man has withdrawn meaning from Nature, he can withdraw it from the human realm. Nor again can we treat a collective projection as synonymous with something objective, even when objectivity is equated with intersubjectivity (for, though intersubjectivity may be assumed *ab initio*, it is not thereby explained). A transcendental consciousness has to be posited. For after all, subjectivity cannot be superseded by intersubjectivity, but only by trans-subjectivity. And thus, if meanings originate in man, they remain subjective and we have the well-known existentialist predicament.

Schuetz's effort to give objective validity to these subjective meaning-structures is therefore doomed to failure. He holds that objectivity can be achieved by coordinating the logical and commonsense interpretations of human action. However, the commonsense model is not given to common observation. It is discovered by special phenomenological techniques. Schuetz admits that all interpretation of the world is based on a stock of previous experiences of it, our own or those handed down to us by parents or teachers, and this experience, in the form of 'knowledge at hand,' functions as a "scheme of reference." In other words, he clearly acknowledges that all human experience and interpretation is in terms of theories and concepts accepted at that time— that it implies a given system of knowledge. In view of this, what could he mean by basing his solution on the assumption that the commonsense constructs were something ultimate, something pre - speculative, something in the nature of absolute (phenomenological) presupposition of all these mental activities? It is difficult to see how such a view could be tenable, for admittedly commonsense is the popular version of the current system of knowledge. Since these systems of knowledge have been changing, any universal set of concepts cannot be obtained from them which could be set up as a permanent control for the findings of the social scientist.

It could be shown, I think, that the actual analysis which Schuetz gives of social concepts and perspectives, – penetrating and brilliant as they are– succeed merely in getting to the core of current commonsense which is not the only one in the history of human culture. In fact, even in the case of the commonsense of the modern world, it may not be difficult to offer equally plausible alternative phenomenological reconstructions. It follows then that a coordination of 'logical' and commonsense constructs will not ensure the 'scientific' status of interpretation of human action if they are conceived as actualizations of subjective, private meanings and intentions.

The essence of the phenomenological method is the setting up of the consciousness to observe the working of another. Once the possibility of a parallel, overseeing consciousness is granted, the series of these higher and lower level consciousnesses is theoretically infinite, and hence we cannot hope to arrive by; this method, either at the summit or at the absolute zero level of consciousness. Even the transcendental consciousness, which is sometimes positive, cannot achieve this, for either it is itself excluded from the series, or it is absolutely transcendental and then it is identical with nonconsciousness and thus lies outside phenomenology. In its principal outlook, phenomenology is a naturalistic idealism – it seeks to 'break-through' cultural sediments to 'pure meanings' which are original in the sense that they are supposed to be creations of a "culture-free", original consciousness. However, as shown above, the methods can be adequate only so long as it does not strive to go beyond particular modes of consciousness. But even with this limited scope, the phenomenological method can be adequate only on the assumption that knowledge is purely human in origin and real. If, however, there is Wisdom, Para Views, phenomenology is seriously inadequate.

This is well illustrated by the treatment of a crucial problem in the social sciences, that of rationality. With his usual insight Schuetz points out that the more standardized the prevailing action-pattern, the more anonymous it tends to be and the greater is the subjective chance conformity and therewith of success of intersubjective behaviour. Yet, this is the paradox of rationality on the commonsense level – the more

standardized the pattern, the less amenable are its underlying elements to analysis in terms of a rationalistic system.⁸

Schuetz's brave attempt notwithstanding, I do not think that the paradox can be resolved without a fundamental shift in our thinking. The thinking of everyday life and its constructs have been formed by these modern rationalisers in which the notion of reason is necessarily associated with individual, choice and deliberate, coordination of mere means to *discrete* ends. Given these notions, there is no way of overcoming the paradox: for reason is essentially impersonal and non-voluntaristic while the modern paradigm of rational action is individualistically and voluntaristically conceived. On the other hand, for archaic man whose life was "ceaseless repetition of given paradigmatic gestures"⁹ there could not be the faintest shadow of paradox in the situation.

II

If one is right in taking Man and human action (which includes social action) as the central concern of social sciences in general and social action as that of sociology in particular, then the concept of social science is determined by the nature of human action. It has been shown that the phenomenological theory does not offer a satisfactory understanding of human action; it fails to cover the traditional theory of action. Now, is the traditional theory of human action adequate? Could one take it as the basis of a sound concept of social science. In order to examine this question, first let me state the traditional theory. It is given here in two versions, the second somewhat more elaborate than the first:

A. A K Coomaraswamy:

"Ethics, whether is prudence or is art, is nothing but the scientific application of doctrinal norms to contingent problems, right doing or making are matters not of the will, but of conscience or awareness, a choice being only possible as between obedience or rebellion. Actions, in other words, are in order or inordinate in precisely the same way

that iconography may be correct or incorrect, formal or informal. Error is failure to hit the mark and is to be expected in all who act instinctively, to please themselves. Skill is virtue, whether in doing or in making: a matter needing emphasis only because it has now been generally overlooked and there can be artistic as well as moral sin. "Yoga is skill in work".¹⁰

B. Mircea Eliade:

"If we observe the general behaviour of archaic Man, we are struck by the following fact: neither the objects of external world nor human acts properly speaking have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value and in so doing become real, because they participate after the fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them."¹¹

Similarly, the meaning and value of human acts which do not arise from pure automation "are not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act of repeating a mythical example. Nutrition is not a simple physiological operation; it renews a communion. Marriage and the collective orgy echo Mythical prototypes, they are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning ("in those days" *in illo tempore, ab origine*) by gods, ancestors, or heroes".¹²

"In the particulars of this conscious behaviour, the "primitive", the archaic man, acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is a ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.

"This conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology. The crude product of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act".¹³

“To summarize, we might say that the archaic world knows nothing of profane activities: every act which has a definite meaning – hunting, fishing, agriculture, games, conflicts, sexuality – in some way participates in the sacred. As we shall see more clearly later the only profane activities are those which have no mythical meaning, that is, which lack exemplary models. Thus, we may say that every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for archaic world, a ritual”.¹⁴

“Thus, an object or an act becomes real only in so far as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation, everything which lacks an exemplary model is ‘meaningless’ i.e. it lacks reality. Men would thus have a tendency to become archetypal and paradigmatic. This tendency may well appear paradoxical in the sense that the man of a traditional culture sees himself as real only to the extent that he ceases to be himself (for a modern observer) and is satisfied with imitating and repeating the gestures of another. In other words, he sees himself as real, i.e. as ‘truly himself’ only, and precisely in so far as he ceases to be so”.¹⁵

A good point of departure for examining the adequacy of this theory of human action – in which, it will be noted, action is *ab initio* social – is the theory of Hannah Arendt.¹⁶ She makes a most useful distinction between three aspects of human life: labour, work and action. Labour is the organization of human energy necessary for biological survival. It is to use Marx’s phrase, man’s metabolism with nature in which process nature’s material is adapted by a change of form to the wants of man. The principle of labour is self-maintenance of man as an organism.

Work is the adjustment of human energy to producing a desired object. If labour is the name of the process of reproduction, work is the name of the process of transformation. It implies first of all, the transformation of process into procedure. It is the sphere of work to which the categories of means and end – and the whole framework of structural – functional analysis, properly applies. In working, man

essentially works upon nature in order to make desired objects. Work must always result in a tangible, concrete object. Man alone possesses this faculty for making things in a preeminent degree and to an almost unlimited extent.

Action differs from labour and work in its field of operation which is man’s relation to his fellowman. The principal distinction is that the essential medium of work is space, that of action is time. Now both, of course, take time and the products of both lost; but the work-product is finite while the action-chain is infinite and similarly, while the products of making endure, the consequences of action continue. In other words, while the nature of work entails the spatialization of time; that of action does not: it conforms to the nature of time. To elaborate:

- (i). Action has no goal and purpose other than bringing into being human relationships, which, in turn, have no end except the mutual revelation of the identity of the doers. It has no concrete, tangible product whatsoever, and though it is only for self-revelation, and self-fulfilment, the full meaning of an action, the identity of the doer, cannot appear before the entire series of an individual’s actions comes to an end. (The Essential anonymity of the Actor).
- (ii). Action is essentially unpredictable. (Unpredictability)
- (iii). Action is irreversible, nothing that is once done can ever be undone. (Irreversibility).
- (iv). The chain of actions is infinite since every action gives rise to another action. The consequences of an action are therefore infinitely extended into the future and they are always more than the actors intend. (Incommensurability)

All these four properties of action are derived from its temporality, namely that it necessarily takes place in time, and in a plurality of other men who have in principle the same potentiality of action. It should be mentioned here, however, that the incommensurability between intentions and consequences is not unique to the concept of action but is a mark of human life as such and is an aspect of its temporality. It is

particularly important in the case of action because of a significant difference from labour. In the case of labour, the surplus product corresponds analogously to the unintended consequences of action. Now in both cases, it is through action that man deals with these unintended consequences. The appropriation of surplus labour (and the use of surplus value) is clearly the domain of action, not of labour; the same in true is the case of work, apart from other ways of dealing with the unintended consequences of work, which cannot be discussed here; but which involve all action, the most direct method is to destroy the product of the work : but this unmaking is not another mode of making; it is a mode of doing. In other words, while not-labouring and unmaking are not modes of labouring and making, undoing is a mode of doing. This can be seen more clearly in speech with which action is intertwined. The denial of a proposition is always another proposition and silence, when it is not simply an inability to speak, is a form of eloquence.

All those properties of human action as also its inherent tensions, the paradoxes and the perplexities of action, have ben forcefully summarised in the following passage from Arendt:

“That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance, superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if man were able to bear its burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength. That this is impossible, men have always known. They have known that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he always becomes ‘guilty’ of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed, he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and that its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act. All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom, which by producing the web of human relationships, seems to entangle its producer to such an extent that he appears much more

the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done. Nowhere in other words, neither in labour subject to the necessity of life, nor in fabrication dependent upon given materials, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man”.¹⁷

Now whether this analysis of the fundamental logical properties of human action is sound or it is not, is very important. To me it sounds true both in logic and in experience and I have been unable to think up any convincing argument against it. If so, a valid concept of social science must be able to deal with these tensions, paradoxes and perplexities of human action. This does not mean that they could be eliminated, explained away or solved by the social sciences, but it does mean that any social science which is constructed in terms of a concept of human action that does not reflect its fundamental properties and the tensions and perplexities inherent therein is seriously inadequate.

How Adequate Is the Modern Positivistic Social Science, Especially Sociology?

Now, it is not a wholly fair question, for the analysis of human action that has been presented here is not one that is accepted by the majority of sociologists today. Their concept of human action is derived from the experience of work, the sphere of making, hence “doing” or action proper remains outside the scope of modern social science (except in so far as it is assimilated to the category of making or to that of event, as we shall presently see). And yet, if the analysis of the action presented here is sound, the problems will arise in any case. From this point of view, it is proper to try to see how, if at all, the resources of the dominant schools of sociology met these problems.

Let us take the essential unpredictability of human action. This of course is denied, on the other hand, the fundamental postulate of the received theory of social science is that social action is predictable and that this is quite consistent with human freedom. I do not wish to get involved with this compatibility question, for social scientists are seldom clear and sophisticated about the concept of prediction;

besides, I do not start with any axiom of human freedom. The problem of unpredictability, however, does appear in modern positivistic social science under the name of self-fulfilling prophecy and self-negating prediction, and so let us see if these can be dealt with.

There is no such thing as a self-fulfilling prophecy or prediction, notwithstanding a sizeable literature where eminent people discuss this so-called problem. There is, of course, a problem here but it concerns the logic of belief and action and not prediction, and hence I will leave it out of consideration. However, there is a self-negating prediction, for a warranted prediction can be falsified if having become aware of a future state of affairs through a predication, people take steps to prevent it successfully. I am not aware of any satisfactory solution to this problem in contemporary social science- sociology. Two answers or solutions are usually given. One is to say that given the previous attitude of the people, the prediction is valid, the subsequent change in the attitude of the people is a new datum and hence does not affect the validity of the prediction even if it has been falsified. I will not raise the question whether we seek the truth or the warrantability of prediction. But whether it is the one or the other, the fact that the new datum is a consequence of the prediction itself affects both the truth and warrantability. The other answer is that the effect of the prediction can be anticipated and be built into social science predictions. I must admit that I do not understand this solution. If the problem of self-negating prediction remains unresolved, the theorem of the predictability of human action has not been proved.

The other problem that has been recognized is that of incommensurability of intention and consequence. It goes under the name of the problem of unintended consequences of action. One solution to it is Merton's illogical theory of latent and manifest function¹⁸, of which Dahrendorf's theory of latent and manifest interests is a branch.¹⁹ However, if this solution is understood at the level of actor, it does not touch the problem at all, which consists precisely in the knowledge that there are "latent" functions or consequences which cannot be prevented. If it is to be applied to the system level alone, then the concept of intention being inapplicable to

a system one has to bring in the idea of a "telos" or an eschaton, or, from another point of view, of providence, for which there is no logical or official place in the current concept of social science.

In a qualified form Popper admits the essential unpredictability of human action. He proposes piecemeal social engineering as the solution of the problem of unintended consequences of human action. It is clearly a 'solution' which leaves the principal level untouched.

The same objection applied to the handling of irreversibility of human action in so far as it is recognized. The only way it is dealt with is through some version of evolutionary progress involving secularized versions of eschatology or Providence. Again, these are notions which, strictly, are extraneous to social science.

The main point is that the current concept of *social science* is based on the reduction of action to event, hence it eliminates the actor; an event need not have an agent, nobody needs be responsible for it. The current position at psychiatry brings this out. Though both an event and an action take place in time, pastness is of the essence for the former and futurity is essential to the concept of action. Thus, though every series of action recedes, so to say, into a series of events (and hence it can always be seen as such), an action remains fundamentally distinct from an event by virtue of its attempted appropriation of the future, or – in more familiar but less favoured language – by virtue of its quality of hope. In other words, the future is given not in prediction but in faith, whose inter-personal mode is promise.

We thus find that most of our current sociology (or for that matter whole gamut of social science) has no theory of human action. What it deals with is human events and their manipulation, not human actions and human life.

Let us now turn to Hannah Arendt's own solution which is in terms of two unique faculties of man: his ability to promise and his ability to forgive. Because man can make and keep promises there are, to use her own words, islands of certainty in the ocean of unpredictability: and because he can be forgiven and thus "released" from the consequences of his own actions he can be free again, that is, he can

begin again. (In Arendt's definition to act is to initiate, to begin a new process). Promise and forgiveness represent, not higher powers but are inherent in action itself. Her other major contention is that the power to forgive and to promise has no need to be grounded in any divine or transcendental source. It is not true, she argues, that God alone can forgive. In short, essential unpredictability is overcome by promise and what has been 'done' can be 'undone' through forgiveness. It is implicit in this solution that man's identity is revealed in the series of his promises in terms of which he can be the author also of his own life story.

Now if we have rightly contended that the methodology of modern social science is inadequate to deal with the unpredictability of human life for it cannot solve the problem of self-negating prediction, then the category of promise does become a most important one to replace that of predictability in the social science. To promise is to create a future and become its guarantor. In promising one paradoxically takes responsibility for the future and this is what distinguishes a promise from a prediction for the latter involves no personal responsibility.

But it is beyond human powers, taken by themselves, to guarantee a future, for man is not the creator of time. Even at a purely personal level the fulfilment of a promise involves correct memory, which, in principle, is beyond human control. The human capacity of promise, therefore, depends on man's faith in a Transcendent order without which his promise would be an illusion, a pretense or a fraud. Moreover, the capacity to promise, even in so far as it creates and guarantees a future, is not a free capacity: It is subordinate to what should be promised and thus presupposes a system of norms of action. The promise can thus be only a mediator between the universal order and the individual who promises. If, on the other hand, the power of promise was made absolute so that it alone was the basis of obligation, the concept of justice will be eliminated altogether.

And if justice is eliminated, Arendt's theory of promise leads to only a tyrannous socio-political order based either on brute force or an manipulative and conditioning power or on both. That is to say,

translated to the collective level, a non-transcendental, humanistic concept of promise becomes the wilful exercise of power on the part of a few and its compulsory acceptance on the part of all the others. Since this is an unexpected result and one completely opposed to Arendt's intentions, a brief elucidation of this point is perhaps in order.

If my capacity to promise is an expression of my 'freedom' (Arendt's view) and not of my responsibility (the traditional theory), then collective action still remains unpredictable and the only way to deal with this situation is to see that I make and keep the same promises that others are making and keeping. Only to the extent and at the level that this is so, will unpredictability be overcome at the collective level. But this can come about only if I determine the promises of all others, or others determine mine. Either way it is coercion and obedience, conscious or subliminal, and thus a negation of my 'freedom'. And the worst aspect of this situation is that the theory of promise as an expression of my 'freedom', deprives me of my human right to rebel against the power of others over me, even though it is inherent in my 'freedom'.

It should not be difficult to see how this theory runs into such a crucial contradiction. The idea that my capacity to promise needs no cosmic, transcendental ground is the idea that my future is knowable to me because it can be made by me. In other words, to accept this idea is to assume that I have full 'freedom' (power) over my future. But If I am the ground of this 'freedom', then I must know who I am, and if I do, I have already transcended by egoity, my finitude; for, as the knower of the finite series that is my past, present and future, I am outside it. (And since my past, present and future involve the past, present and future of others as well, to know who I am is to transcend all history).

But if I don't know who I am, (and Arendt is right about the essential unnameability of the human actor throughout his life) then my 'freedom' over my future is not *my* 'freedom' and I do not make future. No other human being(s) can make it for me, for as actors they suffer from the same unnameability. And yet the *hope* of my Self Knowledge and true Freedom is signified by this very fact that neither I nor any

other human being(s) has power over my future: that is inviolable and as such, unpredictable. I discover and realise myself in and through the unfolding of this inviolable, unknowable future, struggling constantly to preserve its inviolability. In short, the unknowability of the 'I' makes it false to assume that I make my own future; however, if in spite of this I do proceed on this assumption, I would be granting the general idea that the future is violable (manipulable) and thereby undermining the very foundation of my human duty to resist any unjust invasion of human life, for this duty is grounded precisely in the inviolability and unknowability of man's future. (Compare Simone Weil's profound observation: "The future corresponds to responsibility, the past to powerlessness. Notebook, Vol. I, p. 97).

In the same way the human capacity to forgive depends upon a faith in transcendent order. By myself, I cannot forgive anyone without assuming, in the very act, a superiority which falsifies the meaning and purpose of forgiving. Again, to forgive is to accept a wrong without approving it; that it renews the transgressor's freedom, and not encourage him in his wrongdoing, cannot be guaranteed by man alone but must be given by faith in a transcendent Providence. In other words, whether one's act of forgiving will restore the disturbance of social equilibrium implied in the wrong act or will increase this disturbance by increasing the level of social apathy, cannot be decided solely in terms of the power of forgiving, for its redemptive power cannot be immanent in it. In other words, the supererogation necessarily involved in the act of forgiving must be redeemed by humility before God, or a superhuman reality, in whose name alone man can forgive another man. To forgive truly is to forget, but not only one cannot guarantee this, one cannot even make any effort specifically to forget. Here again one depends on suprahuman divine powers.

It can thus be seen that Arendt's solution in terms of a humanistic theory of promise and forgiveness is, unfortunately, a failure.

Unlike modern social science, the traditional theory of action is based on the acceptance of all the four properties of human action. And it

does not seek to eliminate or conquer any of them: its aim is to devise a method of suffering action in a mode that takes man to a level where they (the inner tensions of action) could be transcended.

The traditional theory of action does not, and unlike Arendt and the whole modern opinion, see action as man's capacity to initiate, to start. Man can only intervene in an ongoing stream of actions, events, etc. The unpredictability of human action is not an aspect of human freedom, for if it were so, one should always be able to predict truly one's own future. It is really an aspect of man's creatureliness, of his ignorance: that is, of the fact that his life and actions are in time and oriented towards the future. The redemption for him, therefore, is not through an effort to guarantee the future by promise (or plan or prediction), but by participation in the Timeless, through imitation of archetypes. Man's freedom is only his awareness of his creatureliness. Human action, being imitation of archetypal actions which represent universal principles, creates a transpersonal space in virtue of which it becomes expectable. Unpredictability remains, for the failure to act cannot be eliminated as a possibility, given the creature character of man-in-the-world.

It may be useful to point out here that traditional sociology does not aim at developing any theory and technique of 'predicting human behaviour' nor is it interested in any individual or collective effort to guarantee or engineer a future state of affairs – for it is in vain to try to abolish time and nothing less is involved in the knowledge of future. The important question for traditional social theory is not what *will* men do, but how *ought* men to act. This 'ought' or norm represents the "scientific application of doctrinal norms to contingent problems". It is an imperative derived from the response situation itself when interpreted in the light of traditional principles and differs fundamentally from any theory of the norms which defines it in terms of the calculated manipulation of the future in accordance with the actors- individual or collective purposes. From the traditional point of view, at the individual level man copes with future by his understanding of and obedience to traditional (timeless) norms of action and correspondingly at the social level through the royal

(stately) duty of maintaining the sovereignty of the *Dharma*, that provides the required social certainty and equilibrium.

For the traditional theory, a promise represents the affirmation of one's responsibility to do the right thing in the given situation; true, one is thereby committed to a future cause of action, but this implies no attack on the invisibility of the future because this commitment to the future is only an aspect of the temporality of existence and not a result of one's will to determine the future. In other words, when one decides under guidance of traditional (timeless) principles, upon a future course of action, both the future and the decision-maker are determined by the (timeless) principles. That is why promise as the power to bestow boons or pronounce curse is a form of *hubris*. (In the Hindu tradition all such forms to promise and prediction are regarded as divine (or royal) prerogatives or as temptations to be avoided).

The irreversibility of human actions, their infinite endurance; again, is sought to be redeemed not by human forgiveness, nor even, in the last analysis, by divine grace or forgiveness, but is to be accepted through ceaseless repetition of transcendent models. Viewed under finitude, an irreversible but infinite process becomes a cyclic one; in the traditional theory of action acceptance of this cycle is fundamental and is to be met by acting in function of one's awareness of one's situation and not at all in terms of one's *will* which aims at a consummation that is impossible for man. The repetitive character of traditional life in terms of trans-temporal models is the way the irreversibility of time is coped with.

The incommensurability between intention and consequence of action (the problem of unintended consequences) is not accordingly by the concept of initiation of archetypes which are symbols and have to be understood in order to be translated into action. Intention and result are both thus removed from the centre, though the actor remains responsible for all the consequences intended and unintended since action in this theory is defined as response to the total situation determined by the actor's level of awareness (knowledge).

And finally, the fourth property, which may be called the essential unnameability of the actor. Surprisingly, even Arendt does not really deal with this in her theory. Modern social sciences do not formally recognize this problem (paradox) at this level, but it does appear in the form of what is termed as identity-crisis or need and search for identity.

In the traditional theory as summarized in this paper, this is recognised as central. The identity man gets through participation in and imitation of transcendent models, does not name him but only gives him a way for the search of his *self* through life. The paradox of unnameability is a pointer to man's transcendence, to the vanishing of the problem of identity. The tradition requires man to live through this autological mystery and progress towards its transcendence. For this the archetypal framework, the transtemporal orientation of traditional life, provides just a way. One is always free to devote oneself to the search of another way. The transtemporal models of action, the myth and metaphysics which provide the principles from which norms of action are set up, are not ultimate: they only clarify the nature of man's quest for his self, so that one could progress towards the vanishing of the autological question "who am I?", that is, towards no-self.

The most relevant doubt or objection that could be raised against this theory of action will perhaps be: Has not action here been reduced to work? I may briefly try to deal with this.

The distinction between work and action has been drawn by the scholastics as follows: 'Human activity has two basic forms: doing (*agore*) and making (*facere*). Artifacts, technical and artistic, are works of making. We ourselves are the 'works' of doing".²⁰

This admirably explains the distinction and brings out the inner dialectic of action and work. Let us put in this way: Both work and action are concerned with realization: work is concerned with outer reality, action with one's own self. Work gives forms to space: Action gives 'form' to Time. Action and work both stop time's flow. But while work deals with space, action deals with time itself. Hence there is a contradiction in action, for to give form to time is to spatialize it:

that is, to relapse into work. Now the traditional theory of doing and making is deeply aware of these structural tensions of action and work and the inherent tendency of action to relapse into work – the worker’s search for leisure and the technician’s longing for being scientist and artist are but aspects of it. At the same time the actor’s longing to leave a permanent record, to create monuments, is something wholly alien to the spirit of action. Hence *tradition* offers to both the actor and the maker (artist) the only solution possible, viz., the imitation of archetypes. The imitation of archetypes does not convert action into work, nor even does it affect a mutual conversion.

By introducing a transhuman dimension it redeems both work and action and makes both supports for contemplation. Since it is the only way in which action can transcend time by leading towards eternity, there is no need for converting action into work. Indeed, only insofar as the transhuman consciousness is alive does action remain action; as it begins to fade, the imitation of archetypes begins to be itself a kind of work.

When Arendt speaks of the degeneration involved in the conversion of doing into making, she ignores the authentic traditional solution to which her analysis would not apply. In fact, her own valuable insight into the nature of action as the unfolding of the self, as steps towards self-realization needs a traditional basis. For, if the self is not given already in a transcendent sense, its realization through action cannot make sense.

As to labour, there is, in a sense, an analogy between action and labour. It is through labour that man as an organic being is kept alive; beyond this, labour as such has no meaning. Analogously through action the cosmic cycle is kept going. From the traditional point of view, it is from action that labour is derived – that is labour is the application of the principle of self-realization to the lowest level of the human realm.

III

The concept of social science can now be briefly indicated. A social science must be based completely on First Principles or Traditional Wisdom. The sociologist *qua* sociologist does not concern himself with their general exposition. However, a high degree of understanding will be necessary equipment for him. His most general task will be to give an exposition of the *tradition* from the viewpoint of sociocultural systems. In particular the major areas of his intellectual activity will be:

- (i). To distinguish the “spirit” of Tradition from traditional law. This is of the first importance in view of the fact that in the sociocultural order the tradition predominantly takes the form of law and the sociologist by his intellectual contact with the living sources of tradition can prevent its deadening, particularly in intellectual forms²¹.
- (ii). Reactivation of (traditional) meanings and their de - sedimentation.
- (iii). To think out model variations of archetype and thus lessen the area of what modern social scientists call twilight zones. To distinguish the traditional from the non-traditional variation.
- (iv). To explain the symbols and the various modes and levels of their imitation. Also to examine the effects these various modes have on society. Social science will thus be a branch of hermeneutics, and it will make a comparative study of the symbols of various cultures and discover their symbolic or analogical unity.

The structure and nature of social science will be dialectical and deductive. In other words, it will draw deductive and dialectical implications from a set of principles. Also, the logic of the use of dominant symbols (myths, rites and art). Thus, it will work out a set of corollaries from the major symbols. It will also work out what have been called laws of importance, that is, major incompatibilities of the system. It will be based on modal logic.

It will presuppose a theory of language and meaning with the central idea of a hierarchically ordered triple level of meaning- the literal, the figurative, and symbolic. These do not perfectly fit the triple structure of activity but correspondences are there. It will not, however, be a developing science.

IV

The question that will now be asked is: what relevance can such a social science have for our times? Is this a contemporary concept at all? It is a large and important question that requires a paper to itself. In the very brief space available to me now, I can offer only a few tentative remarks:

It is clear that today no actually functioning system of archetypes for human action is available. It follows, if the analysis of this paper has been sound, that in such a situation, social science can, in the last analysis, be only a study in the disintegration of social, cultural and personality system. This means that it will be both empirical and philosophical in nature and method. It will have to be empirical because the disintegration of sociocultural systems involves the decline of essentially general forms of thought and action and ascendancy of accidental generalities; and these latter cannot be studied without direct observation. It will have to be logico - philosophical in order that a nomothetic level be attained. However, the only strictly theoretical generalizations that it can formulate will be the nature of what Eddington has called laws of importance,²² that is, they could only formulate what could not be done or could not happen within the framework of a given society. (But even this could be done only in terms of consistent model of the social order and this, in the context of contemporary society, will be 'utopian' for it will imply on exclusively integrationist model of society. The philosophical nature of theoretical social science can thus be seen, howsoever empirically oriented it may claim to be).

This view may be questioned on the grounds that what is happening to a socio-cultural system is not necessarily disintegration: just

change, tremendous and unprecedented. To answer this objection, it should be pointed out that socio-cultural change of this order can be studied only from the standpoint of a given social system or in terms of a future one. Marxism recognizes this very clearly, and it has a nearly archetypal system of action and the basis of its social science. If one finds the Marxist concept of social science adequate, the traditional concept of social science as presented in this paper is rendered obsolete. However, if the Marxist system is found untenable,²³ the contemporary relevance of the traditional concept of human action and social science becomes immediately clear. Together they provide a coherent alternative to the failure of the modern worldview – Marxist and non-Marxist – and assign us the task of working out contemporary socio-culture forms for the traditional worldview.

NOTES:-

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein. 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London, p. 177.
2. For a critique of Winch's theory see my article, "A Wittgensteinian Sociology" in *Ethics*, April 1965.
3. Alfred Schuetz. "Commonsense and scientific interpretations of human action" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XIV, No. I., p. 3
4. Alfred Schuetz, *loc. cit.* p. 7.
5. Alfred Schuetz, *loc. cit.* p. 34.
6. Alfred Schuetz, *loc. cit.* p. 3.
7. Mircea Eliade. 1958. *Birth and Rebirth*, New York, p. xiv.
8. This is not unrelated to the 'neutral' (positivist) definition of social action in terms of the 'other' and the 'Generalised Other'.
9. See for an elaboration of this anthropology, Mircea Eliade's *Birth and Rebirth*. 1958. New York, and *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. 1954. New York.
10. A. K. Coomaraswamy. 1943. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York, p. 10.
11. Mircea Eliade. 1954. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, London, p. 4.

12. Mircea Eliade, *loc. cit.* p. 4.
13. Mircea Eliade, *loc. cit.* p. 5.
14. Mircea Eliade, *loc. cit.* p. 27-28.
15. Mircea Eliade, *loc. cit.* p. 34.
16. Hannah Arendt. 195. *The Human Condition*, Chicago, passim.
17. Hannah Arendt, *loc. cit.* p. 233-234.
18. Robert K. Merton. 1949. *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, Ill., (Chapter on "Latent and Manifest Functions").
19. Ralf Dahrendorf. 1959. *Class and Class—Conflict in an Industrial Society*, London.
20. Josef Pieper. 1960. *Prudence*, London, p. 47.
21. A. K. Coomaraswamy. 1943. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York, p. 28
22. A. S. Eddington. 1935. *The Nature of the Physical World*, London.
23. For a critique of the Marxist system see A. K. Saran, "The Marxist Theory of Social Change" in *Inquiry* (Oslo). Spring 1963. Vol. 6,

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Possibility Of An “Indian Sociology”

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There is widespread concern among sociologists in India over the future of their discipline in the country. It appears to many that not only has Sociology failed to make sufficient headway, it has not been able even to chart a clear course for its development.

Uneasiness in this regard is widely shared, but the reasons given for this and the remedies suggested vary considerably. It is often pointed out that the chief cause of the inadequate growth of sociology in India lies in its weak moorings in the soil of the country. It is said that we have leaned too heavily on the theories developed by western scholars, which are unsuited to Indian conditions. Thus, a plea is made for the development of an "Indian Sociology."

However, the term "Indian Sociology" can be interpreted in a number of ways. In our task of exploring the possibility of the development of an Indian Sociology, it seems worthwhile to analyse the more important meanings which this term may cover in its varying uses. Broadly speaking, the term Indian Sociology may be employed to cover one or more of the following meanings:

A body of concepts and generalisations applicable specifically to Indian society and culture;

Sociological principles derived from traditional Indian sources;

The study of social structure and social processes in India;

Sociology as it has developed in India.