

ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE, CHATEAU DE BOSSEY, Céligny, Vaud, Switzerland

CONFERENCE

o n

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIOLOGY FOR THE
STRATEGY OF THE CHURCH

August 29th - September 5th, 1950

WHAT IS NEW ABOUT SOCIOLOGY

b y

Eugen Rosenstock-Heüssy

The creation of Saint-Simon's (1760-1825) sociology, is not a science without its basic presuppositions. Everything it is cognisant of emerges from the one primary fact of suffering. All it knows first and foremost is that men are causing one another to suffer, that something in their relations is not as it should be. Indeed, that is just about all that it does know. It represents a break with the arrogance of liberal aspirations, and of liberal man who thinks to take as his starting-point the true, the good and the beautiful. It avows itself sprung from dread of the void and the suffering and the injustice prevailing among men, and taking its bearings from these and these alone. In his great work, the root of the whole science, Saint-Simon apostrophised the mathematicians of his time as follows: "You men who go by the facts, you algebraists and arithmeticians, by what right do you take first place in the army of science? The human race is caught up in one of the most serious crises since its existence began. What are you doing to end this? What means have you at disposal to restore order in society? All the peoples of Europe are at one another's throats, and what are you doing to put a period to the carnage? Nothing.

"Not only that, but you have sought to improve on methods of destruction. You attend to that in every army. What are you doing towards the conclusion of peace? Nothing. A knowledge of humanity is all that could help you there. But you only make use of the knowledge that you must flatter the powerful in order to obtain money from them.

"Withdraw from the forefront of science. Leave it to us to bring new warmth to hearts grown cold under your governance. We must draw their attention to those labours which create peace by reorganising society " (Oeuvres I, 1865, p. 54).

When Saint-Simon chose the way of the sociologist, with the great catch-phrases "the crisis of Europe," "the sufferings of our contemporaries", "the misery of poverty", he was seeking to institute a system of therapeutics for the temporal order: it still lacked, in his view, what Christianity had provided for the spiritual order (i.e., the Church) - a lawful and necessary structure. Science becomes the science of sinners, Christians, suffering human beings - what a

contrast to all pre-sociological science, which seems to be the prerogative of the just man, the educated man, the wise man, the philosophical thinker, the estimable character and the rational mind.

The new science is therefore, in addition, to develop people to take their places beside the Church's priests and the State's lawyers, and indeed to render these superfluous. What is new in the nouveau christianisme is the new leadership of society where both the old classes of leaders fail. They fail in the rational order of the "sword" of this world, and thus in the institutions of labour and economy, marriage and education.

A further important realisation to serve in the delimiting of sociology is to be drawn from Saint-Simon's mental-compass: he is, being reckonable as a socialist, writing a "political catechism for industrials", and "labour" is one of his great sociological discoveries. In other words, the problems he regards as topical and of most particular immediacy are those of modern capitalist economic society. But he does not fall into the error common among socialists and economists proper, of seeking to solve all questions affecting the state of humanity on the basis of these social problems. It is rather true to say that Christianity remains in his view the original quantity and given truth preserved as an issue beyond this modern world of industry. And there is another latent superpower existing as an unanalysable, irreducible element in the life of the community, on which economic society must not encroach, and that is the life of the sexes. It is a basic, original power like Christianity and the working world. When his disciple Enfantin seeks to transfer to the family those economic concepts well-known today as slogans of society in the form of such catchwords as "free marriage" and "the public education of all children", there is an immediate protest against this impoverishment of the basic forces of life. In fact, Saint-Simon considers it necessary to erect a rampart in protection of these forces of the family and the sexes. This rampart already went by the name which has had to be laboriously rediscovered today after a painful hundred years of psycho-analysts and neurologists - le code de la pudeur. All the social effects and expressions of modesty were to be explored and expanded. For the purposes of this survey, I would only mention that Saint-Simon is not the slave of the latest social problem. He does not harp on particular principles, or summarily trace everything back to labour, or economics, or Christianity. He sees the firsthandness of various forces of creation, untraceable to one another and yet presented to us as one uniform creation. "Saint-Simon was still learning when he died. There is nothing to show that he had arrived at his final position" (E.M. Butler, The Saint-Simonian Religion in Germany, Cambridge 1926, p. 10). It was for this reason that he was able to cry out on his deathbed, "L'avenir est à nous". Most men end as they begin, as isolated individuals: this "à nous" is the proud fruit of his sufferings, and that is why I acknowledge Saint-Simon's authority. I cannot drop him, finding in Marx and Comte nothing but doctrines.

This is, perhaps, the most important delimitation of sociology from all its contemporary social theories, with which it is so frequently confused. Saint-Simon, with his genius for recognising the real powers and forces, never sacrificed the firsthandness of religion

the family, economics and the State to any dogma. And this first-handness, this fundamentality, has had to be rediscovered and re-insured by sociology in a series of bitter struggles. This exposition likewise is an effort on behalf of its final vindication. Sociologists possessing less genius than Saint-Simon frequently enough in their fanaticism set out to link up as many as possible of the items in their calculations with one another: we have, for instance, the materialistic conception of history, with its idée fixe of the "economic" element. This Saint-Simon firmly avoided.

It may be that the outside observer will appreciate neither Saint-Simon's broadmindedness nor the closely-allied temptation for narrower spirits. Why set forth all these principles, anyhow, as if there were not enough of them already? And historians do in fact rather like to go on in this strain. But a sociologist cannot be indifferent to the number of motive forces existing: he must seek for the original basic forces, for he is striving after insight into the law of expenditure governing historical patterns. For this reason, therefore, his work entails the realisation once and for all that the tapestry of life is not made up of a definite number of threads, nor, indeed, of threads of any one kind: on the contrary, the presence of these original forces makes itself felt, or, as with Saint-Simon, is dispassionately acknowledged in recognition of the facts.

Now these original forces are continually being called into play, under many different aspects, to produce the same result. In the exercise of these forces, however, "the same" phenomenon has a different meaning for every moment that passes, since the part it plays within the whole, and its relation to the whole, is always changing. Mention is made in Saint-Simon's works of this point, which is one of the most important in the whole field of sociology. I give an example of the way in which it is applied, in order to illustrate the genius of his insights. He accuses the Church of heresy on the grounds that it changed its function. "The Roman clergy was orthodox up to the election to the Holy See of Leo X in 1512, for until that date it had been superior to the lay world in all those branches of knowledge whose progress has helped the poorest class along. Since then, it has fallen into heresy, for it has devoted itself solely to theology, and has allowed its standing in art, natural science and technical development to devolve upon the laity."

This healer of the institutions of society is aware that even as regards his position in the course of intellectual development he is dependent on Christianity. Saint-Simon's is to be distinguished from the plebeian, often purely economic and pagan sociology of those who came after him, by the fact that he knows his to be a post-Christian intellect. He does not recoil from Christianity as did the whole natural science of the nineteenth century, and sociology of the zoological type: here too he reveals himself as being akin to Goethe, whose paganism is to be termed not blankly extra-Christian, but consciously post-Christian. For Goethe's untrammelled existence was yet conditioned

by one presupposition to which it gladly assented - Christianity. In the same way, Saint-Simon has nothing of "unconditioned" thought. He grows further from Christianity. His freedom of thought is similarly post-Christian.

Saint-Simon is concerned to renew the treasures of clerical Christianity, and to transmute them into the language of science, of the thought of the future, of general human applicability. Here too, as in his personal life, he keeps to the tension in its entirety. Even as the ancien régime nobleman born changes, by unwearying sacrifice, to correspond with the aristocracy of the new epoch of the spirit, so our task is, without surrendering any of the values out of the treasure-chamber of the old era, to change absolutely everything, until our lives swing in equal strength, reborn and renewed.

The original means and the original responsibility of sociology, and its attitude towards Christianity and natural science, thus stand out more clearly against the background of Saint-Simon's life than against the current it subsequently followed, which often threatened to ooze away and disperse altogether.

A living being carries more weight than a hundred books, when his life becomes spirit through the creative force of sacrifice. Saint-Simon was able to write of his life:

"In a word, my life appears as a series of failures, and yet it is not a failure of a life: so far from sinking down, I have come higher and higher. That is to say, not one of my failures has caused me to slip back to the point at which I started."

Thus in the failures he rediscovered the key to the successful life, the key that once opened the gates to the Church. No life was more of a "failure" than Christ's: that is why it is the most productive life in world history. His seventy years of miscarrying life are Saint-Simon's contribution. The sterility of the German view of Goethe has probably prevented Germans from grasping the exact parallel between him and Saint-Simon. What is greatest of all about Goethe's writings is not that they were written by a poet, but that they were left as fragments by a man. For the poet, indeed, a fragment is just what a failure is in politics. Goethe's writing consisted of fragments of a great confession, and yet it is not writing that can be judged a failure.

We are for the most part not up to the stature of this Saint-Simonian and Goethean truth. But it is only this that can enable us to turn a minus to a plus. Without such reconciling of the negative, human society is lost. Saint-Simon and Goethe wove the warp of failures into the woof of the future, but by their so doing the soul of Christ is mystically worked into the future, but by their so doing the soul of Christ is mystically worked into the future of society. Goethe worked it in by his writing, Saint-Simon by his life.

Thus he still stands living before us today, asking us whether we are willing to continue his work. Life kindles only from life: the living fire of this heroic spirit kindles in us the quest of emulation. But at the same time we look forwards. Scarcely any of the answers Saint-Simon was able to give to his questions have a meaning for us today. But we have come to recognise in his questionings an attitude of mind representing a distinct stage in the development of the natural mind - the post-Christian stage. And we put the question to ourselves whether this principle of a post-Christian science is capable of binding us by obligation to sociology.

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What would be felt to be missing if no thought and reflection were given to sociological matters? Who would not feel anything to be missing? If Saint-Simon was a man with a vocation, was he able to elevate his activity into a vocation?

As a matter of fact, for long enough sociology appeared to extensive sections of humanity to be deleterious, or at the least superfluous. Wherever men living in inherited security from generation to generation know right and wrong, good and evil, in accordance with a fixed tradition - the farmers and artisans of the little country places of Europe, the coolies of China and the negroes of Central Africa - wherever there is no new thing to expect under the sun, because an order of things laid down by wise ancestors has provided for every contingency, there we find that it was only that ancestor, or the wise lawgiver, or the ruler, or the successor to the chief, who had to amass experience by means of bitter struggle. All those who have come after wait or work, hate or love, "as the law commanded". And it is from this attitude that there comes the admirable assurance in action of those tribes or villages adhering strongly to custom, their uncomplicated way of doing anything from burning their dead to celebrating their harvest festival. Such an assured life is to be found everywhere, even though only in patches and remnants, in the most tempestuous regions in the heart of Europe. The sectarianism of Puritan North America constitutes a similar foothold for people there too, though only for an upper stratum. But the conquerors and lawgivers and leaders and ancestors, the people ordained to consciousness of their rôle as bearers of the social order, whose precepts and examples seem to be "instinctively" followed, long ago in Europe (unlike many other parts of the world) became a permanent establishment, of scholastic origin: the clergy of the Middle Ages, the educated men of a later date represent a class of leaders that is continually innovating, and altering, and revolutionising, and fastening on existing trends to suppress and transform them. The sciences with whose help it tackled these innovatory duties were first of all theology and jurisprudence, and later political philosophy and natural science.

So long as they continued successful, the clergy and educated classes were accorded respect, the former by the Christians, the latter by Europeans generally, for their formative work. This respect for the lawgiver set in his place by destiny has since 1789 been shaken beyond hope of restoration. The school for leaders is failing, because it no longer enjoys a secure position of authority. It is not one particular law that is called in question, but the deeper right to impose any law of any kind. The claims of the Church, like those of the State, are mocked at. There is a witches' sabbath of all free spirits. God has been deposed: even the godly only bother Him on Sundays. And belief in the natural pre-eminence of dynasties, kings or nobles above the general run of mortals, the belief in the blood of the gods, has also gone. No longer is it the highest honour a peasant girl can hope for, as was still the case in 1750, to be enjoyed by a prince. The regicide is not tortured for days on end, and finally hanged, drawn and quartered.

With all this, respect for natural force, embodied in the command of King and Emperor, has been extinguished. Jurisprudence is no longer enough, for men's minds no longer bow before the Imperial code and its clauses.

A comparison with the history of medicine may serve to make clear what it is that is happening to us today in the political world. In 1600, a quarrel flamed up over the medical textbook every professor had to lecture on, that of the great physician of antiquity, Galen. The celebrated Helmont refused to become a professor on the understanding that he accepted Galen. Now Galen's teachings were by no means as wrong as all that. It was simply that, for Helmont, the true teachings of Galen were true not because they were Galen's, but because they had been demonstrated by experimentation and other means. Similarly, much that we find in the laws and statutes is right today. But it is not to be regarded as right just because it is laid down in the form of a law.

Thus it is that we live today. The sciences of leadership to date have no longer any consequence or authority. The heritage of wisdom that is handed down in them threatens to be spilled along with the vessel it is contained in, which is not regarded as important any more. A theological insight or a legal maxim is clear without more ado to a clergyman or a lawyer. But to be clear to the workman or labourer, the same maxim has to be differently derived and expressed. And such re-expression of them is, in fact, necessary, for the coming leaders are unknown, and whatever happens they are no longer the products of the old classes and schools of leaders, the clergy and the lawyers.

That "crisis of Europe" that called the Comte Saint-Simon into the lists is thus still present for us.

This is true both as regards the crisis of leadership of which I have been speaking, and in another respect also, namely, that innovation and change, and consequently the loosening of

instinct and the breach with tradition, are giving a thorough shaking-up to those sections of the population which up to now have been firmly ruled and looked after, a shaking-up which is going on even in the remotest pockets of traditionalism still remaining. Traditional custom is thus bound, under these conditions of unrestrained change, to be replaced, at any rate in part, by forces of consciousness, by training for all things. In this way, the study of those forces serving to form and to destroy the community - that is to say, sociology - is bound to acquire a special urgency.

Finally, Europe at a later period set about trying to link indissolubly to itself, economically, intellectually and politically, all the other parts of the earth. But its own theology and jurisprudence proved completely unsuitable for export. Roman law and Greek culture are over-indispensable only to us Europeans: for the rest of the world they have over-little immediacy. On the other hand, the catastrophe of the two world wars, and the struggle for world peace, are making of daily urgency the question of a uniform doctrine and language. The few European educated Asiatics who make speeches at UNESCO and elsewhere must not deceive us into thinking that the abyss dividing Europe's thought from those intellectual worlds has been bridged.

In this field too, we are faced with the duty of transforming our own inherited wisdom, surrendering everything fortuitous and unnecessary, disclosing a knowledge with reference not to Divine authority, nor to the laws of the State, but to realisation in man. Only a "human" science has any chance of making good the deficiency which has opened up in every single national integer, all over Europe, on the whole globe.

The methods employed by this science cannot be either of the theological and scholastic type, or of the jurisprudential and philosophical: Saint-Simon, offering up his own life as a great experiment, demonstrated that they must be human. Their triumphant vindication will thus be not in ponderous tomes and strings of figures, but simply and solely in living the process of making good these deficiencies. The sociologist is the man who thus stops the holes. Not until he has lived in the midst of it and helped it along (see Saint-Simon once more) can a sociological problem be brought to maturity. Where the sociologist shares and suffers, figures passively in the pathology of the case as a part of that case, that is the decisive step towards realising what is amiss. Not until this living of the problem has been effected do insights also present themselves. Suffering is demanded of the sociologist, and sufferings are not in the region of the theoretical. "Theoretically", therefore, sociology cannot be described as necessary. It is only for those who have shared in the crisis of Europe, the unsettling of the earth, the dissolution of nationality, that sociology has a future: only they will understand why sociology cannot exist in libraries or laboratories, but must be in communities of human beings. For nobody can imagine that he is set apart from all human events, in abstract

worlds of ideas and the realms of statistics. There are no sociological "definitions" or theories. The sociologist engaged in deriding, or thinking, or talking, or writing, is never in a position to look in from outside at the social process he is thinking or talking or writing about: within his thoughts and his talk and his writings the social processes themselves continue, manifest their power over him, and fulfil themselves with the help or the hindrance of his efforts. Simmel's incomparable representation of European good-fellowship, for instance, is at the same time its last and finest flowering before it ultimately perishes; it is thus itself a dead step in the existence of these patterns. For this reason, there is no fixed object, as in every "objective" science, and no subject, as in every theory. The sociologist discovers the human mind as an integral part of the human world. A part among parts, a creature among creatures, like them transient, and yet like them essential. There can be no certainties, no tenets valid once and for all, if there are not men living, exploring and teaching, who will maintain them and go bail for them with their whole personalities, even at the risk of their lives. Sociology is, in consequence, not an intellectual science as all University tradition understands the term, and still less a natural science in the modern sense. Yet it is a real science, just as much as what has been called science for eight hundred years. For its desire is to realisation.

That is what every great science has always sought and is continually seeking to accomplish - realisation, bringing home facts to people. All natural science brings home to us what nature and its forces really are, and in so far as it succeeds we can hold sway over that nature and turn those forces to our own purposes. Similarly, all scholastic wisdom and philosophy bring home to us the wisdom of the ancients, so that the living generation has this at its command. Sociology is not, of course, intended to bring home to anybody the wisdom and intellectual treasures of, say, the classical era or the Middle Ages; nor the field of nature, since that has already been done, and very brilliantly; but the real human being and the human reality that it detects behind the names and the sayings.

The difference lies only in the theme. Intellectual science strives after one or another of those branches of the intellect which have been handed down as classical; the seeker after knowledge of nature surveys, and calculates therefrom, the full presence of external nature. It would be all up with us if he did come to have complete command over it. And it is all up with him today inasmuch as he has already to some extent too great command over it (application of chemistry to military purposes).

Sociology surveys the real forces with which we men are created.

It is not concerned with the intellectual heritage from the past, like so-called intellectual science, nor with the nature furnished us from without, like natural science: it explores the inner constitution of the reality created for us and within us. This distinction as regards historical tradition and natural givenness likewise conditions its methods.

For this reason, its methods are not those so often represented as the only scientific ones, deduction and induction. The sources of danger inherent in our activity as sociologists are to be found neither in an inadequate universality nor in an inadequate individualisation of our experience: the former is remediable by deduction and the latter by induction. All that represents a danger for the sociologist is lack of realisatory power. His weakness consists in not remaining sufficiently integrated into reality, as part and parcel and fellow-member of it, and thus in taking premature refuge in a debasing impartiality. In this kind of abstraction and detachment, not sufficient resistance is attracted from reality, the due proportion of inertia and gravity is not accounted for, because of some idea that unsullied truth can be borne to victory without a struggle in the vacuum of the sheerly idealistic. But these last few decades, with the monstrous propaganda of lies put out in their world wars, have led the merest schoolmaster of Europe into untruth. The lie proved the commonplace of the human mind. The freest thinkers became fitful and feeble; not a thought was immune from abuse. Everything was, so to speak, maintained and asserted: it came with the newspaper and went with the newspaper. The highest and noblest minds paid their tribute to the spirit of the age. The human "spirit" has played out its ideal rôle once and for all.

There is no genius and no office, no popular spirit and no scholastic spirit, in art or science, pulpit or politics, that has directly to do with the spirit of God. The spirit is not God. And all sociology begins with this bitter recognition. Sociology proved itself an integral part of the world, a party which can and should remain a party, but at the same time as something which must not "detach" itself from the whole (i.e. absolutise itself). Thus social realisation is what distinguishes inside and outside, backward-looking origin and forward-looking necessity. These four ways to determining the vital force of an idea, a will, an activity, an arrangement and the like are to be found neither in natural science nor in intellectual science.

Space forbids us to go into the question to what extent sociology has certain individual points of this process of realisation in common with older sciences, such as jurisprudence, history, theology and economics.

The only thing that is decisive as regards sociology is the plurality of its processes. In order to say, for instance, what sociology is, we have had to make four separate attempts.

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These four can never be combined into one sentence or one definition.

Sociology does not discourse on therapeutics for the human race. It is itself, according to the two different attitudes of sociologists, either releasing or binding, and therefore itself a proceeding within the economy of our human restoration.

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