

THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE TENSION BETWEEN HUMAN EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

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This paper will identify and begin to explore some key points of contact (points d'appui) at the interface between social doctrine and sociological findings.

1. The first point of contact is crucial: namely that the assertion of human equality is fundamentally theological, for the simple reason that sociology cannot sustain it naturalistically. In the long running "nature-nurture" dispute, sociologists have been unable to substantiate that all forms and degrees of social inequalities are socially induced and therefore cannot conclusively repulse claims that even large distributive inequalities are naturally grounded. Although this does not make them either socially necessary or morally desirable, some still maintain that these inequalities are functional to society as a whole, as incentives or rewards which harness talent to the service of the general good.¹

Hence sociology has to rest its case on the more modest assertion that there are indeed demonstrable *artificial* social inequalities which are unjustifiable in origin and divisive in operation.

An egalitarian sociology² thus needs theological underpinning, as

¹ This view is generic to the Functionalist tradition where it is maintained that "Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons", K. Davis and W.E. Moore, 1945. Reprinted in L.A. Coser and B. Rosenberg (eds.), *Sociological Theory*, 1964, Collier-Macmillan, London, p. 415.

² Defined as one concerned with the identification of artificial, that is socially induced inequalities, to questioning their origins and effects, and to minimizing their divisive influence in

furnished by reference to the common creation of all in God's likeness and the shared redemption of the human race. Doctrinally this grounds a fundamental respect for the person *qua* person, which is inimical to many social forms of discrimination *regardless* of whether or not such inequalities coincide with biologically based differences in physical and mental powers; differences which social doctrine does not deny, but firmly subordinates to moral considerations (see *Gaudium et spes*, Article 29).³

2. All social configurations across time and space have been and are characterized by a plurality of inequalities, which represent different types of *social stratification* if they constitute durable and systematic divisions of people because of (relatively) stable hierarchical distributions of resources. No such system of social stratification has persisted unaccompanied by social values which attempt to explain and legitimate the particularities of its unequal distribution of resources.

The traditional conceptualization of social stratification, which has been employed outside the Marxist framework, stems from Max Weber's multi-dimensional view of it, as composed of "class, status and power" hierarchies which are not necessarily, nor therefore empirically, superimposed.

(Note that there is considerable debate about whether "class" is basically tied to the emergence of capitalist industrialization in Western Europe and should now be replaced by various notions of "socio-economic groups" and equally whether all three hierarchies are merely taxonomic aggregates or refer to real interacting groups. These will prove important as this dialogue develops but should not delay its *début*).

3. The central proposition (and the second point d'appui between Social Doctrine and Sociological discovery) is that gross imbalances (inequalities) in either "class", or "status", or "power" simultaneously:

- (a) traduce the "theological equality of humanity", and
- (b) have the sociological result of generating social instability which is

society and damaging consequences for the individual. Such a position of course breaks away from the fact-value distinction.

³ "Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition. True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (Art. 29).

only contained through coercion (be it structural, cultural or both), which redoubles the diminution of human dignity under (a).

The reason is the same for both above effects — namely the absence of *social solidarity* under conditions of large, systematic inequalities.

4. This situation is *never* self-regulating. Societies have no built in homeostatic devices which restore solidarity, nor any pre-set preferred state (unlike natural organisms) which keep inequalities and their divisive effects for collectivities within bounds and their damaging effects for individuals within limits.

Unlike the natural organism, with its in-built tolerance limits and regulative mechanisms seeking to re-establish the status quo, it is people who regulate society, attempt to set its goals, lock in injurious conflict as they do so, such that the outcome is an unintended consequence, the result of compromise and concession in the course of and as the outcome of social interaction.

In short society, or more narrowly in this context, social stratification, is *never precisely what anyone wants* in the form in which they inherit, confront or transform it, nor is there anything which guarantees that emerging structures are actually good for the powerful minority who are most effective in imposing them, let alone for the majority who have to live with them and whose life-chances and social identities are shaped by them.

5. In both social doctrine and sociological analysis it has been recognized that empirically, gross imbalances in resource distributions and accompanying injustice and social hostility have been the rule throughout modernity and late modernity.

(i) sociologically, this is explained because the population in every generation (nationally and globally) is historically pre-grouped into those with vested interests in the perpetuation of the status quo versus those with interests in transformation. This generates ceaseless struggle under a variety of guises (i.e. reformism to revolution) — one of whose consequences is the continuous re-grouping of collectivities without any necessary increase in equality between them.

(ii) theologically, the perpetuation of these structured inequalities is morally condemned (the emergent outcomes of self-interested interaction being “structures of sin”) which militate against the common good of humanity (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Art. 36).

6. Joint acknowledgement that social arrangements derive from *social*

interaction (conditioned, but not determined in a prior structural and cultural context) and from the promotive activities of human agents (collectivities and individuals exercising social reflexivity and creative subjectivity in these contexts), serves to bring social change into the ethical realm because moral decisions are entailed in these processes.

However, historically and comparatively, the various approaches taken to the ethics of social arrangements and institutions are unlike since each demands equality of something (different) which is also central to the approach. The basic issue therefore (see Amartya Sen, *Inequality Re-examined*)⁴ is not “whether equality?”, but “equality of what”? In the context of social stratification in the twentieth century, this has entailed a choice by corporate agents (ideally if not in practice) about which *one* of the three dimensions of stratification, class, power — or status, they were committed to introducing equalizing measures upon.

What became abundantly clear in Europe was precisely the lack of superimposition of these hierarchies: quite the contrary. *Efforts to maximise equalities* on one simultaneously intensified those on at least one other.

Thus state socialism in Eastern Europe could only limit the extremes of class-based economic inequalities *imperatively* by intensifying power differentials and increasing restrictions upon freedom. Conversely attempts to maximise market freedom in Western Europe continued to exacerbate material “class” or “socio-economic” inequalities in liberal capitalism, thus reproducing enormous differences in the life-chances of social groups. Effectively, what we have witnessed in Europe are the trade-offs between (political) liberty and (material) equality. These are the two sets of values that have been endorsed and the more trenchantly each has been pursued, the more its relationship tends to be zero-sum with the other.

Because values cannot be excluded from this discussion, then it is important to signal a fourth meeting point which serves to set social doctrine and sociology alike apart from practitioners of political power. The goal of fraternity, (that solidarity traditionally given theological primacy in social life⁵ by reference to the common dignity of humankind, and regarded as ultimately needful sociologically if hostility is to give way to harmony), *has never been the prime goal of any political régime.*

⁴ AMARTYA SEN, *Inequality Reexamined*, 1992, Russell Sage Foundation.

⁵ “What we nowadays call the principle of solidarity ... is clearly seen to be one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization. This principle is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term ‘friendship’ a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term ‘social charity’, Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a ‘civilization of love’”, *Centesimus annus*, (Art. 10).

7. This is one of the most pressing and least explored issues in the analysis of social stratification. What are the structural and cultural conditions of “fraternity”, or more inclusively, of “amicality”? Which current developments advance it versus those tendencies which are antipathetic to it? Here sociology can make its contribution to the elaboration of social doctrine, for this represents the fifth and most important meeting point in the dialogue between them.

Certain theologians-cum-theorists have attempted to articulate the institutional arrangements which would maximize fraternity, solidarity and conviviality. However, these have rarely taken into account the interrelationships between the various dimensions of stratification and the fact that seeking to maximize equality on one cannot be achieved in isolation from the others — precisely because intervention stimulates counter effects which nullify the prime objective.

Thus, for example, Ivan Illich’s proposed “deschooling”,⁶ and voluntaristic use of the expertise distributed throughout society, would simply have licensed the free play of privileged classes or socio-economic groups to manipulate this structural transformation to their even greater advantage, through their purchasing superior educational opportunities, by their restrictive practices in instruction, and via the revaluation of their own cultural capital. As various Indian commentators pointed out⁷ at the time, the more rigidly stratified is the original society, the more marked would such countervailing influences be, and the endurance of caste divisions would have vitiated if not inverted the institutional realization of the values such educational reforms were meant to embody.

8. In short, there are structural and cultural pre-conditions to the actualization of “amicality” in society, namely, that the distributions of resources must not be too steep, nor the values legitimating extreme hierarchical divides be too widespread. This is not to predicate “amicality” upon the prior establishment of equality, which would be to evade the whole issue under discussion. However, it is indeed to accept that under circumstances of extreme inequalities, the tension to which our title refers will be exacerbated — with severe social inequality tending further to reduce human equality. The realistic concern, therefore, is to define conditions for escaping from this vicious circle and entering an increasingly virtuous cycle.

⁶ IVAN ILLICH, *Tools for Conviviality*, 1975, Fontana, Glasgow.

⁷ Suma Chitnis, paper presented to the Research Committee on Sociology of Education, International Sociological Association’s World Congress of Sociology, Toronto, 1974.

Change towards “amicality” involves social stratification systems in their entirety. This is precisely because the various dimensions of each system are interrelated and the vested interests which they distribute to different groups of agents will condition how strongly they are attached to the reproduction of the status quo versus how open they are to transformation.

Institutional changes which embody “amicality”, by according primacy to the quality of human relationships, will need to build support for these qualitative values without stimulating opposition from those fearing such massive quantitative losses in their structural and cultural advantages as to fuel animosity instead.

9. Thus the rest of the paper will examine developments in “class”, “status” and “power” since the 1960s, with the aim of determining whether gross inequalities in these respects have diminished and therefore whether conditions are now any more propitious for an institutional restructuring which would enhance “amicality” without stimulating its immediate undoing.

10. *Advanced Industrial Societies*

Optimism in Social Doctrine and Sociological Analysis

The 1960s represent an obvious starting date for discussing this issue since the post-conciliar period witnessed a significant and immediate elaboration of social doctrine, as indicated by the number of Encyclicals to appear from that time onwards. Equally as this was the first period in which genuinely comparable occupational and industrial data became available from national Censuses and they provided the basis for a profuse celebration of the achievements and promise of advanced industrial societies by Western sociologists of the same epoch. What is notable is the shared optimism in the writings of both groups, amounting to a conviction that “social progress” was underway and on the way to establishing a more just and less divided social order.

Ironically the two pinned their social hopes on the continued expansion of industrialization with a virtually limitless growth potential. Thus *Gaudium et spes* stressed that “the industrial type of society is gradually being spread ...” (Art. 6) throughout the world along with its economic benefits, whilst sociologists as different as Peter Berger could write of its “self-aggrandizing potential”⁸ and Jürgen Habermas of the “end of scarcity”.⁹ The irony of course was that the 1960s represented the high point of what later became

⁸ PETER BERGER, *The Social Reality of Religion*, 1969, Faber and Faber, London, p. 126.

⁹ JURGEN HABERMAS, *Toward a Rational Society*, 1968, Heinemann, London.

known as "fordism" (mass factors production of cheap, uniform commodities, heavily dependent on a relatively unskilled manual workforce in industry). In these years the industrial sector actually reached its maximum size¹⁰ and growth rates peaked in advanced industrial societies. Commentators, however, extrapolated these tendencies onwards into the future and outwards geographically. The common denominator of the supposed "logic of industrialism"¹¹ was that this economic motor would generate a new type of industrial society in which poverty would be attenuated by affluence, inequality rendered impermanent at the individual level by the possibilities for social mobility, and collective hostility reduced by increased equalities of opportunity.

Both contemporary social doctrine and sociological analysis thus accentuated an enduring theme from the Durkheimian tradition, which had first been articulated in the *Division of Labour* (1893), namely that *growing interdependence* in industrial (and now advanced industrial) societies, if not self-regulating in the restoration of social harmony, was nevertheless *highly propitious for the re-establishment of solidarity*. In the two contributions alike, *what optimism occluded* was that Durkheim had not been presenting the naked and automatic effects of industrialism *sui generis*. Instead he had insisted upon structural and cultural pre-requisites being met if the industrial potential for fostering "organic solidarity" was to be realized. It will be necessary later to return in this discussion to these pre-conditions which had been brushed aside by commentators in the 1960s.

11. In this context, social doctrine often came close to implying that economic progress and increasing social solidarity went hand in hand. Thus it is significant that for 25 years after the publication of *Mater et Magistra* (1961) the concept of "technological progress" was systematically presented as being accompanied by "socialization". Indeed, as first used by Pope John XXIII, "socialization" appears to have conceptualized a form of social life *brought about* by economic growth. Technological progress thus largely accounts for the set of "mutual relationships, daily on the increase, which have introduced into the lives and activities of men a close network of social bonds".¹²

Thereafter, these two concepts have always appeared in close

¹⁰ J. SINGLEMANN, *The sectoral transformation of the labour force in seven industrialized countries, 1920-1970*, «American Journal of Sociology», 83:5, 1978.

¹¹ CLARK KERR et al., *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, 1962, Heinemann, London.

¹² J.-Y. CALVEZ, *The Social Thought of John XXIII: Mater et Magistra*, 1964, Burns Oates, London, p. 4.

connection with one another in social teaching. Certainly it is important to note that although economic development and social integration are held to go together, they are differentiated from one another and the latter is held to be deeper in nature and more demanding to achieve than the former. Thus the following important distinction is made in *Gaudium et spes*: “one of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other. Nevertheless, brotherly dialogue does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships” (Art. 23). However, the two elements did tend to become increasingly compacted in a single concept of “balanced development”, which runs through *Mater et Magistra*, *Populorum progressio* (1967) and *Justice in the World* (1971), or “true development” in *Octogesima adveniens* (1971), to continue with the same connotations in later concepts of “authentic development”.

In fairness, it should also be noted that such optimism was accompanied from the start by an insistence that this integrative force must not be vitiated by the entrenchment of economic inequalities. Thus *Mater et Magistra* noted that there must be great vigilance, with no effort spared to see that the class differences which arise from economic inequality are not increased but, as far as possible, diminished (Art. 73). (The same point is reiterated in *Gaudium et spes* [Art. 66]). These represent acknowledgements, (in line with Durkheim’s insistence on such reforms as common schooling, occupational appointment by merit and the abolition of inherited wealth), that the emergence of social solidarity has its structural pre-conditions. What is intriguing is that Durkheim had specified and placed equal emphasis upon cultural pre-requisites, in the form of shared civic values. Progressively social analysts were to omit reference to the normative underpinnings of solidarity,¹³ yet it is stranger to find something of the same tendency in social doctrine.

12. Sociological optimism was even more unbounded. Affluence and increased social mobility were held to be integrating the vast majority into advanced industrial societies by endowing them with vested interests in it and correspondingly reducing social cleavages. Hence Daniel Bell could proclaim *The End of Ideology*¹⁴ because as Seymour Lipset put it, now the “fundamental problems of the industrial revolution have been solved”.¹⁵ In

¹³ MARGARET S. ARCHER, *Theory, Culture and post-industrial society*, «Sociologia: Revista di Scienza Sociali», 1989, I new series.

¹⁴ 1962, Collier, New York.

¹⁵ S.M. LIPSET, *Political Man*, 1969, Heinemann, London, p. 406.

other words the substance of old ideological controversies and class conflict were matters which had become susceptible of technical solutions. Thus to Raymond Aron, "Beyond a certain state in its development industrial society itself seems to me to widen the range of problems referable to scientific examination and calling for the skill of the social engineer. Even forms of ownership and methods of regulation, which were the subject of doctrinal or ideological controversies during the past century seem to ... belong to the realm of technology".¹⁶ The much vaunted findings on collective upward social mobility were presented as a permanent shift from a pyramid to a diamond-shaped occupational/income distribution. This in turn was interpreted as a progressive, unidirectional, irreversible move towards egalitarianism in the developed world. Thus in the USA, Mayer could write that "differential life-chances will diminish further and cultural gaps will continue to narrow down".¹⁷ This was paralleled in the U.K. by Millar's declaration that this long term trend was "decisively in favour of greater equality. There is no going back".¹⁸

Hence continuous economic growth was going to iron out gross socio-economic inequalities, eliminating the tensions and conflictual potential inherent in them. In status terms, the equivalent phenomenon was the emergence of the "affluent worker"¹⁹ who was increasingly engaging in a life-style which could be characterized as "embourgeoisement".

To those sociologists who remained fully aware that economic development had no automatic link with social solidarity, nevertheless the concurrent development of citizenship provided "the clearest and most cogent answer to Durkheim's problematic, "namely, what is the basis of 'organic solidarity' of modern societies?"²⁰ Thus T.H. Marshall (1963) completed the optimistic conspectus by adding that on the power dimension, the extension of citizenship from civil and political entitlements to social welfare provisions, reinforced "the modern drive towards social equality".²¹ It did so by creating a universal right to real income which was not proportionate to the market value of the claimant, thus declaring war on the capitalist class system and abating class conflict by compensating those loosing out in the free play of market forces and conferring on them

¹⁶ RAYMOND ARON, *The Industrial Society*, 1967, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p. 164-5.

¹⁷ K. MEYER, *Diminishing class differentials in the United States*, «Kyklos», 1959, 12, p. 625.

¹⁸ R. MILLAR, *The New Classes*, 1966, Longmans Green, London, p. 44.

¹⁹ J.H. GOLDTHORPE et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, 1969, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

²⁰ D. LOCKWOOD, *For T.H. Marshall*, «Sociology», 8:3, 1974, p. 365.

²¹ T.H. MARSHALL, *Citizenship and Social Class*, in his *Sociology at the Crossroads*, 1963, Heinemann, London, p. 73.

a stake in society. The rights of 'social citizenship' would serve both as forces for social integration and for structural re-modelling which were antithetic to gross class divisions, for the former is not "merely an attempt to abate the obvious nuisance of destitution in the lowest ranks of society. It is no longer content to raise the floor level in the basement of the social edifice, leaving the superstructure as it was. It has begun to remould the whole building, and it might even end by converting a skyscraper into a bungalow".²²

"Post-Industrial Society"

Recession, Re-structuring and Re-stratification

13. Both social doctrine and sociological analysis confronted changes over the next three decades which showed that the conditions for optimism were historically specific — that is, not to be taken for granted, not to be extrapolated exponentially, nor to be seen as uncontested. The remodelling of the Western system of social stratification was radical enough to be termed "post-industrial" because of the following major transformations:

— Collapse of heavy industry in the West, intensified by the world recession associated with the oil crises of the 1970s, followed by a shift in the global division of labour with heavy manufacturing and extractive industries becoming located outside the Western world (South-East Asia, for example, has become the new locus of ship-building). Thus, as one instance, the British manufacturing sector declined from eight million to five million employees in the short period between 1971-1988.

— The economic restructuring which followed entailed sectoral relocation of employment in the service economy, in finance and retail services. The share of service occupations as a percentage of total employment more or less doubled between the 1960s and 1980s, meaning a corresponding growth in non-manual, "white-collar" employees and a decline in traditional "working class" jobs — a "farewell to the working class".²³ Services are becoming the major source of employment in both relative and absolute terms.²⁴

²² *Ibid.*, p. 100-1.

²³ Eg. in G.B. non-manual workers increased from 18.7 of the occupied population in 1911 to 52.3% in 1981, with a proportionate decrease in manual workers. See R. PRICE and G.S. BAIN, *The Labour Force*, in A.H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900*, 1988, Macmillan, Basingstoke/London, p. 63.

²⁴ "Comparative trends indicate that unskilled service workers share may stabilize around a maximum of 10-15% of the labour force: this compares with roughly 20-25% of unskilled workers in 1960". GOSTA ESPING-ANDERSON, *Changing Classes*, 1993, Sage, London and Beverley Hills, p. 45.

— Taken together with technological innovation and automation the “productionism” of Fordism has been transmuted into “post-Fordism”, characterized by flexible techniques, on smaller dispersed sites, emphasizing the variety of outputs, together with rapid response to consumer demand and the use of manipulative methods to create new demands.

These changes, which have been grossly summarized above, had direct implications for social stratification and ones whose effects in many ways ran *counter to the earlier and optimistic egalitarian scenario*. Such contrary tendencies can most easily be located by highlighting their impact upon the three hierarchies of “class”, “status” and “power”.

14. *Social class/Socio-economic groupings*

Underlying all such changes is the basic fact that *employment itself is shrinking*: there is simply less work available in post-industrial societies — whether one concentrates on their high levels of unemployment (especially the rising proportions of school leavers who have never had a job), on the pattern of earlier retirement, on voluntary or involuntary redundancies, or shorter working hours. In sum, there are less and less in the active population and those people in employment spend less time on paid work. Employment shrinkage has had diametrically opposite effects upon men and women, for huge sections of the service economy have come to constitute a female job market. Women’s employment now makes all the difference to “work rich” households and introduces a new differentiation between “dual earners”, “single income families” and “non-earners”. Although this serves to blur some socio-economic distinctions (eg. as a major factor keeping a household out of poverty),²⁵ at the same time it reinforces other class differentials since more women are moving into higher-level jobs, marrying partners from the same types of positions, and remaining in employment during family formation. The enduring importance of occupation for stratification is inescapable. It is still the major factor in the distribution of life-chances and the changing occupational structure does not approximate to an “open society”. Alongside the high rates of *absolute* mobility attending post-industrial job re-structuring, *marked and persistent* differences in *relative* chances of becoming socially mobile remain closely associated with socio-economic background.²⁶

²⁵ D. PIACHAUD, *Revitalizing Social Policy*, «Political Quarterly», 1991, 62:2.

²⁶ J.H. GOLDTHROPE, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Britain*, 1987, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Simultaneously economic inequalities have intensified, especially at the bottom where the proportion of the workforce falling below the Council of Europe's minimum "decency threshold" for wages increased in countries like Britain from the mid-1970s.²⁷ Largely this is due to a growing number of poor, deprived, unemployed who are entirely dependent upon public/welfare state provisions. This has generated an "insider-outsider" dichotomy in Europe and North America in terms of those whose needs are met within the market compared with those who are reliant upon state benefits. This growth in the "new poor" has increasingly been characterized as an "underclass".

From the "left", analysts identify the origins of the "underclass" in long term trends in unemployment, often linked to ethnicity and migration, augmented by the increase in one-parent households and reinforced by spatial concentration of the poorest in inner-city ghettos: a combination which reproduces social disadvantage into the next generation. Conversely the new right²⁸ attributes its perpetuation to an acquiescent dependency on state benefits which basically undermines the "will to work": an attitude which is also transmitted inter-generationally. On the former interpretation the implication is the need for greater welfare intervention (especially in education and housing), for the latter it is the re-accentuation of self-reliance and a withdrawal of welfare provisions.

15. *Power and the Welfare State*

The above debate begins to deflate the optimism with which many had viewed the extension of social citizenship as a major force leading to the abatement of conflict by blunting the edge of market induced inequalities. What becomes abundantly clear is that the welfare entitlements associated with citizenship are fragile and contested and cannot be viewed as a stable or permanent outcome of the development scenario of modern (post-industrial) societies.²⁹

There has thus been a political conflict developing between advocates of "provisions" (economic growth and material plenty) and proponents of "entitlements" (welfare benefits) in the United States, in Western and now Eastern Europe alike. Some, like Dahrendorf, identify this as "the modern

²⁷ D. BYRNE, *Rich and Poor: the Growing Divide*, in A. Walker and C. Walker (eds.), *The Growing Divide: A Social Audit 1979-1987*, 1987, Child Poverty Action Group, London.

²⁸ P. SAUNDERS, *Social Theory and the Urban Question*, 1987, Unwin Hyman, London.

²⁹ A. GIDDENS, *Class Division, Class Conflict and Citizenship Rights*, in his *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*, 1982, Macmillan, London/Basingstoke.

social conflict”³⁰ which will persist because a certain degree of inequality is a requisite for stimulating economic growth and because of this, the claims of the “provisions parties” will be continuously contested by the demands of the “entitlements parties”.

In all likelihood this is the case and a balance needs to be struck between the two — in order to promote fairness, stability and development (which is in the interests of all if combined with distributive justice). Once again, go too far towards enforced collective material entitlements and liberty is throttled as in the Eastern European scenario. Go too far in the opposite direction, as in the Thatcherite erosion of Trade Union rights and the application of quasi-market principles to those areas remaining in the State’s ambit (schools, universities, hospitals, the police) and common humanity suffers. Here, inappropriate notions of “cost effectiveness”, indices of “throughput”, and the use of quantitative measures for services which are generically qualitative, subordinates human need to technical performance, undermines the quality of human relations which should be an intrinsic part of these practices and alienates practitioners by assaulting their professional ethics of service. Thus, defence of welfare citizenship is not automatic, but since citizenship is a universalistic concept it is reliant upon egalitarian movements effectively mobilizing to protect and extend universalism, rather than passively letting powerful groups to exclude whole categories (women, migrants, single parents, ethnic minorities, the chronically sick or aged) from any entitlements whatsoever; let alone a level of entitlement commensurate with human dignity.

16. *Status distinctions and cultural hedonism*

With growing affluence (despite its inegalitarian distribution) status honour, which is always a matter of the esteem accorded to a particular life-style, came to rely increasingly on cultural and aesthetic distinctions governed by hedonism and in growing hostility not only to solidarity but actually threatening the entire economic basis. Hence Daniel Bell’s anathematization of *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*³¹ in which he came to see that one hundred years of industrialism had fathered a cultural monstrosity. The structural combination of fast communications media, high living standards and a mass consumption market had generated a hedonistic cultural ethos which “is prodigal, promiscuous, dominated by an anti-

³⁰ R. DAHRENDORF, *The Modern Social Conflict*, 1988, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles.

³¹ 1979, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

rational, anti-intellectual temper in which the self is taken as the touchstone of cultural judgements, and the effect on the self is the measure of the aesthetic worth of experience".³² This trivial self-expressionism was engulfing: already it had brought about "Death of the bourgeois World View" with its rationalism, sobriety and deferred gratification, for which post-modernism now substituted enslavement to instinctual gratification as "impulse and pleasure alone are real and life-affirming: all else is neurosis and death".³³

In its ceaseless acts of profanation and unprincipled celebrations of novelty, this decadent culture also denies the possibility of any debate on the Good Society, predicated as that must be on enduring, if contested, principles and on rational discourse for their contestation. Yet this culture of modernism is impotent — it can neither sustain, nor criticise, not redirect post-industrial society.

As the concelebrants of spontaneity grow, the restless quest for novelty means no *avant garde* can run fast enough to stay out front and excesses of profanity become the main outlet. But ceaseless desecration is no *modus vivendi*: on the contrary it leads via nihilism to entropy. Bell has come back full-circle to Durkheim's problem at the end of *The Division of Labour* — where is the new socio-cultural cement to be found to restore solidarity?

Durkheim's answer, of course, was to invent it: a new low grade contact adhesive in the form of secular civic morals, necessary in his view since the demise of religion was also the loss of any social binding power. Bell's reply is precisely the opposite, a return to religion, construed *contra* Durkheim as residing in a psychological not a sociological need, though servicing the latter.

"Despite the shambles of modern culture, some religious answer will surely be forthcoming, for religion is not (or no longer) a 'property' of society in the Durkheimian sense. It is a constitutive part of man's consciousness: the cognitive search for the pattern of the 'general order' of existence; the affective need to establish rituals and to make such conceptions sacred; the primordial need for relatedness to some others, or a set of meanings which will establish a transcendent response to the self; and the existential need to confront the finalities of suffering and death".³⁴

The difficulties of this emancipatory-cum-regulatory response seem both theological and sociological. On the one hand Bell simply re-endorses the

³² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Durkheimian definition of religion, i.e. that which maintains a distinction between the sacred and the profane and he wants "it" reinstated ...

"If there is no separation of realms, if the sacred is destroyed, then we are left with the shambles of appetite and self-interest and the destruction of the moral circle which engirds mankind. Can we — must we not — re-establish that which is sacred and that which is profane?"³⁵

The difficulty is that whilst the Christian has no difficulty with linking emancipation and regulation ("in Thy service is perfect freedom"), Bell is looking for some "new rite of incorporation".³⁶ But the trouble with "new rites" is that they have to be written by someone, they do not just surface from some generic religious consciousness; and once written, embodying that "author's" designation of the sacred, then imposed, for if social consensus existed it would not have needed writing; and because imposed, the *secular* relationship between regulation and emancipation resurfaces as an antinomy. Bell thus seems to want the benefits of religion for the individual without the burden of Revelation and its blessings on society without the Church to pronounce the benediction: in other words he wants something very similar to what Durkheim wanted and appears just as unlikely to get it.

17. *Pessimistic Paradoxes: the Combination of Interdependence and Individualism in the 1990s*

The structural and cultural changes diagnosed in the previous two decades have culminated in a unique social configuration today — one characterized by the highest levels of two incompatible properties, namely structural interdependence and cultural individualism. In the prior period, anxieties had begun to surface about the conjunction between occupational re-stratification and aesthetic self-gratification, but the two had been seen as distinct: hence Daniel Bell could maintain that the *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* could be resolved independently, in which case all could be well with industrialism.

What I want to suggest is that, on the contrary, this emergent social formation (which some would term "late industrialism" and others "post-modernity"), is in fact quite unique and uniquely problematic. It presents the paradox of stratification systems which *have much less tendency to condition polarization* than ever before, yet simultaneously also *have much*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

less tendency to foster solidarity. The reason for this paradoxical situation is that the structural and cultural changes undergone now *mutually serve to reinforce individualism.* In turn, rampant individualism is the ultimate enemy of “amicability”, the antithesis of “fraternity”, the antagonist of “hospitality”, and an anathema to “conviviality”. It is inimical to Durkheim’s structural and cultural pre-conditions of social integration alike. For individualism protects vested material interests with indifference to their inegalitarian implications (despite the inescapable fact of interdependence), and engenders a culture of self-indulgence which either dismisses or actually celebrates the resulting fragmentation of any “ties that bind” and bond community together. The net consequence is, at one and the same time, anti-universalistic and anti-humanistic.

Ultimately it is the *offspring of a structure characterized by heterogeneity and a culture where commodification is its main characteristic.* The constituents of this social configuration together reinforce the institutionalization and routinization of un-caring, thus exacerbating the tension which we are discussing by being supremely unpropitious to social solidarity.

18. The irony is that the post-Fordist occupational structure of late industrialism actually militates against polarization and thus, it might have been hoped, could supply the minimalistic conditions for increased social integration. The traditional lines of cleavage between manual and non-manual workers diminish, since higher grade occupations have grown faster than their lower-grade equivalents, and because the new unskilled service class is proportionately smaller than the old working class and much more fluid in its membership (being a short-term stop-gap for the young, an expedient for women who use it at different phases in the family cycle, and to some extent operating as an alternative to male unemployment). Therefore “it seems safe to conclude that the spectre of a massive post-industrial service proletariat seems unwarranted. From the point of view of class formation, fluidity and mobility patterns are simply too strong for any significant social closure to occur”.³⁷ Gross inequalities are concentrated amongst the welfare-dependent, non-working “underclass” whose disadvantages can flare into sporadic urban riots, but whose internal heterogeneity (ethnic groups, single parents, migrants) cannot sustain collective organization and or fuel continuous action with a clearly articulated aim.

³⁷ GÖSTA ESPING-ANDERSON, *Changing Classes*, op. cit., p. 235.

19. Heterogeneity is what fundamentally precludes polarization, despite the endurance of signal inequalities. In the first place there is “the proportionate decline of an internally homogeneous working class and, second, the continuing development of a heterogeneous array of middle classes”.³⁸ The connection between this heterogeneity at all levels and individualism is marked and momentous. On the one hand, the decline in the traditional rural and working classes is directly linked to the *loss of community* (of rural self-sufficiency, mining villages, or supportive urban enclaves), and to *decreased collective action* given the rapid decline of Trade Unionism. On the other, the growing service class is the growth of a misnomer — a class which does not serve in the sense of ministering to real needs. Instead the “services” provided are artificial in creation and anonymous in destination. Now a host of “social” skills are marshalled and marketed as commodities by “need merchants” — advertising, public relations, management, design, fashion, entertainment, bodily and emotional regulation, health and fitness, tourism. The service class is dedicated to *commodification* of human relationships and the response of its recipients is *consumerism*. “Customer care” is the ultimate euphemism for the relations between objects which have replaced those between subjects. Individualism is the resulting hedonistic drive to achieve fulfillment through consumption of services in a subjectively distinctive pattern, which misrecognizes its own managed and patterned nature. Little escapes the nexus between commodification/consumerism. Witness here the “designer sabbatical” in religious life or the “customized retreat”, conveying the spurious sense of spiritual personalization which is as duplicitous and impersonal as it is damagingly at variance with kenosis, and with the Church as the *community* of the faithful — united in love not divided by self expressionism.

20. In its turn, individualism fosters *privatization*, the over-protective concern for private property, the privatized consumption of services, the pre-occupation with personal security, whose outward manifestation is the burglar alarm — for house, car and car cassette, and whose inner representation is fearful closure against the other, configured as potential intruder instead of neighbour, as the harbinger of harassment not the bearer of human need. Taken together, these constitutive features of late modernity militate against social solidarity: it is neither cleavage nor independence which deny it, for we are diverse rather than divided and more globally interdependent than ever before. It is rather individualism which holds

³⁸ ROSEMARY CROMPTON, *Class and Stratification*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 196.

“amicability” at bay. This is the final paradoxical expression of the tension between the unicity of humankind and artificial social divisions between people, for the subjective experience of untrammelled individualism is inner loneliness.

21. *Conclusion*

Must sociological analysis end on the pessimistic note? Basically there are two schools of thought which do not submit to bleak depression. On the one hand, Postmodernism de-centres the human subject and can consequently valorize precisely those features which have been discussed — fragmentation eclecticism, heterogeneity, expressive gratification, plurality, non-universality, parochial relativism, and ultimately, nihilism. The death of God is followed by the death of the human subject and is accompanied by the death of concern. The philosophical version of postmodernism extends a concordat to religion, inviting its persistence as yet another incommensurable constituent of the cultural kaleidoscope — no more to be privileged than any other language game. Elsewhere I have discussed why postmodernism should be rejected in sociology³⁹ and theology⁴⁰ alike, for it dissolves the tension we are addressing by dissolving the human person who becomes in Baudrillard’s words “that spongy referent, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness”.⁴¹

22. Properly social doctrine has resisted this view and there is a consistent line of teaching which stresses the need to *work* at solidarity. Even the optimism of *Gaudium et spes* was not facile: “God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity ... This solidarity must be constantly increased until it has been brought to perfection” (Art. 32). By the time of *Centesimus annus*, the theme remains constant but now contains the recognition that this entails contesting contemporary society: “In order to overcome today’s widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is *a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity*” (Art. 49). Taken in isolation, this could be read as a simple plea for a change of heart and a simplistic assumption that by mere aggregation, such a metanoia would transform social structures. Yet placed in context, this would be a misinterpretation,

³⁹ MARGARET S. ARCHER, *Sociology for One World: Unity and Diversity*, Presidential Address to the 12th World Congress of Sociology, «International Sociology», 6:2, 1990.

⁴⁰ MARGARET S. ARCHER, *The Threat of Postmodernism in Christian Theology*, in F.P. McHugh and S.M. Natale (eds), *Things Old and New: Catholic Social Teaching Revisited*, 1993, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland.

⁴¹ JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *Simulations*, 1983, New York.

for structures are acknowledged to be objective features of society which, as emergent properties, are pre-existent to any generation of actors, possess relative autonomy and causal efficacy, are also relatively enduring and resistant to change. This greater sociological sophistication is clearly inscribed in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*: "one must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost automatically". Although stemming from the concrete acts of individuals, nevertheless, "they grow stronger, spread and become the sources of other sins, and so influence people's behaviour" (Art. 36).

23. Yet how can sociological analysis help in the movement from "denunciation" to practical restructuring in order to promote solidarity? The other strand of social theorizing, which probably goes too far in stressing the demise of class politics and in emphasizing the political takeover of the new middle class from the old working class, does usefully stress the role of new social movements which are "coded in *categories* taken from the movements' issues, such as gender, age, locality etc., or, in the case of environmental and pacifist movements, the human race as a whole".⁴² Where Claus Offe seems fundamentally correct is in pinpointing the capacity of such movements to become corporate agents, articulating universalistic aims, mobilizing and organizing sufficient support to induce degrees of structural transformation. His analysis would serve to encourage the involvement of the Church in peace and justice movements which themselves constitute new forms of social solidarity, often transcending national boundaries. What social doctrine, I suggest, should dissociate itself from in this sociological perspective, is the view that such movements are the preserve of the new middle class, and will remain "typically the politics of a class but not *on behalf* of a class."⁴³ Instead, promotion of these movements, which constitute a counter-culture of concern and represent a new social universalism, *are* the concern of the whole Church universal. What her full involvement in the pursuit of solidarity in and through such movements entails, if it is to challenge heterogeneity and individualism effectively, is an equally new type of consecrated life: one in which the royal priesthood of the laity comes into its own in the next millenium — vowed to "amicability" and embodying solidarity.

⁴² CLAUS OFFE, *Work - a central sociological category?*, in *Disorganized Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 831.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 833.