

Giovanni Busino

SOCIOLOGY IN CRISIS

The subject to consider briefly here is certainly complex and difficult but especially abundant in epistemological misunderstanding and hermeneutic complications. To try to avoid all those pitfalls it is necessary to set up some rudimentary limits and recall some truisms of sociological analysis.

No one will deny that since its appearance on the intellectual scene of European industrial societies, sociology has constantly proclaimed its scientific vocation, often in an exclusive and absolute way, claiming the right to describe and explain the mechanism allowing human societies to think of themselves as such, as well as to speak, act, produce and reproduce all social relationships, following procedures that are sometimes manifest and sometimes latent. In short, from the beginning of its history, sociology has proclaimed the certitude that the social world is totally explainable in spite of its apparent diversity and

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heterogeneity, that it is proper to apply to the study of societies the same cognitive models as those used by science. The unity of science would be the guarantee of a sound, true and objective knowledge, valid for all.

From then on, sociology could only opt for methodological rules, for analytical procedures, for deductive and inductive reasoning, in short, for the model of rationality that we have seen used profitably in the exact sciences.

For a long time sociologists firmly believed that this methodological naturalism (all sciences have one unique method) would open to them the mysteries of science, would assure them the intelligibility of social phenomena at the same time as the legitimacy of their discipline. Science, a new universal religion, a sure means to obtain certitude, thus became the supreme protection against contradiction and conflict.

For the founding fathers, science was at the same time a procedure that guaranteed the validity of description and demonstration and corrected hypotheses and theories but also, and especially, a value, indeed the very paradigm of truth.

From Fergusson to Comte, from Pareto to Durkheim and Weber, the notion, or better, the existential choice, of a sociology-science appeared also as a guard against the crisis of traditional societies and the weakening of the functions of religion in the organization of individual and collective vocations and in social integration.¹ These sociologists, more by instinct than by considered thought, assumed that science would recuperate and refine the functions of religion, and even render them more operative. Certainly, these same sociologists, especially Pareto and Weber (and in a different way also Michels and Simmel), had no illusions about beneficial effects of scientific progress; however, none of them ever imagined that the destiny of sociology could be realized following a different trajectory than that of science itself.

This choice of sociology-science, methodological study, and controlled and organized study within a conceptual system, should have brought at the same time the loyal and absolute adhesion to

¹ R. A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York, Basic Books, 1966; F. Paul-Lévy, "A la fondation de la sociology: l'idéologie primitiviste," *L'Homme*, nos. 97-98, January-June, 1986, XXVI (1-2), pp. 269-286.

a conception of reason as the ensemble of necessary and sufficient rules for knowing and making known, if not social objects, at least their referents. That did not happen. Beyond the proclaimed option, each sociologist had his own particular way of practicing scientific reason. At times it was conceived as a heuristic canon, indeed as a psychological faculty furnishing man with specific cognitive capacities, at times as the ultimate foundation or the *raison d'être* of things, at times as the means to produce truth or find proofs. And that was not all. For Adolphe Quételet or Frédéric Le Play, for example, recourse to scientific reason had still another goal: that of recalling the weight of reality, its fragile arrangement, from which came the obligation to accept the existing, to respect tradition. While for many others, this same recourse furnished a standard with which to measure the present situation and the grounds for standing aloof from it.

In these conditions, it is useless to try to find in the history of sociology a formal theory for reason or even a doctrine specifying the rules of sociological rationality. On the other hand, there are many material theories, that is, referring reason to some reality presented as principle, posed *a priori*, such as nature or history. Even Comte and Spencer, who, however, opposed rational knowledge to empirical knowledge, never detached their theory of science from history and nature. And the founding fathers did no better, continually wavering between critical intention and conservative attitude, and hesitating between moral and expressive exigencies and cognitive necessities, between the goal of social engineering and reflexive concept derived from a particular situation in time, between aspiring to change the social order and the attitude of pure intellectual curiosity of one who unveils the great enigma of modernity.²

When I re-read the classics of sociology, I constantly have the feeling that rationality, especially with the Germans, Italians and French, is less an attitude than a belief, a conviction according to which the insights of science illuminate social experience. Thus, the mysteries of life in society will be gradually unmasked.

Why not admit it?

²J. Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1971, 4th ed.

If we compare the avatars of sociological reason with the history of the transformations of the concept of reason such as they have been analyzed by Husserl, Lukács and Horkheimer,³ we find that our intellectual poverty is striking. While in European sciences one tried to detach reason from contingency by means of a veritable inquisitorial process aiming to establish all its perversions, sociology accelerated operations of reduction. In 1887 Ferdinand Tönnies provoked the irremediable break.⁴ By opposing *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, and by attributing to the latter the modern form of social organization, the exclusive right to reason and rationality, Tönnies tied the latter to a determined form of social organization and historical epoch. Society, as opposed to community, is then confused with abstract reason and the latter with science. Although Tönnies explicitly says that history has a positive meaning, that is manifested at the time of the transition from traditional society to industrial society, he nevertheless attributes the breaking up and destruction of traditional society, endowed with figurative and concrete positive values, to science and its abstractions. In modern society the figurative replaces the expressive, explicit, and the role of individual persons. As we know, such a thesis was radicalized by Georg Simmel, who, at the beginning of this century, made money the symbol itself of intellection opposed to imagination, of intellect opposed to sentiment. In 1910, in *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie*, the same Simmel ended by throwing aside reason and elaborated a theory of knowledge in which only feeling and will, intuition and sensitivity had a determining place. After which, he broke with sociology; and it is for that reason that sociologists began to read his works only in the fifties.⁵

³ E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1959; G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, (with a new preface) Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1962, *Oeuvres*, Vol. IX; M. Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*, Frankfurt, Fischer, 1967.

⁴ A. Bellebaum, *Ferdinand Tönnies*, in *Klassiker des soziologischen Denkens*, Vol. I: *Von Comte bis Durkheim*, Dirk Käsler ed., Munich, Beck, 1976, pp. 232-266 and 487-493.

⁵ Cf. H.-J. Dahme and O. Rammstedt ed., *Georg Simmel und die Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1984, but also P. E. Schnabel, *Die soziologische Gesamtkonzeption Georg Simmels: eine wissenschaftshistorische und wissenschaftstheoretische Untersuchung*, Frankfurt, Fischer, 1974. In French see G. Simmel, *So-*

Some years before, in 1902, Werner Sombart, in *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, had transformed rationality into a property of technique, into a methodical process to assure the adequation of means so as to obtain control of ends and nature.⁶ On the economic and social level, capitalism is the perfect realization of such an equivalence. In this direction, but with quite another finesse and perspicacity, Max Weber made of capitalism the most radical form, the most consequential of the processes of rationalization of social relationships in modern societies. Thereafter, the paths taken by sociologists were very different from those taken by Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Husserl and Wittgenstein. By withdrawing from philosophy, they could more easily reduce reason, rationality, rationalization, to a tool, to an instrument for opening the doors of the historical future of modern societies and thus make of it a factor of explanation of capitalism and its derivatives. The consequences of such a reduction are unfortunate: scientific rationality is, in this way, reduced to the utilization of means and procedures adequate for realizing determined ends: A finalized form of knowledge, this calculating thought remains thoroughly instrumental, obviously incapable of *Gelassenheit*.

Mixing instrumentalism and pragmatism, nominalism and realism, positivism and Marxism; opposing comprehension and interpretation to explanation, the individual to the social, sociologists did not even let themselves be embarrassed by the non-rational, non-reason, non-positive. They were able in any case to treat them scientifically.

Pareto proved himself to be of an intrepid imagination in the matter. His main preoccupation, "irrationality," he ranged in a large class and opposed it to another class: the rational, called logical action, and the non-rational, called non-logical action.⁷

Logical actions are "operations that are logically connected to

ciologie et épistémologie. Introduction by J. Freund, Paris, Puf, 1981; *Id.*, *Les problèmes de la philosophie de l'histoire. Une étude d'épistémologie*. Introduction and translation from the German by R. Boudon, Paris, Puf, 1984.

⁶F. Rizzo, *Werner Sombart*, Naples, Liguori, 1974; F. Raphaël, *Judaïsme et capitalisme. Essai sur la controverse entre Max Weber et Werner Sombart*, Paris, Puf, 1982.

⁷G. Busino, *Introduction à une histoire de la sociologie de Pareto*, Geneva, Droz, 1983.

their ends, not only with regard to the subject that accomplishes these operations but for those who have more extended knowledge." All other actions, obviously, are called "non-logical," which does not mean "illogical," Pareto specifies. The non-logical is the domain of conflicts and emotions, affects and phantoms, sentiments and instincts. Science will make their discursive formulation possible, reveal their preponderance in behavior, work out processes to systematize attitudes, actions, without being able to assign real causes to them. Human behavior is essentially non-logical, but science can reveal its hidden and dissimulated logic.

Freud did the same with the rationalization of the symptom, with defensive compulsion and reactional formation. A residual variable, the non-rational remains, consequently, retardation, deviance, resistance, marginality, frustration, primitivism, and so on.

The distinction between residues and derivations, between facts and values, between the object and the subject of knowledge; neutrality with regard to finalities and values, neutralization of ethics and normative and expressive dimensions give the illusion that it is possible to realize social worlds objectively and scientifically. The price of such a delusion is very high: reason is lowered to the rank of a component of a historical epoch and an economic and social regime; it is reduced to the sum of logico-mathematical knowledge of nature, allowing the prediction, beginning with facts already observed, of results of observations still to be made; the means-ends relationship has priority over values, wisdom, *Weltanschauungen*, meanings.

It is well known but not considered of primary importance that in the daily practice of sociological research we did not succeed in reconciling paradigms that are current in empirical and analytical sciences; sociological knowledge produced always and only biased information.

Do not the most recent doctrines, from sociobiology to the new economics, from neo-Marxism to neo-structuralism, perfect the conception of rationality as the adaptation of means to the sought-after ends? The theory of the subjective function of utility conceives a subject capable of making complete choices in a universe that is integrated but empty of meaning. That of the

Simonian limited rationality erects a man-actor having limited powers of evaluation but making choices of adaptation and survival through groping. Even the theory postulating that rationality is influenced by emotion, an energy that can mobilize human attention on particular problems at precise moments, even that theory considers intuition and sentiment as pertinent to the degree in which they allow interest to put evolutive adaptation into gear.⁸ It still remains that this sociological rationality is instrumental because it is adaptable, adaptable because it is instrumental. It is true that the latest evolutionist models require neither global optimization nor ultimate objectives. But is it a true progress to “suggest” directions in which rational processes can develop? We thus remain in the perspective of the reason-instrument suitable to explore partial and specific problematics, but we do not know how to select and hierarchize adequately ends and finalities, how to mediatize conflicts arising from the antagonism of values and the ultimate end to pursue. The uncertainty of the field of investigation and the impossibility in which we have been up until now to circumscribe and order situations of interactions, in spite of the efforts of the theoreticians, bad choices and perverse effects, continually reminds us that a rationality subordinating cognitive elements to the realization of disparate finalities, toward which science is indifferent, that this rationality remains a belief that proclaims assumptions of scientific knowledge; it is only a simple attempt to constitute in science the justification for particular beliefs and distinctive values of a society or a given culture.⁹

Precisely because it has operated an instrumentalist reduction of the knowledge-action relationship; precisely because it has inconsiderately separated the cognitive of the normative and the expressive, because it has given no pre-eminence to the being in

⁸ H. A. Simon, *Reason in Human Affairs*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford U. P., 1983. Cf. also B. Wilson, ed., *Rationality*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1970; M. Hollis and S. Lukes, ed., *Rationality and Relativism*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1982; I. C. Jarvie, *Rationality and Relativism. In Search of a Philosophy and History of Anthropology*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

ontology, to conscience in gnoseology, to values, to meanings and symbolic significations, sociology is no longer either science nor conscience of society. It is for this reason that we speak of a crisis in sociology and that we wonder about the role of the sociologist. In any case, one thing seems certain: the cognitive impotence of sociology, that for the moment is a serious infirmity, risks being fatal if we do not act quickly for a profound reconversion of our intellectual habits.

What can we do to issue from this long, painful and distressing crisis?

In a letter to one of his correspondents a few weeks before his death, Braudel wrote ironically: Admit that sociology is a particular kind of intelligibility of modern industrialized society, a particular knowledge inserted in a given historical context. Admit that the pertinence and the legitimacy of this kind of knowledge come from the historical condition. Implant sociology into history and you will extricate this discipline from the stagnation in which it is presently found.

That sociology is inextricably linked to history seems to me self-evident. However, I doubt that history can completely bring us out of this crisis with regard to which the late Alvin Gouldner wrote with a rare perspicacity.¹⁰ In fact, if sociology belongs, as I believe along with Braudel,¹¹ in a certain type of society, if it builds society from a representation, if the words that serve to describe the social reality also contribute to its organization and production, how then can this discipline succeed in analysing and objectively explaining, almost from the outside, independently of the mind of the aware person what it has contributed to construct. If the work of the sociologist (distinguishing, defining, classifying, naming) is applied from the outside, on what has been previously circumscribed, a meaningful organization, what is the epistemological status of the categories through which the representation and the attribution of meaning are effectively realized?

¹⁰ A. W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, New York, Basic Books, 1970, and, by the same author, *For Sociology. Renewal and Critique*, in *Sociology Today*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1975.

¹¹ F. Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1969.

Cognitivism, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, well-founded theory and poststructuralism have shown,¹² by contrasting means, the difficulties in basing a universal knowledge on particular facts and blending into a coherent whole significations proper to particular expressions.

If that is so, what can be done? Must we limit ourselves to circumvent the problems of observational expression and induction and, following Popper's method, put refutability in the place of inference, that is, the method of trial and error? Must we, if needs be, and according to the suggestion of Husserl, invent procedures different from those followed by the positive science? Or are we condemned to the imbecile debate: scientific sociology or literary sociology, quantitativism or qualitativism, scientism or aesthetic questioning, absolute relativism and proliferation of interpretations or tautologies and plays on words.

I have no solution to propose, but I am of the opinion that the present situation is insupportable, that we must find a way out of this impasse. Let us at least try, beginning with distinguishing between reason and reasoning.

Reason is a capacity and a value: it is the method of constitution of the social individual and gives him the "possibility to find and constitute for himself a meaning in the instituted social signification" (Castoriadis).¹³ It is socialization and belief in that socialization, conviction that man can know, judge and act in conformity with principles, that he can apply combinations of judgments (analytical, synthetic, hypothetic) to action. From the Greeks until our time, the history of that reason has been multiple and varied, it has known metamorphoses and crises, it has engendered the philosophy of the Enlightenment but also psychoanalysis, theories of association as the productive capacity of social relations as well as that of the innateness of mental structures. Among other things, this same history of reason has also given a mission to the proletariat and a foundation to the

¹² A. Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method, A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociology*, London, Hutchinson, 1976; R. A. Wallace and A. Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1980.

¹³ C. Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Seuil, 1975; *Id.*, *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, Paris, Seuil, 1978; *Id.*, *Domaine de l'homme*, Paris, Seuil, 1986.

theologies of liberation. As capacity, reason is an integral part of the condition of *Homo sapiens*. It has declared itself even more as value, it is true, in the development of our culture. Only the development of a fundamental anthropology, in Morin's understanding of the term,¹⁴ could help us to see how and why the subject takes form with and through others, why human groups work out and evaluate significations, and beginning with these evaluations construct the social reality and transform, impose and submit to it. Such a fundamental anthropology could furnish us with a theory of the real subject, re-establish in a valid way the philosophical tradition that we have demolished by claiming, since the seventies, the death of man.

Reasoning, on the other hand, is a competence: an attitude that consists in using formal criteria guaranteeing liaisons and decisions, manipulating procedures of inference or proof, managing induction, deduction and analogy, to come to conclusions.

The works of Jean Piaget¹⁵ on the birth of intelligence in infants seems to me the most successful attempt to establish how a man of a determined culture may have the competence to effect inferences, to make "abstractions beginning with internal coordination." An ideal equilibrium, "immanent in all conscious activity," collective product, this capacity is defined by Piaget as "submission to the principles of contradiction," recognition of the "need for reasoning itself."

Now, in spite of Piaget, in spite of progress in the study of artificial intelligence, of intentionality and teleonomy,¹⁶ in spite of works by Fodor or Johnson-Laird¹⁷ and in the field of statistic

¹⁴ E. Morin, *Science avec conscience*, Paris, Fayard, 1982; *Id.*, *Sociologie*, Paris, Fayard, 1984.

¹⁵ J. Piaget, *Études sociologiques*, Geneva, Droz, 1977.

¹⁶ H. L. Dreyfus, *L'intelligence artificielle. Mythes et réalités*, Paris, Flammarion, 1984; J. Searle, *L'intentionnalité*, Paris, Minuit, 1985; G. Cellerier, "La genèse historique de la cybernétique ou la téléonomie est-elle une catégorie de l'entendement?" *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XIV, 1976, nos. 38-39, pp. 273-290.

¹⁷ J. A. Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard U. P., 1975; P. N. Johnson-Laird and P. C. Wason ed., *Thinking, Reading in Cognitive Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P. 1977, and especially *Mental Models*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., 1984.

reasoning, of Kahneman and Tversky,¹⁸ we are far from knowing the contexture and different orderings of reasoning. We know fairly well something about the logic of deduction but very little about the other forms of reasoning, notably inductive reasoning. In spite of Popper,¹⁹ Carnap²⁰ and Goodman²¹ the rules of this enigma that is induction remain obscure. Some say that they do not even exist. Jean-Blaise Grize has unveiled some mechanisms of argumentative processes, for example, schematization, and has made us sense under what conditions the subject of enunciation organizes a credible schematization for the receiver. Yet, the same Grize makes theories of acceptability and receivability, while they were engendered well before and outside the context of argumentation, a condition *sine qua non* for the validity of that same argumentation.²²

In the present state of our research, the distinction between reason and reasoning would allow us to see by what mechanism any new being in the world is inserted into this same world, the product of social objects due to its interaction with the milieu and in what way the development of the conduct of a social being joins the attitude of the others in the same cooperative activity, most often symbolic since its intersubjective efficacy is guaranteed by accepted signs and conveyed by a culture.²³

Reason is the mode thanks to which the organism-environment relationship is manifested and by means of which objects that

¹⁸ D. Kahneman *et al.*, *Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., 1982.

¹⁹ K. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, New York, Harper and Row, 1968; *Id.*, *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, New York, Harper and Row, 1968. See also P. Jacob, *De Vienne à Cambridge. L'héritage du positivisme logique de 1950 à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, especially pp. 121-176.

²⁰ J. Hintikka, ed., *Rudolf Carnap, Logical Empiricist: Materials and Perspectives*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1975; and P. A. Schilpp ed., *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1963.

²¹ N. Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1979; *Id.*, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Brighton, Harvester, 1984. Also P. Jacob, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-195.

²² J.-B. Grize, *De la logique à l'argumentation*, Geneva, Droz, 1982. For some extensions of this problematic, see R. J. Falmagne ed., *Reasoning: Representation and Process*, Hillsdale, N. J., Erlbaum, 1975; R. M. Farr and S. Moscovici, eds. *Social Representations*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1984.

²³ G. Busino, *Les théories de la socialisation*, Lausanne, IASUL, 1985.

could not have existed otherwise may appear. It is reason that creates social objects, that endows them with meaning, that stabilizes them by setting up institutions.

Reasoning is giving form to operations that we can perform beginning with these same previously formed objects and elaborated by virtue of this attribute proper to the human species that Castoriadis calls “the radical imaginary” or the possibility to construct significations beginning with practically nothing.

If reason is a function of the human species, one that certifies its profound unity beyond the variable configurations of cultures, we can affirm that the formalizing exigencies, the reasonings on formal and natural languages and formal systems characterize, on the contrary, the only culture that has posed the problem of rapport between reason and reasoning, sometimes by an outright reduction of the first to the second.

The great difficulties of sociology come from this “cultural preconstruction” as Grize would say. In fact, contrary to other disciplines that naturalize formalizing exigencies, sociology never succeeds in putting between parentheses the preconstructed, in obtaining the obscuring of one field to the profit of another. It does not succeed in objectifying into formal systems the objects created by other signifying reasons, because it does not have at its disposal an ultimate base to find concordances between the meaning of human facts as such and the significations of theoretical statements (always with intrinsic validity) in their regard. Added to that are complications engendered by ambiguous correlations between scientific objectivation and social utility, between the critique of the orientations of action and the social demand to be clarified.

How can we circumvent these difficulties? By making a critical inventory of them, by trying to discover the way they are constituted, their results, social function and sociability. This must be done at the level of the fabrication of social objects, since it is through an approach to them that we might have some chance to grasp what orients and predetermines comprehension and legitimizes the postulates, axioms and hypotheses. A transhistorical and intercultural science of social practices could clarify these indispensable cultural preconstructions, even for the generalization of the theory of the argumentation of Grize and his school, and equally the precomprehension of communicational activity and

speech understanding, such as Jürgen Habermas developed in his latest writings.²⁴

Commotions, bustle, intuitions, the art of connecting and recording, of seeing in the disciplines and knowledge lying fallow healthy sprouts such as are offered by the books of Edgar Morin, seem to me like indispensable contributions to the revitalization of the social sciences.²⁵ The same is true for the works of Louis Dumont.²⁶ His theory of comparison, whose formulation it will be assuredly necessary to ameliorate and generalize, gives us from now on precious indications on the problems arising from the fact that the conceptual framework of sociology derives from a particular historic situation, from the fact that in sociology there is no discrete unity and that the primary elements are organized and fabricated entities, whose components are governed by bonds of interdependence and have no meaning except in their belonging to these constructed entities.²⁷

I am formulating projects here, while perhaps some precise results should have been presented. But could I do otherwise in a moment in which the sociological community has disintegrated, in which sociological knowledge is dispersed and in which the tradition of a knowledge born as a consciousness and science of man in society has reached the brink of exhaustion? Is it still a virtue to keep and transmit the memory of a tradition when we know that it is indispensable to us to master the mutations, drifts and mirages of our present societies?

Faced with the dangers arising from the nuclearization of the planet, from growing bureaucratization in all social relationships, floods of scientific rationality; faced with this constatation that all

²⁴J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Vol. I: *Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*; Vol. II: *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1981.

²⁵Cf. especially E. Morin, *La méthode III. La connaissance de la connaissance. Livre premier. Anthropologie de la connaissance*, Paris, Seuil, 1983.

²⁶L. Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus. Le système des castes et ses implications*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979; *Id.*, *Homo aequalis: Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977; *Id.*, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne*, Paris, Seuil, 1983.

²⁷Cf. G. Berthoud and G. Busino, eds., *L'exploration de la modernité. La démarche de Louis Dumont*, Geneva, Droz, 1984; G. Busino, "Pour une "autre" théorie de la comparaison," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XXIV, 1986, no. 72, pp. 209-216.

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modern science aims, as was formerly the case with metaphysics, at organizing and subjecting the world, reducing man and nature to the state of manipulable objects; faced with the alienation of a totally-organized world and one that is more and more deprived of any meaning outside of a utilitarian one; faced with the devastation of nature that threatens to compromise the possibilities of the survival of our species—what can we as sociologists do?

I believe that we could experience in a less dangerous way the developments of science and technique to the degrees in which we would be able to keep alive, alongside calculating thought, proper to instrumental sciences, a thought that meditates and reflects, a thought capable of *Gelassenheit*, as Eckhart has said.²⁸

Sociology can contribute to that. An instrument of liberation of the present, that claims to organize one sole form of possible life, the unique and exclusive reality, a thought that meditates and reflects, a reflective sociology could allow us to really grasp other civilizations, other ways of living in this world, of questioning ourselves, and to glimpse alternatives to our present existence in other cultures.

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²⁸ Read on this subject the volume *Ordre et désordre*. Texts of conferences and meetings organized by the 29th Rencontres internationales de Genève, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière, 1984.