We all conceive of ourselves as experts on society. In fact, however, the social world is a mystery—a mystery deepened by our lack of awareness of it. Society is our immediate, everyday reality, yet we understand no more of it merely by virtue of living than we understand of physiology by virtue of our inescapable presence as living bodies. The history of sociology has been a long and arduous effort to become aware of things hidden or taken for granted: Things we did not know existed—other societies in distant place and times, whose ways of life make us wonder about the naturalness of our own. Things we know of only distortedly—the experiences of social classes and cultures other than our own; the realities of remote sectors of our own social structure, from that inside the police patrol car to those behind the closed doors of the politician and the priest. Things right around us unreflectingly accepted—the network of invisible rules and institutions that govern our behavior and populate our thought, seemingly as immutable as the physical landscape but in reality as flimsy as a children’s pantomime. Most obscure of all, our own feelings, actions, thoughts, and self-images—the tacit bargains that we make and remake with friends, lovers, acquaintances, and strangers and the paths we steer amid emotions, habits, and beliefs. All of these things are beneath the usual threshold of our awareness.

We think of ourselves as rational, choice-making masters of our actions if not of our destinies; in reality, we know little about the reasons for either. And if the social world is shrouded from us today, it becomes even more illusory the further back we go into our history. It is only a few hundred years back in European history to an era when authority of kings and aristocracies was legitimized by the supernatural, when unexpected behavior from our fellows was explained as witchcraft and seizures of the devil, and foreign lands were populated not merely by blood-thirsty Communists or the terrible Turk but by werewolves and cyclopes. “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake!” James Joyce declared. Sociology has been part of that very slow awakening.

The social world as we know it and have known it is mostly illusion. Yet, if we were all completely deluded, there would be no point in trying to investigate and explain, and this writing as well as any other would be worthless. The existence of illusions is not incompatible with the existence of facts and of the principles of logic. But facts and logic are inextricably mixed with concepts and theories, and for the study of society the concepts and theories are ones that we daily act upon as well as use to explain how things are and why.

Sociology is not an impossible science, but it is a very difficult one. It has progressed by disengaging the web of everyday belief, not all at once, but little by little as one taken-for-granted assumption after another is questioned and replaced. As was once said of philosophy, sociology is like rebuilding a boat, plank by plank, while floating on it in the middle of the ocean. The history of sociology is a progression of world views, each an advance on some other in that it asks some previously unasked question, avoids some previous confusion, or incorporates some previously unobserved fact. Each world view, including our own, has its illusions; waving the banner of science is no more absolute a guarantee of truth than any other. Nevertheless, there has been a series of major breakthroughs in understanding, including some quite recent ones, and we can be confident now that we are on the right path.

THE SOURCES OF ILLUSION

At the center of the web that clouds our vision is the fact that our knowledge is both subjective and objective. “Facts” are things that independent observers can agree upon; but we must look for facts in order to see them, and what we look for depends on our concepts and theories. What questions we can answer depends on what questions we ask. But the form of the question cannot be the only determinant of the answer, or else our knowledge would never go beyond the subjective point of view of the particular questioner. Any completely subjective viewpoint undermines its own validity, since there is no
reason for anyone else to accept it. If there are no objective standards, then the man who claims that there are no such standards can never prove his claim to be true.

There is a realm of objectivity, then, based on shared observations and the exigencies of logical communication. We do not know, however, whether any particular theory or even any particular belief about the facts is true. The problem of separating illusions from reality has been an especially difficult one for sociology, since it begins in the midst of the social world of everyday ideas and ideologies. Until we begin to notice phenomena and ask questions about them, we cannot start to check our theories against the facts or even to check our assumed facts against careful observations. It took many centuries of controversy about ideological and practical issues before some men realized that their ordinary ideas might not be accurate and hence were in need of logical ordering and empirical testing. Even after there arose a community of men dedicated to this purpose, much of the raw material of human illusion remained mixed in with the more solid part of sociological knowledge. Progress has come not because sociologists were convinced that a particular theory was right, but because the scholarly community generated a cutting edge of objectivity out of their own controversies and research efforts that has moved them onward in the right direction.

We cannot usually notice something unless we have a name for it. This is true of the physical world—the botanist notices dozens of species of plants where the layman sees only a field—and it is especially important for understanding society. No one has ever seen a “society,” although we have all seen the people who belong to one; no one has ever seen an organization, but only its members, the buildings and equipment that belong to it, and its name or emblem written on signs and pieces of paper. We live in a social world of symbols: of symbolic entities such as “property”—land that would “belong” to no one except by a social convention, a set of rules as to how various people must behave toward it and what words they use in talking about it—and of symbolic acts such as “marriage”—a recorded ceremony that enables middle-class Americans to recognize the otherwise indiscernible difference between a couple illicitly living together and a “respectable” family. These symbols are by no means obvious if one has never thought about them. The fish apparently does not notice the water until he is out of it.

The idea of a society, as distinct from the state, did not develop until the commercial and industrial changes of the eighteenth century and the French Revolution woke men up to the recognition that there were two different forms of social institutions, each going its own way. One hundred years later, thinkers such as George Herbert Mead came to recognize the symbolic nature of society and thus provided us with concepts with which to analyze the operations of this world that we have so long taken for granted.

Much of sociology has developed by uncovering facts that we had not previously known, either because they were remote from ordinary experience or because they had been deliberately ignored. The earliest efforts at sociology were inspired by the discoveries of the explorers of the Orient, the Americas, Africa, and the South Seas: The familiar ways of life of Europe could no longer be unreflectingly accepted as the natural order of God, but had to be explained along with the ways of the newly discovered peoples. The first edges in this direction were naïve and consisted mainly of doctrines of progress, which accounted for the European difference simply as social advancement over other cultures. Such theorizing, nevertheless, began a tradition of thought concerned with explaining society. It was an early thinker on social evolution, Auguste Comte, who first gave sociology its name and thus helped to create that “invisible college” of thinkers who have ever since asked questions about society.

Many facts, to be sure, could have been discovered without the voyages of Captain Cook. But the voyage to the other side of town is harder to make than a trip around the world, and a voyage of discovery in one’s own home is the hardest of all. Conventional biases against looking for or recognizing facts that touch on one’s own life have been greater impediments to sociological understanding than the lack of facts themselves. These same biases that have kept most of social reality obscure have prevented us from seeing that they are biases. Not the least important aspect of an illusion is the fact that one believes it to be the truth. The great sociologists have contributed to the sociology of knowledge as an intrinsic part of their work. They have broken through illusions by analyzing the ways in which the conditions of social life determine the contents of our consciousness. The history of sociology has been a progressive sophistication about our own thought, uncovering sources of bias that we did not know existed.

The uncovering began with Karl Marx, the first great thinker to see life from the standpoint of the common working man. Marx did not discover social classes, of course; ancient and medieval law as well as social thought spoke openly of the various ranks of society, which indeed everyone knew about from daily experience. Ideological denial of stratification is an innovation of modern America. What Marx discovered was that our own thought is a product of our social circumstances and that much of what we believe to be reality is but a reflection of our socially determined interests. Marx may have defined “interests” too narrowly in economic terms, but there is no doubt of the validity of this general principle. Marx was not the first to notice that governments tell lies or that newspapers, writers of books, and individuals in conversation put forward alleged facts and explanations that are actually selected and distorted according to the interests of their formulators. Much of the thought of the Enlightenment is epitomized by Voltaire’s effort to unmask the absurdity of supernatural explanations of human events. Marx went beyond Voltaire when he pointed out how the socially con-
servative thought of the Church was only to be expected from the leaders of a wealthy, landowning institution whose higher ranks were filled from the aristocracy and whose leaders, like Cardinals Mazarin and Richelieu, often served in the government of the king.

Marx's dictum "Religion is the opiate of the masses" is a puzzle in its own terms, however: If ideas reflect material interests, how could the lower classes hold ideas that did not reflect their own interests? It took Max Weber's analysis of the relation between ideas and power and Emile Durkheim's recognition of the effects of ritual on solidarity to provide the keys to this paradox. But the opening wedge first driven by Marx has never been retracted, even though there is a constant danger that our ideas will be molded in keeping with the prevailing political orthodoxy.

We know now that ideas are upheld as conventions within particular social groups and that the ideas of the group tend to take the form that will most enhance its status and advance its interests. We know that people associate closely only with persons of similar outlook and that individuals modify their ideas to fit the groups they join. And we also know how it is possible for men to have some freedom from ideological bias by institutionalizing a competition of ideas, especially among men whose interests are based on their achievements within the collective enterprise of science or scholarship.

Marx's recognition of ideological bias in social ideas is not a counsel of despair. The bias cannot be wished away, but it can be gradually pushed back by continuous effort to examine our own and others' ideas for their adequacy in explaining the full range of facts about society. This is not to say that biases cannot be found in modern social science. They are deeply embedded, especially in the areas of politics, deviance, and stratification. But we can have some faith that the search for the most powerful explanatory theory will lead us away from ideological distortion, whether from the right, the left, or the center.

One result of Marx's unveiling of ideology has been a distinction (first emphasized by Max Weber) between depictions of reality and evaluations of it, between "facts" (here used broadly to refer both to empirical data and to theories summarizing and explaining the data) and "values." This seems obvious enough: It is one thing to find out what the state of affairs is in the world, another thing to decide whether we think it is good or bad, just or unjust, beautiful or ugly. This distinction is important because most of our thought about the social world is evaluative: We are more interested in finding wrongdoers to condemn and heroes to praise than in explaining what happens or even in ascertaining the facts. Just after World War II it was popular to point to the "big lie" techniques of propaganda as a sign of totalitarian regimes and to stereotypes and distortions as the warning signs of extremist political thought. A closer acquaintance with serious sociology would have shown that such distinctions are naive: that all governments try to manipulate their own legitimacy, that all politics deals in slogans and ideology, and that the popular world view is made up of stereotypes. If we are to expose the authoritarian and the brutal, deeds are much better indicators than words.

The distinction between facts and values thus has a twofold usefulness: It warns us to note which statements are saying something about reality and which are only assuming something about that reality in order to arouse our feelings about the good or evil of it, and it points us to the hard discipline of separating out and testing a body of knowledge whose validity does not depend merely on our moral point of view.

In the history of sociology the struggle against value biases is far from won. Indeed, controversy currently rages over this very issue. There is a strong tendency, especially among younger sociologists whose personal sympathies are vehemently on the side of persecuted racial minorities of America and the oppressed peasants of Southeast Asia and Latin America, to declare that all sociology must be value-biased and hence that the only choice is the moral one: Which side are you on? In support of this position, it is pointed out that academic social scientists have claimed to be value-neutral and yet have created theories that extol the virtues of American democracy, minimize the plight of oppressed groups, and rationalize military support for brutal dictatorships in Vietnam and elsewhere. But the lesson is not clearly drawn. Propaganda for the left is no more valuable intellectually than propaganda for the right or the center, whatever one may think of its moral virtue.

The distinction between facts and values remains crucial, even in this context. If we do not make an effort to uphold the ideal of intellectual objectivity in assessing theories and facts, no valid knowledge is possible—even the sort of knowledge that practical and activist men claim to have about the problems of the world. If objectivity is not maintained, both serious theory and intelligently guided action will be impossible. A successful explanatory theory is universally acceptable as knowledge; but in the realm of value judgments, every man's basic values are as good as any other man's, and no logical argument can force him to change his mind. This means that applied sociology will be much more diverse than pure sociology; and it is for applied sociology that the arguments of radical sociologists hold true: It comes down to a moral question of in whose interests you choose to apply it. The attack on some of the older sociologists, then, is a legitimate attack only on their applied work: their pure sociology, on the other hand, can be judged only by the standards of scholarly objectivity, comprehensiveness, and consistency, and if mistakes are made here, they can be corrected by the normal processes of the advance of research. If some of these men have misleadingly claimed value-neutrality in an effort to make others accept the conclusions of the applied work they carried out in the interests of cold-war politics, the blame cannot fall on the doctrine that
distinguishes between facts and values, but on the misuse these men have made of that doctrine. In the end, the fact-value distinction remains absolutely crucial, and not only for the development of objective sociological theory; whatever our values may be, only by taking a position of detachment are we able to see society realistically enough to be able to act on it with any insight into our chances of success.

The fact-value distinction is important to keep in mind in the following chapters. We have attempted throughout to present the successive developments of sociological theory and to assess their objective validity as theories. Since most of them are far from complete in terms of formalizing the logic of their arguments and testing their factual predictions, our judgments on them must reflect the balance of existing evidence and the most promising prospects for future elaboration. But all of this is an attempt to move forward within the realm of objective sociological knowledge. We have also tried to time to state some applications of these theories to particular practical issues of today. It should be clear that these applications are made from a particular point of view and that sense cannot make a claim on others to agree with us unless they happen to share our particular sets of values. These values are heavily on the side of maximizing personal liberty and are slanted toward the point of view of those coerced by systems of power. There are of course many other points of view from which theory could be applied; we have given little attention to practical questions as seen from the viewpoints of military officers, politicians, businessmen, administrators, or dominant classes and status groups. For the pure side of sociological knowledge presented here, we would like to claim as much objectivity as the considerable progress of the sociological enterprise allows. For our practical applications, we claim no more than that an effort has been made to see the world accurately as it bears on our particular values.

The fate of Karl Marx's insights warns us of how arduous the path to sociological understanding is. The fact that one man, even a famous one, makes an advance is no guarantee that other social thinkers will maintain it. Marx's thought had little impact on the respectable thinkers of his day. It lived on mainly in the underground until a twentieth-century generation of German sociologists (Toennies, Weber, Michels, Mannheim) recaptured some of its key insights. Marx's contributions did not fare much better in the revolutionary underground. Instead of being treated as a theory to be developed and refined as new facts and new insights became available, Marxism became a dogma to be polemically defended against all revisions. Near the end of his life, Marx was moved to cry out against his own followers, "I am not a Marxist!" Since the Russian Revolution enshrined Marxism as an official state ideology, Marx's thought has ceased to be a fruitful source of new insight except, ironically, for non-Marxists. The lesson applies not only to Marx; the uncompromising political realism of Weber and Michels has also proved too much for most respectable thought to incorporate, and it remains semihidden in an academic underground.

Marx found one source of illusion about society in the realm of ideology; Freud made an analogous discovery at the turn of the twentieth century when he discovered repression. Freud struck even closer to home. If ideology prevents us from understanding the larger processes that link us to countless others through the economy, politics, and social stratification, repression prevents us from seeing what goes on right before our eyes, including our own actions. Again, the discovery was more in the way of seeing than in the sight itself. Freud was not the first man to notice that men lust for women who are not their wives (and vice versa) or that people can bitterly hate each other even while carrying on polite, even intimate, relationships. Freud's insight was to see how widespread such desires and feelings are and to see that they can exist even in people who would be ashamed and guilty to realize that they felt anything of the sort. Freud unmasked the respectable society of the nineteenth century at its most vulnerable point—the place that was kept most hidden. Repression, like layers of clothing upon bodies, points to what is concealed by the very act of covering it.

Respectable social thought of the nineteenth century, epitomized by Herbert Spencer and the British utilitarians, saw man in modern society as rational and respectable, the upholder of contractual rules that regulated the individual for the common good. Freud looked into those conscious, rationalistic beliefs and those proper, middle-class ideals and found that they could be explained in terms of something else: passions of love and hate turned in upon the self in response to the social restraints that kept them from being outwardly expressed. Where preceding thinkers saw a rational man making decisions to follow the rules, Freud discovered what had long been excluded from such a world view: that man is still a physical animal, a creature of instincts and emotions, and that the civilized, rational part added by socialization does not displace the physical creature, but only reshapes him, sometimes in a mutilated form.

The fate of Freud's insights has been much like the fate of Marx's. His ideas have gained considerable notoriety among people who have heard of him only secondhand through some alleged refutation and who think that they can dismiss him with the observation that "obviously there's more to life than sex." In this way, his insight into repression is itself repressed, along with any recognition that anything in the world has to do with sex, hate, or any other emotions impelling our allegedly rational behavior. Freud has also suffered from dogmatic followers who have given the theory a bad name in scientific circles, especially by polemics against equally dogmatic behaviorists in psychology. Between these two extremes, Freud has done much to orient us toward investigating how childhood socialization makes us members of society. The central insights—the view of man as an emotional animal who lives in groups,
the existence of repression and identification—are yet largely unexploited; but they are not lost. Freud’s discoveries are more appropriately investigated in group interaction than by examining the individual alone. It is in the socially oriented analyses, conducted by such men as the psychiatrist Fritz Perls and the sociologist Erving Goffman, that Freud’s insights are beginning to find their explanation and their place in an integrated body of social theory.

We have touched on a number of sources of illusion in our views of social reality: taking our social arrangements for granted because we know of no others, ideological distortions based on the interests and perspectives of our social positions, inability to detach ourselves from an evaluative stance, repression of things that make us feel shameful or guilty. By the time these sources of bias came to light, sociology was on the eve of the twentieth century. We shall touch on only two more kinds of illusions and thereby bring ourselves up to the present: the fallacy of psychological reductionism and the misconceptions that a too-literal identification with physical science can engender. The man who cut through the first of these most strikingly was Emile Durkheim.

A common way of thinking is to explain social events by the actions of individuals: to look for great men in history, agitators in riots, traitors in defeats. By the end of the nineteenth century the dominant evolutionist thinkers—speaking especially in defense of a laissez-faire economic policy—described society as the interplay of individual decisions, in which deliberate social policy could have little effect. Nevertheless, their basic mode of explanation was individualistic: Men struggle for a livelihood and rise and fall according to their individual qualities; modern society itself exists because of contracts among individuals.

Durkheim struck through in a new direction: The distinctive thing about social institutions is that they persist while individuals come and go; they have a force of their own such that individuals who violate social norms not only do not change the norms but are punished as deviants. Furthermore, society can never be logically explained in terms of the motives of individuals. As Durkheim put it, society is a reality sui generis. “Social facts,” such as the rules that people enforce upon each other, the forms of the institutions within which people act, and even the ideas that they hold, cannot be explained by examining the workings of an individual and multiplying the result a million-fold. These facts must be explained by social—that is, supraindividual—causes. Just as living organisms are made up of chemical molecules, yet physiology is to be explained on its own level in terms of the functioning of the parts in relation to each other, society is made up of individuals but is not explicable simply in terms of individual psychology. With his emphasis on social structure as the subject matter of sociology, Durkheim gave the field a distinctive focus of its own. He also showed that such supposedly individual phenomena as suicide, crime, moral outrage, and even our concepts of time, space, God, and the individual person-

ality are socially determined. With Durkheim nineteenth-century individualistic rationalism commits suicide. We know now that we are all social creatures and there is no turning back to the naïve optimism of the nineteenth century that could see in the rational education of the individual the solution to all social ills.

The final major development of sociology took place in the early twentieth century, for the most part in the United States. Instead of relying on historians, newspapers, and their own speculations, sociologists began to go and see for themselves: first with community studies, then with surveys, participant observation of organizations, and small group experiments. This research tradition has done much to counteract the illusions due to ideology and to other biases. We have discovered, for example, that the conservative claims that crime is due to hereditary degeneration or racial traits (theories once popular among biologically oriented sociologists of the evolutionist school) are false, as are liberal outrages that social mobility has been declining in the United States. The great merit of an active research tradition is that it is largely self-correcting; as long as we insist that theories must explain facts, their biases are likely to reveal themselves sooner or later.

But even this research tradition has its dangers and illusions. One of these is the problem of overspecialization and technicism. Sociology has become a large-scale cooperative enterprise; and, as in any large bureaucracy, the individual members tend to lose sight of the overall goals—producing and testing theories to explain all of social behavior and institutions—and are caught up in the immediate details of day-to-day research. One danger, then, has been the trivializing of research and a tendency to substitute purely technical standards, such as statistical refinements, for substantial contributions to our knowledge about society.

The physical sciences provided a model for the modern research enterprise; they have also provided a final, distinctively modern illusion about society. Many American social scientists, especially those who have not fully absorbed the great breakthroughs of Durkheim, Weber, Freud, and Mead, still find their ideas in a version of the nineteenth-century tradition superseded by the above thinkers. Like the British utilitarians and their American followers, they continue to take the natural sciences as an uncriticized model for understanding society. Utilitarian rationalism has been modernized as behaviorism, the doctrine that asserts that human behavior is to be explained in terms of external stimuli—rewards and punishments—without any reference to scientifically inadmissible concepts such as “mind.” In sociology, the old positivist doctrine shows up in the notion that the only valid material for a scientific theory are quantitative data, such as those collected in large-scale questionnaire surveys, carefully measured experimental behaviors, and census tabulations. Only “hard data,” consisting of observed and preferably quantified behaviors or enumerations, are valid; “soft data,”
encompassing the experiences of participant observers, in-depth interviews, case studies, historical writings, and introspection, are excluded.

The merit of this distinction turns out to be an illusion. Human social behavior and social institutions are basically symbolic. Society exists and affects the observable behavior of individuals only as systems of invisible names, rules, and positions that individuals can identify with and orient toward. As might be expected, strictly behavioristic theories have not borne much fruit in psychology; rather, it has been in the area of cognitive development and functioning that progress has been made. In sociology the extreme positivists have been found mostly among researchers who have been caught up in short-run technical concerns and hence have contributed little to advancing theories to explain society. It has been by insisting on the principle that we be able to explain all the facts that social science corrects itself, even against illusions created by an excessive zeal to emulate the methods of the natural sciences. Symbolic reality is the empirical reality for sociologists; it is life as all individuals experience it. Numbers derived by totaling the answers of many individuals to a few short questions about what they believe or have done are quite a long way from the firsthand experience of those individual lives that we are ultimately trying to explain. In this sense Erving Goffman and his students, with their firsthand accounts of how people manipulate the social reality they present for each other to experience, are the latest of the important innovators in sociology.

We are coming to see that there is no necessary battle between "hard" and "soft" in the social sciences. Both quantitative but superficial data and direct phenomenological experience of a few situations have their values and weaknesses. When used to complement each other, they help us to understand in depth and to check up on the generalizability of the understanding. Like a navigator plotting the position of a point from his own moving ship, we are learning to "triangulate" our accounts of social reality from several vantage points.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

It is often said that the social sciences lag behind the natural sciences and that the latter have created the problems of atomic war, overpopulation, and industrial change that the former must now solve. This view betrays a naive analogy between the natural sciences and the social sciences, ignoring how innumerable to control by deliberate action the structures of a society are, except—and even here there are serious organizational limitations—by a form of political control that would be likely to create more evils than it solves. If we judge the social sciences, not by the popularistic criterion of practicality, but by their advance toward a comprehensive and powerful explanatory theory of social behavior and institutions, their advance is much greater than has been recognized. Such a theory may not yet be found in the history of textbooks, but the major pieces have been in existence for some time, and we are slowly learning to put them together. From a time when social thought was little more than myth, ideology, and speculation, we have broken through illusion after illusion, and with each destruction of old belief we have discovered something new and solid.

The great breakthroughs that provide the basis for our modern knowledge took place around the turn of the twentieth century. Durkheim discovered the dynamics of social solidarity, providing us with a way to explain how society can operate as a moral order, instead of merely to justify or debunk it. Weber showed how ideas and ideals interact with material and power interests, how we can understand social order in the midst of conflict by seeing society not as a reified abstraction but as a stratified network of groups and organizations. In addition, Weber gave us the most penetrating vision of world history yet produced. Freud revealed man as a social animal in whom civilized mind and physical body guide and torture each other. Mead showed both individual minds and social institutions to be the result of symbolic communication. Since then we have come to see how the unexplained or overlooked facets of one theory could be clarified by the insights of another. Parsons has advanced the synthesis of Durkheim, Freud, and Weber; Goffman that of Durkheim, Simmel, and Mead. Empirical research has fleshed out our general insights, especially on organizations and stratification, where we are beginning to see a core uniting much of sociological theory and research.

This development is not yet widely recognized. Of the great figures in sociology, only Freud and Marx are names widely known to the general public. Durkheim, Weber, and Mead are little known or understood outside the bounds of academic sociology. Even within sociology progress has been obscured, most notably by the conflict between hard and soft approaches and by other controversies over the application of sociology to political issues. Sociologists caught up in these peripheral disputes have thereby blinded themselves, in a way that Marx's analysis of ideology would have predicted, to their opponents' contributions to sociological theory and have even themselves often forgotten that a comprehensive explanatory theory is the major goal of the discipline. But in science as elsewhere nothing succeeds like success. As the demonstrated power of the central sociological tradition is increasingly brought into the light, it advances steadily.

The sociological tradition has shaped our views of the world throughout the last century without our knowing it. It has been the major source of political world views: Radicalism derives mostly from the views of Marx; liberalism in both its laissez-faire and its welfare-state versions from the British utilitarians and evolutionists; corporate statism in Europe from the tradition of Saint-Simon, fascism from, among other sources, the racist varieties of nineteenth-century evolutionism. What is
striking about this list is the fact that modern political ideologies all derive from nineteenth-century social thought. The far more profound thought of the great breakthrough—the Durkheim-Weber-Freud-Mead contributions—has as yet had little influence on our thinking about social and political issues. Popular thought lags fifty or seventy years behind the forefront of sociological knowledge. Even the university-oriented liberal proponents of the modern American welfare state have offered little more than a benevolent reformer’s belief in the “bad environmental” causes of crime and social unrest and a faith in social work and public education as panaceas. Political idealists have yet to learn the hard Weberian truths about the dynamics of status stratification and the scarcely controllable momentum of bureaucratic organizations and the Durkheimian and Freudian discoveries of the personal strains in a world of impersonal rules and emotionless organizations.

Modern sociology does not recommend itself to those in search of easy solutions, whether these be of the left, right, or center. Indeed, one of sociology’s great contributions is to show that the center is just as subject to illusion as are the extremes. Perhaps we can now see why sociology does not offer easy practical applications in the way that advances in the physics of electricity give rise to color television sets. If we wish our knowledge to advance, we cannot spell out what that knowledge must consist of in advance of the facts. The facts are not what most people would wish them to be, and social science cannot be called in to tell them what they want to hear.

The early social thinkers of the Enlightenment thought they had the key to the world: Man is basically rational; the evils of despotism and war are due to ignorance and superstition. Let man only learn to see things in a rational way, and utopia would be ushered in. This dream has died hard. The generation of Durkheim destroyed its last remnants as far as serious thinkers were concerned, although it has hung on in naïve public ideologies—a further illustration of how little men’s social behavior fits the Enlightenment dream. Politicians and social movements pursue their own ideologies and try to impose their ceremonies on reality: the applied sociologist advising them is usually in the position of an anthropologist telling the aborigines what is wrong with their fertility rites.

If sociology has a contribution to make, it is this: If we can be more realistic about our world, more wary of the dilemmas of social organizations, more aware both of the necessities of social coordination and of the dangers of social coercion, and more sophisticated about the illusions with which our institutions populate social reality, we can perhaps make our world more livable. It may be that if enough people realized the connections between political illusion and political coercion and the deadening effect of psychic chimeras on our everyday encounters, the quality of life would improve a great deal. A significant part of the new generation has already shown itself more realistic than those before it—more capable of cutting through social hypocrisies about sex and politics, through rituals of status deference and illusions about personal relationships. Whether a new culture of honesty and personal emancipation will enable us to control the coercive and alienating institutions of modern society is still in doubt, but greater illumination is one of our few weapons.

THE BOUNDARIES OF SOCIOLOGY

A final note should be made on the subject of disciplinary boundaries. We have attempted to present a brief history of sociology, but we have not insisted on any rigid classification of thinkers, and occasionally we move far beyond what a strictly Durkheimian view of the field would include. One of the reasons for the looseness of boundaries is that sociology did not become a distinct discipline until the twentieth century. Up to that time, it was often not distinguished from economics, and many of the important sociologists—Marx, Weber, Pareto, Parsons—spent some or all of their lives as economists. As economics came to concentrate more and more on the technical analysis of money, prices, wages, and employment, it gradually became a distinct intellectual enterprise as well as a separate university department, although even today institutional and developmental economists, such as Kerr, Galbraith, and Boulding, or Marxist economists such as Ernest Mandel, discuss many of the same concepts and issues as sociologists. Robert Bellah’s *The Worldly Philosophers* tells much of the side of the story we have omitted here.

Another discipline whose history is entwined with that of sociology is anthropology. The main difference between the two fields is primarily a historical one: Anthropologists became identified as the investigators of the newly discovered tribal societies of the colonial era, whereas sociologists were concerned with modern societies. The distinction has since broken down. As primitive tribes have been colonized or destroyed, anthropologists have come to study modern Western and non-Western societies, and sociologists to study traditional ones. Today there is little difference between what most anthropologists and sociologists do, although anthropology includes some fields—physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics—that are rather remote from the work of most sociologists. It is mainly for reasons of space that this volume does not deal with the great anthropologists, although Spencer, Durkheim, and Freud must be viewed as key figures in both histories. The interested reader is referred to Kardiner and Preble’s short book *They Studied Man* for a sketch of the great discoverers in anthropology.

Political science has origins rather distinct from those of sociology. It originated largely in the study of constitutional law, and its main function has been to train public administrators and high-school government teachers. This background has meant that its orientation has been
too philosophical and too ideologically biased to make any very notable contributions to a scientific theory of society. Since World War II the behavioral movement has developed in American political science, and political scientists now do work on political sociology, organizations, and social change that merges with that of sociologists.

Psychology has long been both distinct from and intertwined with sociology. Its distinct branch deals with nonsocial determinants of individual behavior in such areas as physiological psychology, perception, learning, and motivation. The overlapping branch is social psychology, the study of the individual in relation to others. It has been carried on in modern American universities both in sociology and in psychology departments and sometimes in a separate department of its own. We have set the boundaries of sociology rather far over in the field of social psychology out of the feeling that disciplinary boundaries often do more harm by compartmentalizing studies that should be carried on in a broad perspective, than they do good by allowing the concentration of attention. Freud, in particular, might be considered primarily a psychologist, but we give him rather full treatment here for two reasons: First, although Durkheim is surely right that social structures cannot be explained purely in terms of individuals, society is nevertheless created and enacted only by individuals, and our explanations of social order must be founded on knowledge of how individuals function, especially in relation to others. Second, Freud has exerted a great deal of influence on sociology and anthropology—indeed more than on psychology (although perhaps less than on the medical field of psychiatry). American academic psychology has been the bastion of behaviorist orthodoxy, and much of the best thought about cognitive functioning—by Mead and Piaget as well as by Freud—has had to find refuge in sociology. Psychology's loss has been sociology's gain, but one that may eventually be repaid, as the work of the symbolic interactionists, Goffmanians, and sociolinguists promises much progress in understanding the psychological functioning of individual human beings.

Finally, history has considerable overlap with sociology. It would be difficult to place men like Tocqueville, Fustel de Coulanges, Weber, Pirenne, Marc Bloch, Hintze, Rostovtzeff, and many modern historians such as Lawrence Stone or Richard Hofstadter decisively in one intellectual camp or the other. Like sociology, history is an all-encompassing discipline: Everything that has ever happened in the social world is potential material for its narratives, just as it is potential material for sociological theory. The main difference is in orientation: Sociology's is toward a generalizing theory, history's toward the description and explanation of particular sequences of events. The distinction between generalizing theory and particularistic histories is not an absolute one, however. Historians often apply general principles as a means of ordering the myriad facts available to them, and one of the great tasks of sociology has always been to describe what a particular society (usually our own) is like and to explain the social changes that have led up to our world. In thinkers such as Marx and Weber, the two aims—creating generalizing explanations and capturing a particular historical drama—were carried side by side, to their mutual enrichment. As historians grow increasingly interested in probing beyond political and diplomatic events to social structures, we can expect the two disciplines to draw together even more closely.

Our history of sociology is thus mixed with those of most of the other social disciplines. We draw the boundaries here only to make our subject compact enough to handle. The various disciplines have learned much from each other in the past, and they have much to offer each other now and for the future if only we transcend narrow departmental labels. Having said this, perhaps our various colleagues will forgive us if we indulge a little sociological pride: In the pages of this book, the reader will find the most illuminating tradition in modern social thought.