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GOULDNER'S TRAGIC VISION

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Abstract

Classical literature, specifically ancient Greek philosophy and especially the study of Greek tragedy, is helpful in tracing out and understanding the transitions Alvin Gouldner made during his career as a sociologist. This article argues that a latent tragic orientation or vision existed during Gouldner's early career as a standout in the field of industrial sociology and that this tragic vision became manifest around 1962 as Gouldner was developing more and more strident denunciations of establishment sociology. This case study of Gouldner's career teaches a valuable lesson about the importance of the tragic vision in helping sociologists to understand the limitations of the scientific quest for knowledge.

Sociology, which became established as a scientific discipline only as recently as the end of the nineteenth century, was heir to the Enlightenment vision of science and reason. This Enlightenment vision, according to R. Bierstedt (1978), contained the following elements or propositions: explanations based on reason and science were superior to those based on religion; all social phenomena could be explained via the application of the principles and methods of the natural sciences; and the confidence in the ability of reason to solve all problems meant that the perfectibility of humankind was now attainable and no longer merely a fanciful, utopian dream (see also Rundell 2001).

By the 1940s most U.S. sociology departments had fully embraced and institutionalized these Enlightenment propositions, and the field's theorists and practitioners were busily constructing, both conceptually and organizationally, this burgeoning science of society (Luhmann 1982; Habermas 1984; Turner and Turner 1990). For example, because of his strengths in statistical technique and methodology, William Ogburn was hired by Columbia University's sociology program in 1928 in a departmental effort to position itself as the American leader of scientific sociology (Oberschall 1972; Bannister 1987; Chriss 2001).[1] Thus, by the time Alvin W. Gouldner had arrived at Columbia in 1943 to begin work on his master's degree, scientific sociology was well-established not only as a result of Ogburn's influence but also, and perhaps even more importantly, because of Robert K. Merton's presence.

Gouldner, who studied under Merton (for details, see Merton 1982), was a standout in the field of industrial sociology through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, but by 1962 his commitment to the high modernism and positivism of scientific sociology came to an abrupt halt. In this article I make the case that Gouldner's turn toward a critical

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and especially reflexive sociology occurred because he came to embrace a tragic vision of science and society that in many ways is deeply antithetical to Enlightenment assumptions and to the practice of "normal" science (Kuhn 1970).

By the "tragic vision," I mean an approach to or perspective on life that emphasizes human frailty, the horrors of everyday existence, and the sheer unpredictability of life as we know it (Gouldner 1965; 1976, pp. 67–90). This tragic vision was originally developed in Greece during the fifth century B.C., primarily as represented in the poetry and plays of Greek tragic theater. In the next section, I discuss how the tragic vision is related to the scientific vision.

TRAGEDY AND SCIENCE

Over the years a number of authors (see especially Whitehead [1925] 1926; Frye 1957) have noted the proximity between the appearance of tragic theater and the occurrence of scientific revolutions during two specific time periods and places: the fifth century B.C. in Greece and the early seventeenth century in Europe.[2] Tragic theater developed during the fifth century B.C. and shortly thereafter, with the rise of the Socratic and Platonic era, the establishment of academic philosophy occurred. Likewise in the early seventeenth century, the end of the Renaissance ushered in the great tragedies of Shakespeare, which were followed shortly thereafter by the dawning of the Enlightenment and the modern age of science (Munck 2000). Writing in 1925, Alfred North Whitehead ([1925] 1926, p. 10) believed the rise of tragedy was merely a foreshadowing of science, in that both tragedy and science were of the same cloth, sharing the characteristics of fate, remorselessness, determinism, and indifference: "Fate in Greek tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought."

Michael Chayut (1999) suggests that both these periods were marked by a transition from "old myth" to science, two conflicting worldviews that simply cannot coexist. According to John F. Danby (1949), old myth is the dying Renaissance mythology represented by a traditional, hierarchical outlook on humanity and nature, while science is a rational, skeptical outlook representing a new empiricist and mechanistic science (Chayut 1999, p. 166). This is consistent with Friedrich Nietzsche's ([1872] 1956) view of the dialectical, oppositional relationship between tragedy and science. In essence, tragedy gives birth to an optimistic, theoretical, and scientific critical thought and rises to ascendancy through matricide. As the dialectic progresses, for tragedy to be reborn, science must in its turn die out or wither away. We have witnessed this in the contemporary era, as science has come under attack for, among other things, its fetish of quantification and its claims of presuppositionlessness and value-neutrality, as well as its alleged racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and Eurocentrism (for summaries, see Alatas 2001; Lemert 2001; Rogers 2001). It would appear, then, that this postmodernist environment of hyperskepticism toward science (Foucault 1979; Lyotard 1984; Maffesoli 1993) represents a fertile terrain for the return of the tragic vision.

In the tradition of Greek theater, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is perhaps the exemplary tragedy. The plot line is built on the incompatibility between the two contradictory views of nature of old myth and science. One group of protagonists (King Lear, the Duke of Gloucester, Cordelia and their followers) holds to the old myth view of nature and reality, where nature is viewed as fluid, dynamic, and unstable (Chayut 1999; Danby 1949). The group of villains led by Edmund, in contrast, is machiavellistic in orientation;

they are of the age of scientific inquiry and industrial development, the age of the sixteenth century and after (Danby 1949, p. 46). This group of villains is described as machiavels because they are gifted in the mechanical manipulation of human nature, which has a direct lineage to the scientist's ability to manipulate physical nature. Indeed, as Danby (1949) suggests, in Edmund we have the fusing of two images: the political machiavel and the Renaissance scientist.

King Lear is a tragic hero because he is surrounded on all sides by a new way of life, a culture that is foreign to him. As Nietzsche ([1872] 1956) suggests, every tragic hero derives his status from his embodiment of old myth in the form of the god Dionysus. All the celebrated figures of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, and so on—are but masks of the original tragic hero, Dionysus (Chayut 1999, p. 172). Dionysus is the god of wine and revelry but also the god of the theater, of masks and impersonation, of myriad selves (Storm 1998, p. 9). In Euripides's *Bacchae* (Bacchus being the Roman equivalent of Dionysus), Agave tears apart her own son, Pentheus, limb from limb, then takes his head and impales it on a stick for all the Theban citizenry to behold, thinking it to be the head of a lion. But she was mad, possessed by Bacchus, and, standing before her father Cadmus, she is brought to recognition that she had just killed her son. Agave laments, "Now, now I see: Dionysus has destroyed us all."

It is often the case that tragic heroes' own sense of self and identity are torn apart, rent and scattered and, like King Lear or Agave, they are left to make their way through an alien and unsure world, if indeed they survive at all. As the god of wine, Dionysus assures the resurrection of the vine and the intoxication of the flesh in the orgiastic celebrations to his image. In this sense he is the god of ecstacy, the condition of transport beyond the self. But in addition to the power of generation, Dionysus also wields the power of destruction, delivering some individuals to ecstatic rapture and others to horror and madness (Storm 1998, p. 18). Nietzsche suggested that the advent of tragedy is dependent on the dialectic between two forces or movements, the Dionysiac (the art realm of intoxication, freeing the spirit from worldly constraints so as to accommodate an ecstatic communion with primal unity) and the Apollonian (the art realm of dream [the dream of reason], the rational and measured, the tempering that is necessary to return one to the "illusion" of individual selfhood after bouts of rapture) (Storm 1998, p. 22).

PHENOMENOLOGY, POSITIVISM, AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Having taken note of the dialectical relation between the appearance of tragedy and science, we may conjecture as to the impact that certain texts in classical studies—primarily those dealing with ancient Greek philosophy, Greek theater and tragedy, as well as secondary analysis of these works by Nietzsche and other classical scholars—had on Gouldner. Before we explore this topic in more detail in the next section, we must first note that, as the sociology of knowledge suggests, both direct experience of the social world and exposure to texts (or other scholars' ideas) contribute to social scientists' theoretical orientations and paradigmatic worldviews (Chriss 1999a, p. 110).[3]

Texts often work merely to ratify a preexisting set of assumptions the reader holds about the world, about knowledge, about values, and so forth. In this sense, theorists often gravitate toward systems of ideas that resonate with their own personal proclivities, that comport with the *Weltanschaauung* of a theory group. This is what Arthur O.

Lovejoy (1936) described as a "metaphysical pathos" endemic to science and philosophy. Early in his career, at the time firmly ensconced in the normal science paradigm of industrial sociology, Gouldner (1955) chastised Talcott Parsons, Philip Selznick, and others for having an overly pessimistic view of bureaucracy. This pessimistic view of formal organization was established both by Max Weber (his notion of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy) and by Robert Michels (1915; his notion of the "iron law of oligarchy"). Gouldner believed that sociologists such as Parsons and Selznick embraced the pessimistic view of bureaucracy not because of any systematic, analytical inspection of the idea per se, but because it was congruent with the mood or sentiments of these theorists and of the era more generally (Wilson 1971). Indeed, much that had been written in the field of organizational sociology up to that time (1955), according to Gouldner, tended to blindly follow the masters' voices (Michels and especially Weber), and the metaphysical pathos (pessimism and fatalism) of their ideas insinuated itself into the majority of contemporary writings. In essence, Gouldner argued that organizational studies had taken a wrong turn in embracing the notion that bureaucracy was inevitable and pathological rather than potentially humane and liberating. Further, this delusion was caused by sociologists' inattention to the empirical realities of organizations.

During his early period of immersion in the "normal" science paradigm of industrial sociology (1953 through approximately 1962; see Chriss 1999a; 2001), then, Gouldner drew upon Lovejoy and the sociology of knowledge as a way of critiquing fellow sociologists who were allowing extracognitive factors to encroach upon their "scientific" work. Indeed, in some ways this strategy is similar to the phenomenological critique of science. Phenomenology suggests that standard sociological concepts such as role, role-making, status, and reference groups develop in parallel to the truths, realities, and lived convictions of the everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Gouldner 1975). The unthematized horizons of the lifeworld provide the backdrop for the everyday life and, as a result, social scientists' tacit knowledge of the social world is inexorably intertwined with their attempts to thematize these background understandings in the form of scientific theory (Chriss 1999b, pp. 68–71).

Both positivism—which Gouldner embraced in his early period—and phenomenology believe that a meaningful distinction can be made between science and nonscience. In comparison to positivism, however, phenomenology envisions a "softer" or "fuzzier" boundary between the two insofar as it is possible to transcend the tacit understandings of everyday life through the bracketing of the "natural attitude" (Ferguson 2001).[4] This is a difficult task, however, in that only highly-trained phenomenologists are able to suspend belief in the taken-for-granted world through the methodology of bracketing, thereby alerting scientists to those aspects of unthematized existence that are bound up in their thematized objects of scientific inquiry. Phenomenology, then, is in a position to help scientists understand or explain certain pretheoretical phenomena that, as members of an ongoing, everyday lifeworld, confront them as subjectively experienced aspects of their reality. By doing this, phenomenologists and phenomenologically-trained scientists are better able to direct their attention to the primacy of experience, thereby returning "to the things themselves" (Tiryakian 1973, p. 208).

Positivism of course is equally concerned with phenomena, with the "things themselves," but goes even further than phenomenology in presuming that, by following the protocols of the research process, contaminating aspects of the everyday life—superstition, ideology, dogma, hopes, aspirations, dreams, values, and personal proclivities—can

be held in abeyance by scientists, thereby producing "objective" or "value-free" knowledge. In this sense, positivism seeks to go beyond mere "description" or "understanding" of phenomena, instead providing causal "explanations" of these phenomena. Since Immanuel Kant believed that metaphysical knowledge of things-in-themselves (noumena) is not possible, he made human transcendental ego the measure of all things. Further, as David Bidney (1973, p. 110) explains, "In denying that things-in-themselves can be the object of empirical, scientific knowledge, Kant was responsible for the alleged antithesis of science and metaphysics or ontology—a thesis which he shares with the later positivism of Comte."

The interesting thing about Gouldner's embrace of positivism during his early, industrial sociology period is that there is a flirtation with the phenomenological critique of science—by way of Lovejoy and the sociology of knowledge—without there being the "pathos" or excess baggage of self-reflexivity that signals the tragic vision more generally. As mentioned earlier, Gouldner's immersion in certain texts in philology, ancient Greek philosophy, and linguistics beginning in the early 1960s acted essentially as a "trigger" that unleashed the full potential of the tragic vision that, like the protagonist in a Greek drama who reaches the state of recognition, brought Gouldner to recognize the deficiencies of, and paradoxes contained within, normal "establishment" sociology and science. In the next section I shall trace out the genesis and growth of Gouldner's tragic vision.

GOULDNER'S TRAGIC TURN

As we have seen, although Gouldner (1955; 1956; 1959a; 1959b; 1960) had been critical of Parsons's structural functionalism and organizational scholars in general for their metaphysical pathos of pessimism concerning modern bureaucracy since at least the mid-1950s, these criticisms were nevertheless written in a tolerant, scholarly tone that reflected Gouldner's continuing immersion in what he would later come to deride as "establishment" sociology. For example, in his famous 1960 paper on the norm of reciprocity, Gouldner (1960, p. 171) still clung to a positivistic view of science: "The task of the sociologist, in this regard, parallels that of the physicist who seeks to identify the basic particles of matter, the conditions under which they vary, and their relations to one another." This contrasts sharply with the position Gouldner (1972, p. 15) took a decade later, when he was becoming more sympathetic to hermeneutics, this being a method in which "the theorist is regarded as being more like an art or architectural critic than a physicist." Indeed, this represents quite a radical transition from a physicalist to a symbolist frame of reference (Chriss 2000a).[5]

Gouldner's tragic vision arose shortly after his 1960 reciprocity paper was published. It was nurtured and given form beginning in the late fifties, which represents the end of his industrial sociology phase, and then flowered fully in 1965 with the publication of *Enter Plato*, a study of ancient Greek philosophy in which Gouldner sought to trace the origins of modern social theory. Gouldner wanted to understand how and why Plato attempted (in *The Republic*) to fashion a new rationalized approach to social explanation for purposes of building a just society upon the foundation of his (Plato's) "eternal forms." This new approach for making sense of the human condition and governing the lives of people sought to settle once and for all the meanings of such contested terms as

virtue, justice, goodness, and health through Socratic dialogue (the Greek dialectic), philosophical reflection, and the sheer force of reason.

How did the theory behind Plato's *Republic* arise out of the "old" way of making sense of the human condition, as represented in Greek tragedy? As we have seen, the major theme or form in Greek (and later Shakespearean) tragedy is the staging of a performance in which a hero or protagonist faces obstacles in a tireless search for truth(s), only to eventually fail, the failure or shortcoming serving to illustrate the irreducible richness of human value that attends to that very same heroic attempt to order the world. As Christopher Rocco (1997, p. 23) explains,

> The *Republic* argues that a polis and a life can be properly ordered by knowledge of the Good so as to avoid the tragic failures of human progress adumbrated by Sophocles and suffered by his Oedipus. The *Republic* seems to banish, not only tragedy and the tragic poets, but the very conflicts born of intense human commitment to irreconcilable values.

Tragedy argues that one learns what is meaningful and important about the social world only through the intimate contextualization of persons and their relationships as they rise to victory and then fall to defeat, and eventually suffer the greatest human tragedy, death (Gouldner 1965). There are no universal truths "out there," no "eternal forms" waiting to be discovered by persons trained in a specific method or holding a particular epistemology or ontology. In this sense, tragedy is akin to hermeneutics or empathic understanding (*Verstehen*), often employing a qualitative, case study approach whose aim is "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of various aspects of social reality. Conversely, the Platonic/Socratic program of philosophy and dialogue is akin to the positivistic search for law-like generalizations about the social world, the aim of which is causal explanation of the factors associated with the production of those social phenomena under investigation. Whereas tragedy argued that what was tragic about the human condition was its utter randomness and unpredictability, the new orientation of the Socratic era saw the universe as formed and limited, not chaotic and infinite. Indeed, science and philosophy by the time of Plato

> gives the assurance which the questing fifth-century mind increasingly lacked, that the seemingly infinite variety of the world is not in fact wild and ungoverned but open to understanding and hence to control. Control would in effect be simply the recognition and following of natural laws that exist in any case. (Finley 1966, p. 93)

Gouldner became familiar with the writings of ancient Greek philosophers and tragedians, as well as a broader secondary classical literature, not only as a result of his work on *Enter Plato.* Three years earlier, in 1962, Gouldner, along with coauthor Richard A. Peterson, published a peculiar little book entitled *Notes on Technology and the Moral Order.* In preparation for this book, Gouldner spent time in workshops on quantitative methods and the newest statistical techniques, including factor analysis. Through factor analysis, Gouldner and Peterson (1962) hoped once and for all to settle a persistent problem within functional analysis, namely, its penchant for tautology. In conceptualizing the social system as a system of interdependent parts in which all parts and subsystems affected all the other parts and subsystems, functionalism explained everything, thereby explaining nothing.

Factor analysis promised a way of holding constant certain key variables in a system of multiple variables or factors, thereby allowing determination of the relative "loading" or influence of each variable of interest. Gouldner and Peterson drew their data from the Human Relations Area Files, which contained information on seventy-one pre-industrial societies. They grouped the data into various factors, such as factor L (lineality), factor SD (sex dominance), factor T (level of technology), and factor A (their measure of morality which they dubbed "norm-sending"). The A in factor A stood for Apollonianism, which Gouldner and Peterson appropriated directly from Nietzsche's ([1872] 1956) study of tragedy and the genealogy of morals. As Gouldner and Peterson (1962, p. 51) explain,

> There is in Apollonianism a development of norm-sending institutions such as ceremonial or ritual and of codified laws, as well as of groups and roles such as a powerful chieftainship, authoritative judges, a restricted council, and an organized priesthood bulwarked by beliefs in the attractiveness of the afterlife.

As mentioned earlier, Nietzsche had suggested that ancient Greek society and certain other societies of antiquity were characterized by a Dionysian complex emphasizing the pleasures of the flesh, rapture and intoxication, a tragic view of the world, and the acceptance of the terrors and horrors of existence. In contrast, later more rationalized societies were labeled Apollonian, whose primary characteristic was "impulse control." Some of the factors of the Apollonian ideal type included freedom from all extravagant urges, the stressing of cognitive modes of experience, reason, knowledge, and science, and the admonition to "know thyself." Gouldner and Peterson found that societies that scored high on factor A also tended to score high on factor T, technology.

Although Gouldner seemed to have arrived at a new level of sophistication regarding functional analysis and an improved ability to judge the relative importance of variables in contributing to certain features of the social system—here, the link between technology and morality—he also realized the extraordinary irony and incongruity of calling upon Nietzsche to help order his data and provide corroboration for his thesis. Indeed, at this point Gouldner has one leg in the old myth camp of the Dionysiac tragic vision and the other leg in the camp of the Apollonian scientific vision. As Gouldner and Peterson (1962, p. 32) state,

> We are unhappily aware that, at this point, we may lose some of our remaining readers. We may lose those who feel that tainted philosophers have no place in a pure social science, or those whose liberal views are offended by Nietzsche's seeming anti-Semitism, or those who simply cannot bear the presumably gross incongruity of juxtaposing philosophical poetry and statistical analysis.

Like oil and water, the tragic and scientific visions simply do not mix well. At this critical juncture, Gouldner opted out of the positivistic worldview, gave up most if not all pretenses of doing "science," and from approximately 1962 forward unleashed a virtual tirade against all scientific systems of thought that lacked the reflexivity to peer into and confront their own anomalies and contradictions. This is seen, for example, in Gouldner's blistering attacks on (1) the doctrine of objectivity and value neutrality in science (Gouldner 1962; see Hammersley [2000] for a summary and critique of Gouldner's position), (2) the secrets of organizations and the pathological consequences of these for

social service agencies in particular (Gouldner 1963), (3) partisanship for the dispossessed and downtrodden in society, especially to the extent that research on such populations is funded by the welfare state (Gouldner 1968), (4) the sociological establishment (Gouldner 1970), and of course (5) Marxism (Gouldner 1974a; 1974b; 1977–1978; 1980; 1985).

REFLEXIVITY AND THE NEW CLASS: THE FINAL TRAGEDY

Amidst all this seeming negativism and loss of certitude about science, Gouldner still retained one slim thread to conventional science: his program of reflexive sociology. Reflexivity in general refers to "that which turns back upon, or takes account of, itself or a person's self" (Holland 1999, p. 464). The problem of reflexivity for sociology, according to Kieran M. Bonner (2001, p. 267) "concerns the ability of the inquirer to take responsibility for what one says while simultaneously being able to say something substantial about the phenomenon or object of inquiry."

This version of reflexivity in sociological theory is a direct reaction against the positivist dictum that the voice or persona of the theorist should be muted and systematically excised from the theoretical system (Hertz 1997). For example, even today many scientific journals admonish authors to avoid the use of the personal pronoun "I" in their writings. As a collective enterprise, science utilizes such conventions as blind peer review to ensure that findings reflect not merely the idiosyncratic observations of an inquisitive mind, however gifted the author is or is perceived to be, but instead the shared wisdom of a consensual community of scholars. This traditional view of science was handed down to us from the time of Plato, whose own philosophical system was built on the assumption that knowledge is a disinterested "master" vision of formal objects (Sandywell 1996a, p. 126). Reflexivity in the social sciences turns away from this feature of Platonism as well as from Descartes's subject-object dualism, moving from the "individual *cogito* of epistemology and the rational 'agent' of social theory to the embodied, socially situated *person-in relation*" (Sandywell 1996a, p. 377).[6] This is seen clearly in Gouldner's (1970, p. 25) description of the major aims of his own version of reflexive sociology:

	Reflexivity	
	1st Order (Reflection)	2nd and Higher Order (Radical Reflexivity)
Authorial Voice Present	**TRAGEDY**	**—REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY —FEMINIST THEORY —ETHNOMETHODOLOGY**
Absent	**POSITIVISTIC SCIENCE**	**DECONSTRUCTION** ("death of the subject")

FIGURE 1. TYPES OF EXPLANATORY SYSTEMS BY LEVEL OF REFLEXIVITY AND PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF AUTHORIAL VOICE

> The sociologist's task today is not only to see people as they see themselves, nor to see themselves as others see them; it is also to see *themselves* as they see other people. What is needed is a new and heightened self-awareness among sociologists, which would lead them to ask the same kinds of questions about themselves as they do about taxicab drivers or doctors, and to answer them in the same ways. Above all, this means that we must acquire the ingrained habit of viewing our own beliefs as we would those held by others.

Ironically enough, however, the Apollonian decree of "know thyself" through dialogue and philosophical reflection is central as well to Gouldner's program of reflexivity. In this sense, Gouldner's embrace of "cognitive rationality" (Parsons and Platt 1973) shares with Plato the belief in the beauty and dignity of thought (Finley 1966, p. 97). The new class of intellectuals (and to a lesser extent the technical intelligentsia) is the bearer of cognitive rationality in the form of the culture of critical discourse by which members of this class attempt to explain or understand the modern world (Gouldner 1976; 1979). Gouldner (1979, p. 28) describes the culture of critical discourse as

> an historically evolved set of rules, a grammar of discourse, which (1) is concerned to *justify* its assertions, but (2) whose *mode* of justification does not proceed by invoking authorities, and (3) prefers to elicit the *voluntary* consent of those addressed solely on the basis of arguments adduced.

Hence, the culture of critical discourse, as the language of science, is concerned with justifying one's claims, not with recourse to the status of the speaker, but through a reasoned dialogue between interlocutors who agree in principle that all assertions are open to discussion and problematization. Although voiceless, unlike tragedy (which includes the voice of the speaker or author in its explanatory schema), the culture of critical discourse (positivism) is reflexive in that it is open to examination of its own talk and it is willing to talk about the value of talk (Figure 1). The culture of critical discourse is, in essence, the deep or latent structure of the common ideology of the new class (Gouldner 1979, p. 28).

It is in the nature of science to leave nothing to tacit understanding but to investigate anything that comes to the attention of an inquisitive mind. Armed with the protocols of scientific research and assuming that the world can be known through a diligent application of the steps of the research process overseen by blind peer review, the culture of critical discourse nevertheless encounters problems of its own. Since all assertions are open to challenge, the culture of critical discourse must also engage in autocritique, and critique of that autocritique, and so on, in essence putting its hands around its own throat and seeing how long it can squeeze. "There is an unending regress in it, a potential revolution in permanence; it embodies that unceasing restlessness and 'lawlessness' that the ancient Greeks first called *anomos* and that Hegel had called the 'bad infinity'" (Gouldner 1979, p. 60).

Science believes the complexity of the social world can be tamed by a sober application of reason monitored and checked via the collectivity of fellow scientists sharing the culture of critical discourse as their special speech variant. We see then that science requires the participation of like-minded others—especially as Plato conceptualized this by way of dialogue or the Greek dialectic—who negotiate the conditions of their existence and who generate knowledge through a reasoned search for "truth." Tragedy, on

the other hand, depicts the tragic hero as opting to act unilaterally when confronted with the polycentrism and complexity of the world (Ramos Torre 1999). In Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*, for example, Oedipus proclaims himself an independent agent free of fate and history and, being thus self-made and self-generating, he is able to see the world rationally. But as J. Peter Euben (1997, p. 116) points out, in fact Oedipus's "knowledge comes with ignorance, and so the meaning of his acts remains bifurcated in a way he only comes to understand in the scene where, significantly enough, he blinds himself."

Gouldner as tragic hero is similarly "blinded" when he comes upon the realization that reflexivity as science's last great hope is also deeply and mortally flawed. It seems that no matter how hard science tries, its emphasis on reflexivity by way of the operational rules of the culture of critical discourse will always lead to the dead end of self-refutation and self-negation that the tragic vision knows and understands all too well. Tragedy, then, is the latent or deep structure of science as a going concern, ready to break out from latency whenever someone like Gouldner, or Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno ([1944] 1972; see also Connerton 1980) before him, decides to push reflexivity to its upper limit. This realization of the bifurcated and dualistic nature of the tragic hero gives us a new model of the social actor in contemporary social science, namely *homo tragicus*, whom Ramon Ramos Torre (1999) argues has supplanted earlier actor models such as *homo specularis* (from Adam Smith), *homo rationalis* (from economics and utilitarianism), and even *homo moralis* (from the Durkheimian tradition).

CONCLUSION: TRAGEDY'S LESSONS

Gouldner's criticism and eventual abandonment of conventional positivistic sociology, and his later flirtation with Marxism which he found equally problematic because of its lack of reflexivity and its tendency to lapse into regimes of terror, can actually be seen as an empirical instance of a generalized tendency in science and philosophy toward the production of "nightmare theory" (Gouldner 1980; Chriss 1999a). Gouldner (1980, p. 380) suggests that every theoretical system has a caged, unarticulated, and repressed version of the theory struggling to get out. In effect, all theories share the nightmare that the caged system will break out.

As much as anything, Gouldner's program of reflexive sociology was an attempt to alert theorists to the hidden or tacit dimensions of their theories. Gouldner's (1980, pp. 380–389) discussion of "nightmare Marxism" was the culmination of his analysis of the hidden, indeed paradoxical, dimensions of Marxism residing in its infrastructure. Specifically, Marxism was never adequately reflexive enough to account for its own origins. In other words, it could not answer the question: How could the intelligentsia, most of whose members come from privileged social class strata, elude their own social being to give expression to the consciousness of the proletariat? This contradicts the technical level of Marxism that argues that social location gives rise to consciousness, to a particular way of seeing and understanding the world. This garbled account of the origins of Marxism points to weaknesses in the entire Marxist analytic, according to Gouldner, and partially accounts for the nightmarish regimes of terror (Gouldner 1977–1978) that emerged under critical Marxism in places such as Russia, Cuba, China, East Germany, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere.

Not only Marxism but also all nonreflexive theories have nightmare versions waiting to break out from latency when conditions are favorable. A theory's nightmare arises as well out of the repressive work the theory must do in order to draw distinctions between itself and competing perspectives. But in so doing, each theory must also address criticisms and challenges emanating from within its own borders. In similar fashion, having been founded in a critique of traditional society and cultural arrangements, sociology finds itself involved in constant internecine fighting, as versions of emancipatory sociology arise to challenge, and attempt to break out from the shadow of, the currently dominant version of sociology that some critics may come to perceive as being overly beholden to some oppressive power structure (for example, the kowtowing by researchers to the welfare state as an important source of their funding; see Lemert 1995, pp. 1–10; O'Neill 1995). Gouldner's work in sociology, then, can be understood as the articulation of the nightmare versions of existing theories that, because of either their lack of reflexivity or their outright desire not to admit openly to the discrepant or self-refutational implications of their own ideas, otherwise tend to be silenced, obfuscated, or systematically glossed over. All theories, whether structuralism, feminism, Marxism, functionalism, deconstructionism, postmodernism, dramaturgy, ethnomethodology, network theory, or rational choice theory to name a few, have their repressed nightmares, their systematic silences concealed with a gloss.

Sociology's nightmare—its tragedy—is the fact that its own critique of conventional or establishment sociology folds back on itself as sociology gains more legitimation and is accepted by society as a source of insights about the pathologies of modernity. This tendency toward self-critique and even self-refutation is what John O'Neill (1995, pp. 188-189) describes as the inherent limitation of sociological knowledge, as embodied and articulated in and through the culture of critical discourse. It is what Gouldner (1976) described as the dark side of the dialectic, or *anomos*, or the "bad infinity." This is the home of tragedy. The tragic vision has always understood that the quest for knowledge involves the solving of certain paradoxes and riddles only to generate more questions and more ambiguities as a result of that seeming step forward toward greater enlightenment and rationality. Euben's (1997, p. 134) discussion of the ambiguous conclusion to Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos* is especially apposite here:

> Given the play's stance toward the riddles it dramatizes and the way it itself becomes riddling, this ambiguous ending is hardly surprising. Indeed, it would be strange if there were one integrating conclusion that answered all the questions raised by the play. If we are, as the play suggests, caught up in a web of local meanings that necessarily leave us riddles to ourselves, if not to others, then reducing the play to a single term would endorse what it seems to warn against.

Euben further suggests that, if *Oedipus* were to have an obvious conclusion, it would diminish the play's ability to disturb the alliance of reason, method, order, and progress that are the hallmarks—or rather the conceit—of science. Our unbridled optimism about the power of science to deliver better and more useful knowledge about the social world than ever before has blinded us from recognizing that every success of sociology (political science in Euben's case) has contained a failure. Indeed, the tragic vision teaches us that every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing, every way of knowing a way of not knowing.

Gouldner's tragic sensibility led him to the ultimate painful conclusion that the new class of intellectuals were a flawed class and that their culture of critical discourse and method of reflexivity generated as many paradoxes and dead ends as they hoped to solve. In addition, Gouldner's tragic vision informs us that even theories with noble and humanitarian aims, such as Marxism's promise of uniting theory and practice via the elimination of oppression and subjugation by one class at the hands of another, have dark sides, nightmares lying in wait in the theory's infrastructure (Chriss 2000b).

Hence, Gouldner's earnest warning, informed first by a latent and then a manifest tragic vision or orientation, was for social scientists to understand the limitations (the "bad news") of any quest for knowledge and ultimate "truths," to learn from that bad news, and to use it to improve both their own theorizing and, potentially, the human condition more generally.

NOTES

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1. Indeed, Bannister (1987, p. 161) points out that Ogburn's vision for a scientific sociology included the utilization of a "wholly colorless literary style" by which the author's voice would be rendered invisible or irrelevant. I will return to this issue of authorial voice and the myth of silent authorship (Charmaz and Mitchell 1997) shortly.

2. There exists of course a vast scholarly literature on tragic theater, Greek tragedy, and Greek thought more generally. Some of the writings I consulted include Chayut (1999), Danby (1949), Finley (1966), Glicksberg (1963), Goff (1995), Gouldner (1965; 1969; 1976), Kaufmann (1968), Maffesoli (1993), Nietzsche ([1872] 1956), Padel (1992; 1995), Pickard-Cambridge (1962), Ramos Torre (1999), Rehm (1992), Rocco (1997), Sandywell (1996b; 1996c), Sennett (1994), Steiner (1996), and Storm (1998).

3. Deconstructionists do not share the view that one can make a meaningful distinction between the world and texts. As Lehmann (1993, p. 6) observes, "Deconstruction posits that there is *no* difference between the world and the text because there is *only* difference; the world is like a text; the world is a text; the world is textual. And there is no 'outside the text'; opposites are the same, all oppositions are equal, 'there is only difference.'"

4. As Schutz and Luckmann (1973, p. 4) explain, "In the natural attitude, I always find myself in a world which is for me taken for granted and self-evidently 'real.' I was born into it and I assume that it existed before me. It is the unexamined ground of everything given in my experience, as it were, the taken-for-granted frame in which all the problems which I must overcome are placed."

5. This idea of frame of reference draws primarily from Parsons (1937; Parsons, Bales, and Shils 1953) and Klausner (1982). Theorists working from within a physicalist (or objectivist or materialist) frame of reference are employing a conceptual scheme that assumes that the objects of study are located within a spatiotemporal framework, emphasizing that these objects can be located in space and time relative to other objects. The spatiotemporal framework of classical mechanics is the paradigmatic example here (Parsons 1937, p. 28). On the other hand, theorists working from within a symbolist (or subjectivist or idealist) frame of reference place objects of analysis within an interpretive framework that emphasizes the meaning such objects have for actors within a situation. As Munch (1992, p. 244) suggests, a symbolist framework emphasizes meaning construction, norms, expressions, cognitions, and actions guided by symbols.

6. Terminologically, we may avoid further confusion by noting that traditional positivistic science engages in a "first-order" reflexivity that is more akin to simple "reflection" (Sandywell

1996a). First-order reflexivity, or reflection, occurs naturally in everyday life without humans necessarily being aware that they are acting reflexively. For example, the human self is developed out of routine social interaction as we see ourselves in the mirror of others' appraisals of us (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Normal science is reflective in the sense that theorists work with and develop ideas as they reflect upon the nature of their world. "Second-order" reflexivity is "meta-" in the sense that it involves thinking about thinking and can become more and more radical as it is possible to think about thinking about thinking ad infinitum (Wiley 1994, pp. 83–89). Gouldner confronted this infinite regress in his own reflexive sociology; another form of radical reflexivity appears in ethnomethodology (Pollner 1991). (See Figure 1.)

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