



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 1  
Issue 1 *Fall*

Article 14

---

October 1973

## Ideology, Sociological Theories, and Public Policy

Norman Goroff  
*University of Connecticut*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Public Policy Commons, Social Work Commons, and the Theory, Knowledge and Science Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Goroff, Norman (1973) "Ideology, Sociological Theories, and Public Policy," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol1/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

Ideology, Sociological Theories, and Public Policy

by  
Norman Goroff  
Professor of Social Work  
University of Connecticut

It is important that my basic assumptions about social theories be made explicit at the very outset.

1. Every social theory has implicit, if not explicit, assumptions about the nature of man/woman.
2. Every social theory has implicit, if not explicit, assumptions about the nature of society or the collectivity.
3. Every social theory has implicit, if not explicit, assumptions about the relationship of man/woman to society or to the collectivity.

These assumptions in the theories are not empirical but normative and hence social theory is ideologically based. The fact that the social theories are ideologically based does not diminish their usefulness in helping us organize our knowledge of the social world. Rather, it becomes incumbent upon us as social scientists to explicate our assumptions in the three areas noted whenever we do research and/or participate in assisting groups of people in the formulation of social policies.

W.I. Thomas' dictum is one of two laws in Sociology. "If a man defines the situation as real, it is real in its consequences." How we define the world has tremendous consequences for our subsequent behavior. Our definition of the world is based on our "stock of knowledge at hand" (Schutz:1959) which includes our ideological assumptions.

The second law in Sociology is "He who succeeds in imposing his definition of the situation on others, controls that situation." Attempts to pass off on others ideologically based definitions of situations under the guise of "objective science" is an attempt to impose their worldview on others and therefore control them. The various struggles occurring within the field of Sociology may best be understood as attempts to redefine the nature and scope of the field and, therefore, to break the control exercised by that segment of the profession that has long imposed their worldview on the others.

Martindale's (1960) brilliant analysis of the philosophical and historical roots of sociological theory clearly supports the thesis that sociological theory is ideologically based. As increasing numbers of sociologists recognize and accept the fact that our sociological theories are ideologically based; as they

begin to explicate their assumptions, we may well see a significant enrichment of our knowledge of the social world.

Those of us who are involved as sociologists and social workers in the area of the development of social policy must, in the meantime, extend our analytical skills and critically examine the assumptions that are implicit in relation to the nature of man/woman, the collectivity, and the relationship between man/woman and the collectivity.

There are many assumptions concerning the nature of man/woman. For heuristic purposes, we will try to conceptualize some of these assumptions as polarities and indicate how these assumptions result in different public policies. We do not claim this analysis is exhaustive, but rather illustrative.

One set of assumptions sees man/woman as "homo-duplex, part egotistic, anarchistic and self-seeking and plastic without a system of inner controls." (Horton, 1964). The consequences of this set of assumptions is to seek ways to provide man/woman with external controls. This Hobbesian definition of the nature of man/woman focuses on the necessity for the establishment of external constraints (Dawes, 1970). Much of our current welfare policies and programs are predicted upon this view of man/woman.

Another basic assumption about the nature of man/woman is that behavior is predetermined by his/her psychic structure as well as by social forces that he/she cannot control (Blumer, 1969). In other words, he/she is the medium through which self-perpetuating social forces pass through and thus pre-determine his/her behavior. The consequences of the psychiatric world view (Reissman & Miller 1964) and social-determinist view is to provide therapeutic services designed to help the individual work through his intrapsychic problems so that he can make a better adjustment. Thus we find a myriad of services involving all types of therapeutically oriented personnel i.e. social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, made available to the individual. In addition to personnel, we also build large edifices to care for (control) those we cannot affect in the community.

While some social scientists adhere to the Hobbesian view of the nature of man/woman, they simultaneously adhere to the view that man/woman's rewards in terms of wealth, power, and prestige is the result of inherent superior qualities. The Davis-Moore (1945) - Melvin Tumin (1953) discussions regarding the efficacy of functional theory to explain the existence of inequalities of rewards do not obscure the fact that popular mythology as well as social science ideology gives credence to the view that superior rewards is due to superior personal qualities. The consequences of this definition are to be found in the programs in the War on Poverty which stressed trying to help individuals develop necessary qualities to assist them to get out of the "culture of poverty." Programs such as Head Start, Job Corps, Manpower Training were focused on the individual and not necessarily the social structure and how we distribute the resources of our society. In many of the "individual improvement programs" of the War on Poverty a necessary concomitant

to "cognitive training" was "personality therapy." Thus services to individuals and families seemed to become the focus of many of the programs. We will reserve comment on the Community Action Programs until later. Suffice to say that CAP programs were founded on other ideological assumptions and when they began to show some minor results, the conservatives in the legislature quickly succeeded in effectively weakening this part of the program. (Rose, 1972).

The view of man as homo laborans, existential man/woman, the active creator of himself/herself, capable of freeing himself/herself from being "stimulus bound by his/her capacity for synthesizing, symbolizing, and exploring" (Frankl, 1967), capable of developing self-control and social control patterns that maximize freedom and self-development, the creator of the social structure and the constructor of the social reality, requires a different set of concepts with which to understand the social world. Social behaviorism (Martindale, 1966) holds great promise in its focus on the study of social behavior. This view holds that man creates social institutions and changes these institutions. Man in interaction with other men creates a variety of patterns of ways to influence one another and that various forms will rise and fall from preeminence. If power, (the ability of one group of people to impose its will on others), (Bierstedt, 1950), is an important element in certain forms of social control, then to alter these forms and its subsequent consequences, it is essential to alter the power relationships among people.

The theoretical basis for Haryou Act, Inc., an anti-delinquency project in New York City, which provided a major prototype for the C.A.P. programs in the War-on-Poverty, was the necessity for the redistribution of power so that those who were powerless could obtain power in order to effect the decisions that affect their lives (Knapp & Polk, 1971). A thorough reading Youth in the Ghetto: A Study in the Consequences of Powerlessness (1964) provides clear evidence that the implicit assumption regarding the nature of man/woman is that of latter point of view. Social service was seen as an integral part of the program, but by no means the dominant feature. The predominant feature was on the ways and means for the powerless to obtain power. Once Title II of the Act establishing the Office of Economic Opportunity began to show some minor results in forcing some redistribution of power, the conservative forces in Congress led by Congresswoman Green of Oregon succeeded in stifling the program by putting it under theegis of the elected officials i.e. Governors and Mayors.

A second area we need to examine briefly in order to illustrate the significance of one's assumptions in social theory on public policy is how one defines society. Here as before, we will posit a polarity. One pole views society as being transcendental, an entity sui generis, greater than and different from the sum of its parts. In this view, society is the source of morality because individuals cannot of their own volition create and maintain order. External constraint is necessary for society to exist at all. Furthermore, this view sees society as self-generating and self-maintaining

which gives rise to such concepts as central value system, structure, function, equilibrium, and structural differentiation. (Horton, 1960).

The relationship of the individual to society is a super-ordinate-sub-ordinate one. The individual becomes socialized by internalizing external constraints. He adopts the central value system of the society and learns the norms and proper social roles. He thus learns to become a productive member of society.

This view of the nature of society and the relationship between the individual and society have important implications for one theory of deviance and the social policies that flow from it. Within this framework there are two basic explanations for deviance. The deviant individual has not been sufficiently or successfully socialized to the control value system or he is psychologically ill.

The consequences of this definition of the situation is to establish elaborate systems aimed at either "resocializing the individual" or treating him as a psychologically ill person in a mental hospital or similar settings. The concept of structured social roles further becomes the criteria for diagnosing mental health and illness within this view of society and man (Parsons, 1958).

In order to appear more humanitarian, the concept of a therapeutic state is rapidly gaining ascendancy as the primary method of external social control for "deviants." Kittrie (1971) notes: "The implications of the therapeutic state for the treatment of crime and criminals are dramatic, representing a departure from the moral-religious concept of crime and other antisocial behavior as manifestations of evil and should be suppressed and punished as a means of purging the evildoers as well as society." However, the abuses possible in the therapeutic state are illustrated by Thurman Arnold in his foreward when he relates the case of a man found innocent of a crime by virtue of "insanity" and sent to St. Elizabeth's Hospital where he spent over four years. Had he been found guilty of the crime, he would have received a maximum sentence of six months.

Within the transcendental point of view, the worth of the individual is judged by his "contribution to society." We, therefore, establish many services in order to help the individual make a contribution to society and many new services and programs are promulgated on the basis that it will increase the individual's contribution and usefulness to society.

The other assumption views society as the creation of man/woman. This eminent orientation is a holistic view of the relationship of man and society. One cannot think of a society except as composed of individuals and cannot conceive of an individual except as members of society. Man/woman and society are opposite sides of the same coin. (Denzin:1969). This view makes no a prior assumption relative to the ideal state of society as being in equilibrium nor that neither consensus, cooperation, conflict, or constraint is

ideally present. Rather, the existence of any of these phenomena become empirical questions which must be researched.

An important set of ideologies which stems from these two orientations (transcendental and eminent) are related to what Martindale (1964) posits as individualism and collectivism. Individualism is an ideology which maintains that the person is the highest of all values and the vindication of a society is to be found in its assistance in the maximum unfolding of the individual's potential. Collectivism is an ideology which maintains that the highest of all values is the society (and the peace and harmony it guarantees). While individuals are important, they are second to the community, for without the community, the individual is insignificant. In the individualism ideology, society and institutions are instrumental i.e. institutions are made for people and not people for institutions. In the collectivism ideology, the internal peace of the community is the highest of all values; therefore, people must order their behavior to the priority of the community.

The collectivism ideology is an integral part of the transcendental orientation and the individualism ideology is related to the eminent orientation.

Two examples related to public education will illustrate how these ideologies influence the definition of the problem and the solutions that emanate from these definitions.

In two suburban school systems with which I am associated as a consultant, there is considerable concern being voiced by school administrators about the increasing number of students being "turned off" from the educational system. One school system is attempting to define the problem within the collectivism framework. The problem resides in the students who cannot adjust to the high school and are disruptive. The solution they have evolved is being called euphemistically "an alternate high school." In reality, it is an "R and R School"-----Relaxation and Refreshment" for the regular teachers in the high school who are having trouble with these adolescents: "Rehabilitation and Return" for the students who will be taught how to behave in a school and returned to the regular high school.

In the other school system, there is increasing recognition that not all students can profit from a large bureaucratically operated high school. The school administration has begun a process of deliberation with students, teachers, parents, and pupil service personnel in order to develop a viable alternate high school which will help students and teachers maximize their potentials. The individualism orientation is evident.

If one has a transcendental view of society---individual relationship and a collectivism ideology then public policy will be aimed at changing the people who do not fit into the structure and who threaten the stability of the collectivity.

If one has an eminent view of the relationship between the individual and society and an individualism ideology, then public policy will focus on changing the institutional structure that does not contribute to maximizing the individual's potential.

The second example illustrates how social class bias result in differential definitions of the same problem. Martin Trow (1966) describes how the problem of non-achievement in an inner-city school and a suburban school is defined. In the inner-city school, the problem is the result of inadequate early socialization, poor family attitudes, poor peer group influence, racial segregation, family disruptions, poor motivation, etc. The assumption is that all is well with the school; it is the children and their families who need help. Hence, a group of therapists are brought into the picture to begin tinkering with the children's heads. The solution to the problem is social service.

In the suburban schools, the children are motivated; they are not culturally deprived; there is the assumption that they have been well socialized, there are "good" family attitudes; therefore, the problem must be found in the structure of the curriculum and in the technology of teaching. Elaborate attempts are, therefore, made to modify the school.

A collectivism orientation was used in defining the problem in the inner city school and an individualism ideology in defining the problem in the suburban school.

Earlier we mentioned the prevailing mythology relative to the belief that one's personal qualities determine what one's share of rewards, wealth, power, and prestige will be. This myth promulgated by the ruling class and supported by "the special group of ideologists" (sometimes called philosophers, economists, and social scientists) (Marx, 1964) became the rationale for the War on Poverty. Instead of developing a program for fixed full employment and a measure of income maintenance, which would have had some impact on the redistribution of the nation's income, the Office of Economic Opportunity was launched. Founded on the implicit assumption that being poor, just as being rich, was the result of the individual's personal qualities, services were the mainstay of the O.E.O. The variety of services created the illusion that we were doing something about poverty.

Figures by Miller (1971) demonstrate the persistence of inequitable distribution of income over a forty year period. In 1929, the lowest 40% of the population received 13% of the income. In 1968, they received 18% of the income; a total gain of 5%. In 1929, the top 20% received 54% of the income. In 1968, they received 41%, a drop of 13%. In 1968 the top 5% received 14% of the income as compared to 18% for the bottom 40%. Translated into figures, based on a population of 200,000,000 people in the United States, 10,000,000 people had almost as much income as did 80,000,000 people. The middle 20%, 40,000,000 people received the same as the lowest 40%, 80,000,000 people in 1968. The same was true in 1929. The fourth 20% received 19% in 1929 and 24% in 1968,

From an ideological point of view, the War on Poverty reflected a collectivism orientation in which the individual was out of step with the collectivity and had to be helped to "get into step." Few research reports on either the War on Poverty or Model Cities challenge the basic ideological assumptions regarding the nature of the collectivity or the nature of the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. The notable exception seems to be Roland Warren (1971) and Stephen M. Rose (1972).

The collectivism orientation places great stress on education as the avenue to upward mobility. To a degree, there are statistics that seem to support this claim (Miller 1971). However, the median income based on educational achievements between white and non-white families demonstrate considerable variation. White families with an elementary school education earn \$2015 more than non-white families. White families with a high school education earn \$3179 more than non-white families with the same education. White families with a college education earn \$2671 more than non-white families with the same education for the year 1969. (New York Times, January 10, 1972), Figures from 1958 to 1969 show the identical trend i.e. higher median incomes for white families in each educational achievement category when compared to the median family income for other than white families (Miller, 1971).

The utilization of social services in an attempt to fight the War on Poverty is, in my view, equivalent to feeding the birds by giving oats to horses.

Similarly, attempts to tinker with the educational institutions through incremental changes (Lindbloom, 1959) is to create an illusion that we are doing something about a problem without truly effecting the social practices in the broader society which results in the vast differences in earnings between white and other than white families with the same educational achievement. We are able to be blinded to the consequences for individuals of our social arrangements by adopting a collectivism orientation.

We are, therefore, able to develop sophisticated research designs which make a prior assumption that the problem of achieving within the educational system resides within the individual and not the social arrangements (Ausubel and Ausubel, 1963; Bettelheim, 1964; McLelland, 1961 ). The ideological bias seems clear.

One needs to ask how social science theory and sociological theory in particular with its various ideological orientations influenced the definition of the problem and the subsequent public policies that evolved in response to the problem.

It seems to be generally accepted that the problem of defining a social problem involves a normative orientation rather than empirical orientation. C. Wright Mills (1943) more than thirty years ago was among the first to demonstrate the normative orientation of social pathologist. Martindale's (1957) scholarly analysis of the normative influences in defining social problems carried that work further. Freidrich's (1970) landmark contribution to the

development of sociological theory and the various ideological influences at work brings us up to the present decade.

The acceptance of the prevalence of normative orientations in sociological theory does not diminish the contribution that we can make towards understanding our social world and our social problems. However, Sociology can no longer parade under the guise of being a value-free social science. Gouldner (1962) in his presidential address to this society more than a decade ago may have sounded heretic to those of us who felt that the model for social sciences is the "value free" natural sciences. The drive for acceptance in the academic scientific community caused us not to hear what Mannheim (1952), Znaniecki (1952), and others said about the differences between the natural sciences and the cultural sciences.

### Concluding Remarks

As a social worker, a sociologist, and a social work educator, I find no conflict between these three roles. As a sociologist, I am committed to the explication of my assumptions in any work I do in that role. As a social worker, I have lived with my assumptions and have functioned with them for twenty-five years. As an educator, I am convinced that I owe it to my students to explicate my assumptions so that they may better understand what I have to say because what I have to say is influenced by my frame of reference. I do not have any conflict between being a social worker committed to a set of values and principles and a sociologist, because I do not advance the claim that I am free of values.

Lynd almost forty years ago asked "Knowledge For What?" The answer must be knowledge for use to help make our world fit for human beings to live and grow in. I cannot comprehend how knowledge generated by sociologists has any real meaning if it is not used to help construct a better world. When we enter the arena of trying to construct a better world, we enter as artisans and not "objective scientists" however we attempt to define this. We, therefore, must be honest and explicate our assumptions so that we may join with others as knowledgeable human beings involved in the history of mankind and not as someone who claims exemption on the basis of "scientific objectivity."

- Ausbel, D.P. and Ausbel, Pearl  
1963  
"Ego Development among Segregated Negro Children." In A.H. Passow (ed.) Education in Depressed Areas, New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bettelheim, Bruno  
1964  
"Review of B.S. Bloom, "Stability and Change in Human Characteristics" New York Review of Books, September 10,
- Bierstedt, Robert  
1950  
"An Analysis of Social Power" American Sociological Review, 15;6
- Blumer, Herbert  
1969  
Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Methodology  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall.
- Davis Kingsley and Moore, Wilbert E.  
1945  
"Some Principles of Stratification" American Sociological Review, Vol. 10 No. 2
- Dawes, Alan  
1970  
"The Two Sociologies" British Journal of Sociology, pp. 207-218.
- Denzin, Norman K.  
1969  
"Symbolic Interactionism and Etnomethodology - A Proposed Synthesis." American Sociological Review, December.
- Frankl, Victor  
1967  
Psychotherapy and Existentialism,  
New York Simon and Schuster-  
A Clarion Book.
- Friedricks, Robert W.  
1970  
A Sociology of Sociology, N.Y.  
The Free Press

- Gouldner, Alvin  
1962  
"Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology" Social Problems 9:3 pp. 199.
- Horton, John  
1964  
"The Dehumanization of Anomie and Alienation: A Problem in the Ideology of Sociology." British Journal of Sociology, Vol 15, December, pp. 283-300.
- Horton, John  
1966  
"Order and Conflict Theories of Social Problems as Competing Ideologies," American Journal of Sociology, 71 pp. 701-713.
- Kittrick, Nicholas N.  
1971  
The Right to Be Different, Baltimore, Maryland The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Knapp, Daniel and Polk, Kenneth  
1971  
Scouting the War on Poverty, Lexington, Mass., D.C. Health and Co.
- Lindbloom, Charles  
1959  
"The Science of Muddling Through" Public Administration Review Vol. 19 Spring pp. 79-88.
- Martindale, Don  
1957  
"Social Disorganization: The Conflict of Normative and Empirical Approaches" in Becker & Boskoff, ed. Modern Sociological Theories, N.Y. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Martindale, Don  
1960  
The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory, Boston, Mass. Houghton, Mifflin, and Co.
- Martindale, Don  
1966  
Institutions, Organizations and Mass Society, Boston, Mass., Houghton Mifflin Co.

- Schutz, Alfred  
1959  
"Tiresias or Our Knowledge of Future Events", Social Research, Vol. 26.
- Trow, Martin  
1966  
"Two Problems in American Education" in Howard S. Becker, Ed. Social Problems: A Modern Approach New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Tumin, Melvin M.  
1953  
"Some Principles of Stratification-A Critical Analysis." American Sociological Review Vol. 18
- Warren, Roland L.  
1971  
"The Sociology of Knowledge and the Problems of the Inner Cities" Social Science Quarterly 16/52.
- Znaniecki, Florian  
1952  
Cultural Sciences, Their Origin and Development, Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois of Illinois Press.
- Mannheim, Mar1  
1952  
Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, London, England, Routledge, and Kegan and Pauls.

- Martindale, Don  
1964  
"The Roles of Humanism and  
Scientism in the Evolution  
of Sociology" in Zollschan &  
Herslk, ed. Explorations in  
Social Change, Boston, Mass.  
Houghton, Mifflin Co.
- Marx, Karl  
1964  
Selected Writings in Sociology  
and Social Philosophy, translated  
by T.B. Bottomore, London, England  
McGraw-Hill pp. 78.
- Miller, Herman P.  
1971  
Rich Man, Poor Man, New York,  
Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Mills, C. Wright  
1943  
"The Professional Ideology of  
Social Pathologists" American  
Journal of Sociology, 49 pp.  
165-180.
- McClelland, D.C.  
1971  
The Achieving Society, New York  
Van Nostrand.
- Parson, Talcott  
1958  
"Definitions of Health and Illness  
in Light of American Values and  
Social Structure" in E. Garthy Jaco,  
ed-Patients, Physicians, and Illness,  
New York, The Free Press
- Rein, Martin & Miller S.M.  
1966  
"Poverty, Inequality, and Policy"  
in Becker, ed. Social Problems-A  
Modern Approach, N.Y. John Wiley  
& Sons, Inc.
- Reissman, Frank & Miller, S.M.  
1964  
"Social Change Versus the  
Psychiatric World View," American  
Journal of Sociology, Vol. 34 No. 1.
- Rose, Stephen M.  
1972  
The Betrayal of the Poor: The  
Transformation of Community Action;  
Cambridge, Mass. Schenkman  
Publishing Co. 1972.