Some reflections on the 'crisis' in sociology*  
door S. N. Eisenstadt

1. The seeming inevitability of multiple paradigms in sociology

I – Professor Lammer’s paper is very indicative of the present rather widespread feeling within the sociological community about the nature of the sociological enterprise. Its acceptance of the multiplicity of seemingly exclusive paradigms as a sort of ‘natural’ state of sociology is a very strong indication of the state of potential crisis of sociology, in a sense one possible outcome of this self-proclaimed crisis.

Needless to say, such view of sociology may indeed acquire the force of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is, however, our claim that such development of sociology into mutually closed paradigmatic schools – which in fact will mean the end of sociology as an open critical scholarly activity – while certainly possible, is not necessarily given in the intellectual nature of sociological analysis and research. Rather, such a situation may come about through the selection, under the impact of certain type of institutional forces working within the sociological community, of one of several possibilities given in this intellectual contents.

II – The view of sociology as consisting of inherently of mutually exclusive, totalistic paradigms has added a new dimension to discussions about sociological theory which were prevalent in the fifties and sixties – although to some degree it has followed them. In common with these earlier discussions about sociologic theory the more recent one does also focus especially around the critical approach of the structural-functional model or of the combination of the structural-functional model and the strong behavioristic premises of sociological research into what the Frankfurt school called ‘positivistic’ sociology, and C. Wright Mills designated in more political-ideological terms.

The criticisms of the structural-functional model gave rise to a tendency to construct ‘counter-models’ – such as the conflict model espoused by Dahrendorf; the exchange model proposed by Homans, Harsanyi and to some extent Blau; the different models emphasizing the symbolic dimension of social life – whether those of the interactionists or of the Levi-Strauss-like structuralists; the dialectical historical models of the neo Marxists – which combined the criticism of the abstract model of social system with a general anti-positivist stand.

The allegations against the structural-functional model which were voiced

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in these controversies – and which the different counter-models were seemingly designed to overcome – were of several different, even if usually interconnected, types or levels.

First, from the point of view of the analytical contents this model was seen as unable – because of its assumption about the existence of a basic social consensus around central societal values and goals; its emphasis on boundary-maintaining mechanisms of social control and its implicit minimization of the importance of power and coercion as a means of social integration – to explain the concrete variability of institutional complexes and of social behavior on the one hand and the processes of social change on the other.

Second, there developed the claim that owing to these ideological and analytical deficiencies it is difficult to derive from within the basic assumptions of this model more concrete theories and testable concrete hypotheses.

Third, was the claim that the analytical orientations and ideological deficiencies of this model have also influenced in a crucial way the selection of problems of research – neglecting especially those dealing with power relations, class-struggle, with the potential claims of the 'underdog'; or with the autonomous creative potentials of individuals.

These disputes were often very strong and vociferous. Many of the scholars participating in them often discerned that factually there exists a strong connection among the various weak sides of the structural-functional or positivistic model of sociology. But on the whole these discussions were conducted in a scholarly atmosphere and manner which assumed first the existence of some common grounds of interest and of critical approach to these problems – and second, and above all, the possibility of discussing each of the aspects of the 'dominant' sociological model – be this its philosophical premises; its paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of social order or the various concrete theories of research problems derived from it – on their own merit.

Moreover, while many of the arguments and criticisms were presented in the form of 'counter-models' to the structural-functional one, yet they did not necessarily envisage themselves as totally irreconcilable with it. Indeed many of them expressed hopes of some possible future convergence, synthesis. In attempting to create such synthesis they tended also very often to re-orient themselves to the classics of sociology – Marx, Weber or Durkheim, thus implicitly stressing the continuity of the sociological endeavour.

III – The more recent controversies – those closely related to the outcries about the crisis of sociology – have given rise to a shift in the tenor of these arguments; indeed to their far-reaching transformation.

Within most of these more recent controversies the various more discrete
or specific criticisms or arguments merged into a view in which all the
different aspects of the functional-structural model — or of the combination
of this model with 'behavioristic' empirical research — are seen as inher­
ently, logically and existentially, combined and interconnected into a
closed philosophical-ideological system. The ideological and analytical
weaknesses of this system or paradigm were seen as creating sociological
theories which are both morally wrong and empirically incorrect, the neces­
sary outcome of which is the breakdown of their analytical or research
paradigms.
The only way to overcome these deficiencies is therefore — according to
such views especially in their extreme forms — to construct various 'total­
istic' counter-models which would constitute alternative 'total' explanatory
models of society and which would be part of an entirely new, ideological
sociology — reflective sociology propounded by Gouldner, the dialectic
sociology suggested by Friedrichs, various types of radical sociology or of
radical-Marxist approaches propounded in France, Germany, England and
the U.S.
Thus, indeed, sociology is here often presented especially in the most extreme
proclamations as consisting of completely closed, 'totalistic' paradigms which
differ from one another not only in their analytical premises, but also in
their philosophical, ideological and political assumptions, thus minimizing
any possibility of scholarly discourse in problems of common interest.

2. The analytical openings between different models and paradigms of social
order and the possibility of constructural developments

IV — A closer examination of developments in sociological theory and
analysis will, however, disclose a more complex and rather paradoxical pic­
ture.

Such examination shows that the various paradigmatic models or counter­
models of society which developed out of the criticism of the various aspects
of the structural-functional model or of 'positivistic' sociology in fact evinces
a relatively high level of mutual analytical opening. Without going here
into details* we may give here some illustrations of such openings.

Thus, for instance, one such an opening can be discerned in the growing
recognition of the importance of symbolic dimensions or values in social
life by those scholars who seemingly oppose and negate their importance
and instead stressed the importance of interests, power and conflict. Actually
this approach — as represented for instance by Dahrendorf or Rex — does

* A fuller analysis of such openings will be given in the forthcoming book by
the author and M. Corelaru.
not necessarily deny the importance of values or symbols as referents of human action in society; rather, following Weber's approach, but going beyond him, they emphasize the potentially close relationship between more specific individual group interests and values, and the general tendency to legitimize such interests in terms of some values or images of the 'good society' or of the proper rules of game.

Similarly, the purely individualistic 'exchange' model as represented by Homans, Harsanyi and the exponents of game theory opened up towards the symbolic dimension of human and social activity. This opening took place first of all in the recognition of the growing importance of the symbolic dimension in its social references in the universe of individuals' goals.

Thus, for instance, Harsanyi admits that in order to explain the variability in the behavior of the individual it is necessary to include among his goals or rewards not only those of wealth and power, but also of prestige and status, which he defines already in a broader way than many of the earlier 'individualists' by stressing that the quest for some cultural or social order and the quest for participating in it may be an important goal of individuals and that consequently many induce them to bestow states and prestige, regardless of immediate rewards or profits, on those who in part try to actualize such orders.

The importance of the symbolic dimension and of a wider normative order from the point of view of individuals' behavior is also illustrated by the centrality of the concept of 'distributive justice' in Homans' model of exchange. As Blau has shown, this norm, which according to Homans regulates the rates of exchange between individuals and is not explained by the economic and psychological assumption on which his model is based, and can be only understood as derived from wider general values and conceptions of justice, which transcend any immediate situation of interaction and exchange.

A paralleled - but contents - wise contrary-opening up with regards to the symbolic dimension took place from within the structural and structural-functional schools - as can be seen in the Shils analysis of charisma or Geertz's analysis of ritual, ideology and religion. This opening was manifest above all in the growing recognition of the autonomy and of internal systemic properties of the symbolic realm - and the consequent possibility that these way exist 'direct' relations between this realm and the activities of individuals - relations which cannot be seen only as reflection of the systemic needs of social organization.

Similarly, the growing dissatisfaction with the 'logical' and seemingly far-reaching closed autonomy of the symbolic realm as given in Levi-Strauss' system - together with the dissatisfaction with such seeming closure of the
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structural-functional model in which the symbolic dimension is conceived as completely merged with pure organizational aspects, loosing any autonomy of its own – has brought to several developments, some of which – as for instance in the work of Leach, Dumont, Luc de Hedsch or Beidelman – attempt to 'dynamize' the symbolic – realm not only in terms of its internal logical properties but also in terms of the relation of such properties to existential problems of human life, as well as with the organizational aspects of social order.

V – Similar openings can be found with respect to the extent to which societies are seen as 'systems', and the nature of their systemic qualities. Thus, for instance, the main criticism of the 'conflictual' or power-approach was directed against the functionalist contention that social integration is based on a general consensus; but beyond this, this approach did not always necessarily deny the existence of some basic or actual societal needs which have to be taken care of if society is to be able to function; moreover, it was here also implied that symbolic orders and norms constitute a basic dimension of society and are very important determinants of the definition of any societal needs. In other words, it was not the existence or importance of such symbolic or normative aspects that was rejected or criticized, but rather the assumption attributed to the functionalist that these symbols and norms have to be fully accepted in an equal way by all members of a society, as a basic prerequisite of the functioning of social order.

Among the individualistic approaches we encounter that parallel to the exclusive theoretical emphasis placed initially on the individual's goals and interests (Coleman, Homans, Harsanyi) or on his subjective interpretation of the social situation as the starting points of sociological explanation, the systemic qualities of the division of labor were acknowledged either in the form of 'givens' (as in the case of Homans), or in the form of an emerging and necessary dimension of any continuous process of interaction (small-group research in social psychology) or seen by some at least of the interactionists as one of the major problems to be explained.

Similarly, within the functional-structural model there took place openings of the assumptions that 'society' is a closed system in the direction not only of the recognition of greater autonomy of social sub-systems but also of the different systems of social action – personality cultural system and social system, and of the possibility of direct interrelations among each of them, not necessarily mediated by the needs of only single systems.

Another illustration of such openings can be seen in the relation between those approaches which stresses unique historicity of each society and the general systemic approach to societies.

While many of the Marxists and some of those who see themselves as fol-
lowers of Weber, criticize the structural-functional approach for the generality and abstraction of its system in definition of society — their own terms, such as 'forces of productions' 'system of domination' and the like and are not in principle less general and abstract. The fact that they tend to emphasize the differential historical contents of these general terms does not in principle deny the generality and abstraction and the concomitant systemic view of the social system. It does only indicate that they are more and more sensitive to the importance of some more general comparative criteria according to which different specific societies can be compared. At the same time, however, the new developments in comparative sociology which developed from the structural-functional school do also provide illustrations of the growing recognition of such possible specific characteristics of different historical societies.

Another important opening between the symbolic and the historical structural approach (especially Marxist), can be seen for instance in the works of Goldman, Sabag and to some degree Touraine.

The most important opening on the part of the Marxists has been here the recognition that the internal structure of society is not given only in its economic power structure but in a deeper structure of which 'forces of production' are the major manifestation. At the same time some structuralists like Tiryakian or Luc de Heusch have developed a growing search for the organizational anchorages of such symbolic 'deep-structures'.

VI — Such mutual openings were closely connected with the growing convergence and potentially constructive mutual impingement of the different approaches in contemporary sociology which can be found on several levels. First of all, there developed a growing conceptual convergence among most of these approaches, they all tend to use rather similar range of concepts such as roles, resources, rewards which denote aspects of individual behavior; similar terms which define various types of groups — natural groups like family, community and the like and more 'artificial' specialized groups; third, terms like institutions, and they all tend to delineate common major types of institutions as political, economic or family which denote basic nexus of social division of labor. Although these concepts are often used in different ways by these different approaches, yet there tends to develop a growing convergence, even if not necessarily agreement in the ways of using them.

Second, such convergence can be seen in that in the basic assumptions of each approach — the existence of division of labor and systemic organization of groups and societies; the pursuance by individuals of various goals — both 'private' and institutionalized in social interaction; the importance of symbolic models and orientation in the patterning of such behavior and
organization, the importance of the meaningful definition of the situation by those participating in it; the existence of some eco–systemic organizations—seem to have been accepted as sort of evolutionary universals of any human society, by almost all these approaches.

However, the fact that all these aspects of social life are accepted as evolutionary universals of human society does not explain the crystallization of any of their specific concrete types, i.e., of any specific social groups or organizations, any specific type of division of labor, symbolic patterns of interaction of individual behavior.

Indeed, perhaps one of the most important advances—and convergences in sociological analysis between the growing awareness in the different approach that the crystallization of any such concrete pattern of several order—and the concomitant variability in human societies—are not explained by their mere existence as such evolutionary universals, and that therefore it is the analysis of the concrete processes of such crystallizations that constitutes the major focus or problem of sociological analysis.

Thus, third, the common basic problems of all these approaches is how the process of crystallization of different patterns of social organization—whether formal or informal—is related to behavior of individuals who participate in this process; and how the different levels of the crystallization of such patterns of social organization are related to each other.

VII—But such convergence does not mean the disappearance of disagreements among them. On the contrary, it is indeed here, in the very points of convergence that the potential fruitful implications of the analytical differences with regard to the basic problems of sociological analysis for development of sociological theory and research can be most fully discerned.

The basic roots of such differences and potentially fruitful implications are given first in the fact that the element or components of social order which are taken as given by one approach constitute for other approaches the basic problems to be explained, and second that through such confrontation the weaknesses and blind spots of each approach may become more visible.

Thus to give only a few illustrations—the individualists do not accept the givenness of any specific type of social organization, or division of labor, of norms and of the mechanisms of their institutionalization and perpetuation, as well as their perpetuation by means of socialization alone, but rather wants to explain it in terms of the basic rules and of individual interaction or exchange or in terms of coercion, power and influence.

But by attempting to do so the limitations of the narrower assumptions of this approach become more fully visible. Thus, for instance, Homans, working with an exchange model based on principles of free-market,
actually left unexplained one of the principal normative elements in this model, namely the norm of distributive justice; to some extent this is also true of Coleman's constitutional arrangements, according to which the formation of coalitions and power exchange through which collective goals are adopted, is regulated.

Similarly, the more 'social system' oriented schools, while on the one hand claiming that the emergence or institutionalization of social life from individual interaction cannot be taken for granted but has to be explained in terms of special conversion mechanisms stemming from the 'needs' of social organization have not been able, on the other hand, to account fully for the impact of individual activities on the crystallization of societal goals or of cultural orientations.

In this way the various blind spots in each of these approaches could be articulated and become, instead of foci of general metaphysical debate, starting points for analytical elucidation.

Thus, from the point of view of the more individualistic approaches the crucial problem is the explanation of the ubiquity of 'collective' goals and public goods, or of the limitation on pure exchange to which are characteristic of any concrete institutionalization. Those with an 'anti-systemic' bias have to explain mechanism of group cohesion while conversely those who emphasize the 'needs' of social systems have to explain the mechanisms through which such needs are articulated and related to activities of individuals as well as to the institutionalization of collective goals and public goals; similarly the relations between interpersonal definition of situations and individual and/or the organizational and systemic problems have to be explored.

The potential fruitfulness of these confrontations can indeed be discerned today in very many areas of research – be they social stratifications; problems of family life and relations between the sexes; social change in general and more specific: of its areas such as studies of modernization or comparative political sociology; problems of poverty; deviance and many other areas of sociological inquiry.

For reasons of space it would not be possible to analyse them here* Suffice it to mention that such fruitful advances in research are indeed very often obtained through the many confrontations of scholars from different ideological or paradigmatic camps – thus attesting again to the potential mutual openness of the paradigmatic models they have been developing.

* Such an analysis will be attempted in the forthcoming book by the author and M. Corelaru.
At the same time however, we find among many of the scholars engaged in such disputes a tendency to give up any serious research in any of these fields — and instead to confine themselves to proclamatory annunciations and denunciations.

3. The convergence of closed paradigms and of analytical openings in the development of sociological analysis — their possible impacts on the development of sociological analysis

VIII — The preceding illustrations provide only some indications of such possible analytical openings which are inherent in the confrontation between the different paradigmatic models of society, and these openings obviously provide a rather different picture from that presented in that of sociology as consisting of closed, exclusive paradigms.

How can we then explain this tendency to a combination of mutual openings and to totalistic closure in sociological discourse? The fact that such a tendency developed also — even if in less dramatic forms — in earlier periods of the development of sociological theory, such as for instance during the breakdown of the evolutionist and earlier Marxist systems — seems to indicate that it may be to some degree inherent in the very process of analytical development of sociology — and, paradoxically enough especially in the more dramatic and important aspects of its developments.

It seems to us that such possibilities are given in the fact that many of the crucial concerns of sociological theory have been historically rooted in, and continued to be closely related to those of philosophical, ideological and political problems and orientations oriented to the analysis of human situations and social and political orders.

Sociological theory and analysis constituted from its very beginning — as Shils has strongly stressed — a very important part of a broader intellectual development, of the development of tradition of self-examination, self-inquiry and of the extension on the critical approach to the basic phenomena of human and social existence — which constitutes one of the major breakthroughs of European modernity.

This general, broader, intellectual tradition, which comprised philosophic ideological and scholarly trends alike, was predicated on those special developments in European culture and society through which a new critical distance between social reality and givens and its observation and analysis became possible.

The social and cultural context within which this tradition arose was first that of the broader intellectual concern of the Enlightenment; and second the more concrete political and ideological concerns about the nature of social order and orders, its problems and the possibility of changing it
which developed out of the developments of the French (and the American) revolutions and the breakdowns of the Ancient-Regime, out of the industrial revolution. Above all, these concerns developed out of the continuous confrontations between the premises and assumptions of political equality and participation originally oriented against the ancient-regime; the promises of economic improvement given in the industrial development on the one hand and the development of new inequalities and divisions and conflicts to which the industrial revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie gave rise on the other.

Within this broad intellectual tradition the impetus generated by sociological inquiry and analysis provided a potential focus for the continuous extension and growth of the tradition of such critical self-appraisal. At the same time, by virtue of its being concerned with such critical self-examination of society, sociological thought and analysis was also continuously related to philosophical and ideological concerns with the nature of society and of social order in general and of modern social order in particular.

The general problems with the specifical sociological speculations and paradigms addressed themselves—the nature of the social order and the bases of its acceptance and the mechanisms of its continuity and change were necessarily very closely connected with the ideological-philosophical reflections and speculations concerned with these problems. Similarly, many of the conceptual tools developed in sociology—i.e., such concepts as 'class' or 'civil society' as well as many concrete problems with which sociological analysis concerned itself—developed out of the intellectual concerns closely related to the ideological and political orientations.

For all these reasons any important development or opening in sociological analysis may easily give rise to a new orientation to such philosophical, ideological or political concerns and their respective publics. Similarly, in so far as any such openings tend to be connected with the awakening or re-definition of the critical stance of sociological thoughts, they may become closely related to different ideological orientations and controversies—especially to some metaphysical visions of the social order and to different thematic approaches, or—emphases in the analysis of society—especially those in terms of conflict or consensus, hierarchy or equality, statics or dynamics—which are important components of many such ideological orientations.

Thus the impingement of philosophical and ideological orientations on sociological theory and analysis and the latter's openings to them is not just something external or accidental. While, needless to say, the developments in each of these respective fields tend to be segregated and separated for very long periods of time, yet sometimes philosophical or ideological
developments may converge with internal 'openings' in sociological theory. Such impingements may indeed touch on very central problems of sociological analysis — specially on some of the crucial components of the construction of models and paradigms of social order which develop out of the crystallization of any new developments of openings in sociological theory. They also may give rise to various critical appraisals of the sociological endeavour — up to far-reaching outcries about a total crisis of sociology.

IX — Such critical appraisals may enhance the feelings that sociology is in a state of crisis for a number of reasons. The controversies which abound in such situations tend to disclose some of the 'hidden' relations existing in any given tradition of sociological research, between the existing analytical paradigms on the one hand and different thematic emphases of research; between different perspectives on the nature of social systems, different ideological and political orientations and choices of research problems and emphases.

In such situations there may also develop a growing concern with the various real and presumed methodological weaknesses of sociological research and analysis and with the various weaknesses in the sociological enterprise in general and in the relation between theory and research in particular.

The impact of such 'crises' on the development of sociological theory, analysis and research, can be — from the point of view of the continuous development of sociological analysis — either productive and constructive, or destructive, and instances of both types of possibilities can be found in the history of sociology.

The constructive potentiality of these crises may be seen in the opening and deepening of the phenomenological understanding of different aspects of social order, and especially — as we have briefly illustrated above — is usually seen in changes of the paradigmatic frameworks in different areas — especially in the more central ones of sociological research; in the broadening of the scope of its assumptions; in the development of new areas, problems and topics of research; thus in general the broadening of the scope of sociological inquiry.

As against such constructive possibilities there could also develop negative outcomes of such crises; their most important manifestations are growing departmentalization of 'schools' — each with its own paradigms and research programmes; the tendency of such schools to develop metaphysical and ideological closures; the bifurcation of sociological analysis between dogmatic-metaphysical assertions about the nature of society and of sociological inquiry on the one hand and emphasis on purely technical aspects
of sociological research which could be used in administrative affairs, on
the other.
These are also often connected with a growing preoccupation with phil-
osophical-methodological aspects of social research to the preclusion of the
conduct of research itself. Discussions about hidden dimensions of society,
about the philosophical or existential possibility or impossibility of pursuing
sociological research; about the existential, personal or social, bases of the
pursuit of such research tend in such situations to change from marginal
— even if often very important stimulants of sociological discourse into
central problems of analysis, often serving as justification of non-possibility
of conduct of research.
Such developments may easily disrupt the process of accumulation, and
internal critical reexamination — even if in itself rather discontinuous — of
sociological knowledge, leading to the creation of the illusion that each
group or generation starts anew in the investigation of sociological prob-
lems — an investigation which may then turn out into rather esoteric per-
sonal or sectarian discourses.
One of the most important manifestations of such closures — which facil-
itates the development of such discontinuities in research and the balkan-
isation of research is, — as has been so forcefully stressed by R.K. Merton,
— the emphasis on the 'insider-outsider' distinction in conduct of sociological
inquiry, i.e., that only those belonging to a certain ethnic, ideological etc.,
group, can really understand any phenomenon concerned within such
groups and — more generally — with society at large.

4. The structure of the sociological community as a determinant of the out-
comes of crises of sociology
X — These possibilities of both constructive and 'destructive' outcomes of
such crises are then given in the 'intellectual' contents and orientations of
sociological analysis. But which of these possibilities will really take place
is not determined only by these inherent intellectual possibilities.
The ultimate impact of the nature of any such 'opening' or 'crisis' on the
development of sociological analysis tends to be greatly influenced by the
structure of the sociological community — and especially by its relations
to other academic scholarly and intellectual communities, its perception of
its own roles, and its sense of internal security.
As in the case of all scientific communities, its major aspects of which
influence such sense of security are first size and 'density'; second, its
relative autonomy and independence of resources; and third, level or
degree of internal institutionalization of traditions of pursuit of theoretical
considerations and of objective research in various research fields; and
the consequent strength of such internal traditions in influencing the orientations and problems of research.

The development of the sociological community and enterprise has evinced, from these points of view, certain specific characteristics. One such aspect has been the relatively low level of institutionalization of the sociological community, the relatively low level of its — to use Shils’ expression — ‘density.’

But beyond this, the sociologists’ roles as it has developed from the beginning of sociology, has also contained some continuous ambiguities and potentially conflicting components and reference orientations.

In the first stages of development of sociology these ambiguities were mostly focused around the lack of distinction between philosophical, political ideological, social reformist and administrative roles and concerns and those of the sociologist. Later on, with the growing — even if as yet uneven and halting — institutionalization of academic and professional sociological roles, these ambiguities and role conflicts tended to develop in more variegated directions and became focused around several poles.

One such pole was between ‘the critical’ component of the sociologists’ role with the concomitant possible participation in some ideological, political or wider intellectual communities or publics as against that ‘objective’ research or scholarly orientation with its stronger roots in the academic institutions and publics.

Within the critical role there tended to develop tension between the view of sociology as a secular substitute of religion as against a more detached nonutopian, and the directly-political stance.

Another such pole was that between the practical-applied-professional components of such roles as against those of scholarly research or of the critical one. Within the applied role there developed the tension between the ‘critical-utopian’ and the ‘engineering’ orientation. Within the academic roles there could also develop tensions and conflicts between the ‘humanist’ and the ‘scientific’ models.

Each of these components or orientation of sociologists could also entail participation in, or orientation to different organizational settings tend potentially different publics or clientels, which in turn could intensify the conflicts in the role-conception of sociologists; and their possible abdication of the autonomous, self-critical scholarly orientation.

XI — The ability of the sociological community to maintain its autonomous creativity has been continuously dependent on the degree to which it has been able to develop and maintain some combination of balance and tension between first its internal autonomy on the one hand and openness to other scholarly communities and to the broader intellectual communities
on the other hand; second between commitment to objective exploration and analysis on the one hand and participation in the tradition of critical approach to societal and political problems on the other; and third among the different components in the sociologists' roles and in their respective reference orientations and publics.

Such combination of balance and tension could be maintained only in so far as none of these role-referents or components became predominant so as to negate the viability of other such components.

The maintenance of such balances may be more difficult and problematic in situations of higher levels of institutionalization of the sociologists' roles than in those of low density and institutionalization and because of this, the contemporary so-called 'crisis' of sociology may seem to be more pervasive and 'critical' – but potentially also more promising – than any former ones. Indeed, paradoxically enough, those very features in the contemporary setting which have created a relatively greater density of sociological community and a higher level of its institutionalization, may also explain the tendencies to strong acrimonious ideological disputes, to the development of metaphysically and ideologically closed paradigms with all their destructive impacts on sociological research.

The greater academic, professional and general strength of the sociological community made it to take more seriously the claims of sociology to provide a direction for a critical orientation in the contemporary setting, its promises of helping to contribute to social change and planning and to the creation of a better society and subjected all these claims to critical examination.

The very unification of many fields of research and the bringing of them together into common frameworks has made them more susceptible to broader critical examination; while the very farreaching spread of research could also give rise to growing concerns with serious problems of ethics of social research – both in relation to its 'objects', as well as to the various centers of power or influence which sponsor such research.

In general developments became much more sensitive to the changing pattern of commitment to social problems and inquiries by growing demands for closer relation of their studies to actual social problems, and became much more sensitive to pressures from varying publics.

The possibility that these developments will give rise to a feeling of crisis was enhanced by the growing mutual impingement and awareness of different parts of the sociological community and their respective publics; and by the different levels of institutionalization of different parts of the national and international sociological communities in different academic and professional settings. The possibility that such crisis will develop in direction of
mutual chaines between different sociological paradigms may come about through the intensification of the impingements of some publics on some of the components and reference orientations of the sociological community in a direction which could undermine the legitimacy of other components. Of special importance here is the fact that the greater scope of the sociological community, its working into the more central areas of intellectual and academic life has made it especially sensitive to wider trends of intellectual antinomianism that have swept over Western universities from the middle of the sixties and that students of sociology seem to exhibit sociological character whether in terms of social background or of structure of their departments for a higher degree of predisposition to such antinomianism.

But all these factors do not make the 'destructive' outcome of this 'crisis' inevitable.

The larger, 'denser', sociological communities tend also to show a tendency to maintain a higher level of diversification links with different intellectual academic political settings; a strong internal core of academic research with a relatively high degree of autonomy resources; openness to new problems and participating selectively in various new settings – thus maintaining their autonomy in the new and denser setting.

Thus these developments indicate that more than in earlier times it is indeed in the power of the sociological community or communities to draw strengh from the intellectual turmoil in which it has caught itself; to overcome the negative potentialities of this turmoil and to minimize its positive potentialities. But its ability to do so depends greatly on its ability to forge out a dynamic, open, critical, scholarly identity, and to withstand the various pressures which undermine it.