An 'ethical hassle' or an attempt at a frank criticism of science: the historical development of anthropology

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Introductory remarks

The article published below is the last part of a paper that appeared under the title: 'Concerning the content and the political role of the social sciences in developing countries'. This paper had to be curtailed drastically owing to pressure on space in this periodical. The first three parts of the original version illustrate applied science in general and social sciences in particular:

The first part, 'Anthropology on the war-path', is a short exposition how, with scientific assistance, the US can exploit an ethnic group in Laos, the Meo, for their own political-military ends, viz. to fight communism, in this case the Pathet Lao. This is at the same time an instance of anthropologists getting involved from community-development projects in counter-insurgency.

The second part deals with the role of the Dutch universities in the exploitation of Surinam, notably analysing the Brokopondo projects and the Wageningen rice-project.

In the third part, 'Some social-historical and methodological marginal notes on the practice of anthropology in Surinam', attention is drawn to the limitations of the anthropology that developed under the influence of structuralism and functionalism for understanding the complex social reality. This part functions as a bridge to the last chapter in which the following question is central: Isn't it true that a discussion about ethics and attempts to formulate a professional code obscure a far more fundamental question, namely the justification of the practice of social science?

'Ethical hassle'

In September 1971 an Ad Hoc Committee of the American Anthropological Association (7000 members) published a report 'to evaluate the controversy concerning anthropological activities in Thailand' about which great unrest had developed in the US. In an answer to Margaret Mead, the president of the Committee, Eric Wolf and Joseph Jorgensen criticized the report as factually and theoretically faulty because in it, among other things, the statement is made that the projects carried out by anthropologists in Thailand cannot be condemned 'within the traditional canons of acceptable behaviour for the applied anthropologists' (p. 2, 1.110-11).

The Committee, in its turn, accuses Wolf and Jorgensen of 'unjustified, inaccurate, unfair, and unscholarly behaviour' because they have published

1 'Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the Controversy Concerning Anthropological Activities in Relation to the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association'. Sept. 27, 1971. Eric Wolf was so kind as to send us at our request the material of this congress and the comments on it.
stolen documents.
Both parties get choked up with an 'ethical hassle', as put by a commentator of the congress in *Behaviour Today* (November 29, 1971), by reducing the problem to the lack of a code of conduct.

It seems to us, however, that framing codes, starting points for behaviour, is but patchwork at the outside of the shaky house where in fact a thorough inspection of the foundations themselves is called for. Foundations are not examined by formalities but by a study of anthropology as social science, as a product of social evolution; by tracing the history of its origins and development.

Anthropology, the study of man and his social organization, which rose in the 19th century as a branch of science, is a typical continuation of the humanistic tradition of the practice of science as shaped in the West. However, it also dates from a time when a small part of the world was rapidly developing industrially and far outdistanced the rest of the world. The 19th century was one of expansion, economical growth, more and more effectively organized exploitation and colonialism, but also one of strange meetings with unknown countries and people with queer customs. Anthropology, which during this period evolved from an explorer's diary to the scientific study of 'exotic man', cannot be simply accused of colonialist intentions though definitely of such tendencies.

Along with more knowledge of what in the beginning merely had the attraction of the exotic a certain sympathy also frequently grew, an identification with the subject. The 19th century amalgamation of humanism and colonialism also expressed itself in a leaning towards charity and a responsibility felt by the well-to-do for the less richly blessed with worldly goods but at the same time creating a huge distance between the two. In Claude Lévi-Strauss' words:

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object².

On the other hand, anthropology was also revolutionary where, following in the track of Montaigne and Rousseau, it rejected radically misplaced preten-

sions to superiority of nations and races and therefore turned on forms of racism and fascism. Wider knowledge of the population of colonized regions proved to be requisite when the mother countries intruded into more and more sectors of indigenous life. The training of civil servants for Indonesia in Leyden is a case in point. The ethical policy that influenced the training here and that was rooted in the humanist conception of science that had prevailed a long time in Leyden got its counterpoise, though, in the 'Oil Faculty' in Utrecht. Government and business circles at an early date knew how to articulate and meet their needs. Science, however, had always its own justifications.

Science loses its independence where knowledge increasingly becomes organized productive value; nevertheless, by its unaltered idiom it conjures up the former light-heartedness. Mystifications like the independence, the objectivity, etc., of science function as ideological veils obscuring the subordination of science to the bosses in control, such as the state or other constellations of power. The development of the theories of anthropology is naturally linked up with the kind of relations subsisting between the social system it originated from and the countries it has come into contact with.3 Just as ethnology was an issue and function of colonialism, so is anthropology the same of neo-colonialism, exploitation after the latest style, like it characterizes our (Dutch) relations with the Third World (among whom Surinam, Indonesia).

Although not very many anthropologists are aware of this at least some are. Kathleen Gough for instance calls anthropology 'the daughter of imperialism'. Berreman wonders whether 'anthropology is alive', whether it is not growing into an anti-human science.

Devoting a special meeting to the theme of science and ethics during two days of seclusion and reflection seems by all means appropriate. It supplies as it were the proof that the scientist, who is branded cold and objective, still has his heart in the right place.

However, in this way the matter suggests itself at the same time as a mere extra, an incidental problem to science, a fringe, almost a fancy problem. Concerning this, the authors of the present article think that mooting the ethics of social-scientific investigation as a problem in itself obscures what is really at stake: its concrete object (social development) and its concrete method of investigation and application. We opine that the problem does not allow of a reduction to a formal part of the method of application. The question what is the actual concern of the practice of social science touches a yet more fundamental problem: the justification of science.

3 Also see in this connection Josselin de Jong, P. E., Contact der Continenten. (Contact of the Continents), Universitaire Pers, Leiden, 1969, p. 103-106.
From the statement that human evolution has proceeded by the interaction between the natural environment and the process of getting to know and control the latter the conclusion follows that science must have a function of 'learning and trying', a function of human development and emancipation. Knowledge is based in reality and, directly applied to it, changes it in its turn. Stimulating potentialities, creating the conditions for an unfolding of the possibilities of man, is the ultimate justification for the increase of knowledge. Whether it really does do justice to this justification is dependent on the concrete historical way science develops and is applied. The question concerning the object of science is therefore unsolvable within the compass of science. Science really does not function as an institution by itself. Every attempt to take it that way denies its actual social role and makes the self-sufficient organization and method of the specific discipline absolute. On the basis of such a kind of absolutism, in whatever form it may appear, divisions like those between theory and practice, theory and application, those between 'personal' and 'scientific' values, between man as 'civilian' and man as 'scientist', become apparent antitheses, artificial, though socially explainable constructions. Dramatic high lights in this field are the researches labelled as 'objective' in Indo-China, Indonesia, and Surinam. When the individual scientist stands anxiously aloof from politics and its problems, as if getting involved were 'unscientific' or 'subjective', his behaviour cannot be accounted for by the defective vision on the real social development including the fact that both science and scientist are historically defined and bound. That very reality mainly defines it. The picture it gives us of the separation of brain-work and manual labour, from the constantly increasing division of brain-work itself, as it developed apart from scientific thought, to the almost absolute separation of the disciplines.

At the same time, however, it is this reality which precludes shutting the scientist off from the application of his knowledge. The more precarious the political situation (cf. Indo-China, Indonesia, and now also Surinam) the less this can be kept up. Being ignorant (though it is tricky to think that all scientists are that ignorant), they cast about for anything in such a predicament: certainty please. Concerning their conduct they would love to see rules drawn up. Rules in which thinking and doing remain uncoupled: action becomes a matter of 'ethics'. It is a fact that, in spite of a host of ethical codes in which the separation between science and politics is maintained, science nevertheless plays a role different from the pretended one. By being interwoven and linked up with imperialism, anthropology for instance has long been playing a part in the exploitation and subjugation of the underdeveloped countries.

Starting from what is expounded above, a choice to serve no longer 'pure science' in a capitalist society and to supply the latter no more with means
that perpetuate it but, on the contrary, to turn against it actively, is a choice that can be made on scientific grounds and therefore not in conflict with objectivity and scholarship; on the contrary, scientific procedure, i.e. gaining objective knowledge about the real situation, **demands** it. Consequently, it is on these grounds that one can apply oneself actively to the liberation and emancipation of the **people**, who are the protagonists here.

2 — With the definition of the concrete object of investigation the method of research is closely bound up. Method not taken as 'technique', as suggested and taught in present-day curricula, but as an essential means, itself again founded in reality, of getting to know the latter in its totality and particularity, in its essential constituents, as a reality in movement. The lack of a sound method of research necessarily produces a biassed result: it leaves out essential elements, it interprets parts as things by themselves, etc. Suchlike methodical faults play an exceptionally important role in the application of science, which does not alter the fact that they seldom figure in discussions about ethics!

The bourgeois sociological theory, the bourgeois economical theory, the bourgeois anthropological theory, the bourgeois politico­logical theory, are by the nature of their bourgeois attitude a hatchery of onesidedness. Bourgeois anthropology frequently excels in the description of the manifestations of primitive life as an isolated independent social whole, the investigator taking pains to present in a hundred or two pages a kind of catalogue of whether or not coherent **phenomena**. Its scientific significance is just as great as that of the price-list of the stock exchange. Bourgeois sociology (in which we conveniently include some anthropological tendencies as well) has claimed for itself a particular field, the **socius**. It spares no pains or expense to map out as independent entities social or group phenomena, preferably restricted to their quantitative aspects, i.e. to safeguard against political-economical insight which would tragically rend this independence (but also make possible an essential understanding!).

On the one hand, it is the limitation of the discipline itself: the claimed parts cut loose from the whole surrounding them, on the other hand, the onesided method of analysis connected with it, which constitute the main obstacle in the way of an objective result of research, i.e. a result which represents the object of investigation both in itself and in connection with the whole, in which it has a place. In the Surinam case (in the original article) several examples were mentioned which do not comply with the demands of objectivity: agricultural-sociological research, economical research, anthropological research, and in which the methodology used simply caused the exclusion of important political and social constituents. For the time being, the high light here is the role of the Agricultural University of Wageningen, which has con-
tributed largely to the capitalization of agriculture in Surinam, without for a moment critically examining the forms of production, such as private capitalist enterprise, the leasing-system, the consequent social impact on the small farmer, etc. The capitalist form of mechanizing agriculture was simply assumed to be the natural one. The social and political consequences are therefore among others for the account of this university. In the social sciences (sociology, sociography), for that matter, investigations for the sake of the evaluation of agricultural projects, agricultural advice, and the like, are in the most literal sense abstract investigations because a particular aspect is abstracted from its existential ground and analysed (even so, often superficially) as a disconnected part of the latter.

Within this compass it would carry us too far to elucidate elaborately which scientific method we advocate. Therefore we merely refer to some introductory systematic texts. Besides these classics, some additional remarks chiefly pertaining to the behaviour of the research-worker in 'the field'. One of the most important questions concerns the attitude towards the object of research. It deals with the solution and the way the object of research is approached. The traditional discussions about it are occupied with methods like the so-called 'outside-view' techniques versus 'inside-view' ones, the 'survey' versus 'participant observation' (or even militant observation, or observation-intervention).

We think that it is irrelevant to decide in favour of a certain technique, the more so as certain concrete situations make certain recommended techniques unfeasible, but that one of the principal criteria for good anthropological fieldwork is that the object to be examined (a society, a group) is at the same time subject. Which means: is capable of (or is made capable of) participating in the investigation and in its application or publication because it is their life which is studied and is or will be subject to change. Even when this demand can not be made because the situation precludes implementing it the criterion

4 A. J. F. Köbben, 'Anthropologie en acculturatie. Enige beschouwingen over de betekenis van de antropologie voor de problematiek van de onderontwikkelde gebieden'. (Anthropology and acculturation, Some reflections on the significance of anthropology for the problems of the underdeveloped regions.), Mens en Maatschappij 35, 1960. In this essay the author outlines the symptoms of the modern development, the criteria of his description being one-sidedly defined, viz. on the basis of the capitalist form of development.
5 Some good introductory texts are for instance: Capital by Karl Marx, Band, I, II, III, Dietz, Berlin, several years; and Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, by W. I. Lenin.
6 For this see among other authors R. Stavenhagen, 'Comment décoloniser les sciences sociales appliquées?' (How to decolonize the applied social sciences?), Les Temps Modernes, June-July 1971; G. Huizer, Peasant unrest in Latin America, p. 29-30.
should all the same be effectuated: by treating the object of research actually as subject of social change.

We would like to mention as an example the approach developed by a group of social-scientific workers in Colombia during the last eighteen months. This group, operating under the name ROSCA, has reached the conclusion that just studying the various ethnic and suppressed groups in their country, such as the Indians and farmers, is insufficient and even exploitation if these groups studied are not given back their own history. Therefore the researchers stay on the spot to verify their scientific findings with the people themselves. The sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, one of the members of the group, during a short recent stay in Holland, gave us the following amplification: While studying an agricultural community in the north of Colombia and their specific problems with a large landowner, he traced through several documents the fact that eighty years ago the same problems had arisen and that on that occasion the population had rebelled. When he mentioned this event in the course of a meeting with the villagers one of the people present, an old man, appeared to recollect the incident and subsequently gave a lively and detailed description of the conflict and his own part in the resistance. This opened the discussion about possibilities of resistance in the still continuing situation of suppression of the people.

What has to be done with the results of research? This too produces numerous apparent problems in the discussion of ethics so that irreal 'dilemmas' are posited and one tries to make shift with half solutions. The first 'solution' is defended by the 'pure' scientists, not nearly extinct, who solemnly repeat that theory is theory and not practice and that they are clear of the application of their theoretical results, (should) have nothing to do with it, for the sake of the preservation of science (which amounts to nothing but for the sake of the preservation of the imagined independence of their theory). Choices are made for them. And in a colonial situation this means in nearly all cases that their research will be used by those who have the organizing ability to apply it, if the work has any practical relevance at all.

The second solution boils down to placing the material at the local authorities' disposal with the help of all kinds of covertly ideological justifications. Such justifications cannot prevent this solution from actually resolving itself into the one mentioned above. It is true they suggest that government is no class-defined body but a neutral one, they most emphatically assure the hearers that they contribute to the development of the 'modern national state'7 or —

7 Concerning the pretensions of neutrality with respect to public authorities and also regarding the institutionalized annulment of the independence of the individual scientist, cf. the report of a committee in the framework of the WOTRO (an af-
in case this cannot be sustained that easily — claim that engaging the authorities is necessary (and besides comparatively harmless) in order that people may profit by their enterprises. Against this, two stands can be taken which we could distinguish as 'critical' and 'revolutionary'.

The adherents of the first start from the assumption that science has to serve the people, without exactly indicating what has to be understood by people and what by service. Within this category often come the socially moved who are exclusively directed towards the 'Third World'. The adherents of the second stand, on the contrary, more clearly recognize the shape imperialism assumes in Surinam for instance and discern its source: the capitalist manner of production in their own country which necessitates a colonial expansion. Because it sees through the political implications of research projects like the ones examining the problems of acculturation of the Surinam population, or, more extreme still, the conspicuous interest shown by American universities in social-scientific research in South-East Asia, this latter view knows that the source of all misery is to be found in the West and concludes that here in the first place changes ought to come about.

Conclusion
In the foregoing we have wanted to expound that the question of 'ethics' is not an isolated problem, as its treatment in a secluded retreat-house might suggest, but that it directly points to the essence of science itself and its essential components: the choice of the object, method of research, and method of application. Simultaneously we have also wanted to put all kinds of apparent antitheses, dilemmas, role conflicts, and the like, that are connected with it in their proper perspective. But especially by putting forward empirical material (in the original article) we have illustrated to what misery science can contribute when questions like 'for whom' and 'whose' are neglected as concrete and non-narrow-scientific problems.

The present authors are aware of not being able to cope with the concrete problems of an 'anthropology in crisis'. They do hope, though, that they have contributed at least towards a better definition of the problematical theme of 'The ethics of social-scientific investigation, in particular in the Third World'. Finally, we might very generally summarize some topics of discussion, in other words, put the questions research will have to comply with:

a — for whom?

Are the results of scientific work going to benefit the whole population or
only an upper layer, or only the Dutch government, or an isolated institute, or even just an individual researcher?
b — which are the scientific presuppositions?
We realize that it is by no means easy to establish whether all presuppositions, points of departure, and the like, of certain projects are legitimate but we actually can find out which essential presuppositions are not.
c — in which direction is science developing?
Is science on the occasion of a certain project expanding in the direction wanted? Here the chief criterion is the emancipatory-democratic one, i.e.: is the project leading to a result the masses of the population of the world are going to reap the fruit of in the long run.
Just a desire to tell the truth is not enough. More congresses, more symposia about ethics don't avail much. Only the real results count, not the pretensions.
Nowadays this means first of all: 'ruthless criticism of everything that exists, ruthless in the sense that the criticism will not shrink either from its own conclusions or from conflict with the powers that be'.