

CEPAL Review

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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA
SANTIAGO, CHILE/ FIRST HALF OF 1978

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Between reality and utopia

The dialectics of the social sciences in Latin America

*Jorge Graciarena**

If the social sciences are conditioned by the real circumstances in the midst of which they emerge, and their recent manifestations occur in Latin America, these can only be properly explained within the frame of reference of the changes which have taken place in the region. Specifically, certain key points must be raised in the context of the technocratic order that has come to dominate the fundamental institutions: what conceptions are currently predominant in the social sciences and why, what counter-ideas are brought forward to oppose them, and what is the probable evolution of each.

Consequently, the central aim of the present essay is to describe the development of a 'technocratic conception' of social science in the ground prepared by the aforesaid technocratic order, and to reveal its basic features. Outstanding among the latter are its instrumental and pragmatic function, subordinate to the technocratic order, its emphasis on the production of social techniques and its predilection for a fragmentary and sectoral outlook. And over against this it asserts the need to consolidate a 'critical conception' establishing social knowledge on the basis of a systematic critique of itself and of hard fact: a conception that assumes its ethical responsibilities and considers the freedom of the mind an indispensable requisite for its work, since otherwise there is no possibility of attaining either truth or objectivity.

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I

The development of the social sciences in Latin America has primarily been a dialectical counterpoint between ideas and real processes in which the former have adapted to the latter—and vice versa—to produce syntheses, never conclusive and very often different and contradictory, but always rooted in an unceasing concern for the course of history, for current perplexities and likewise for the anxious anticipation of things to come. Any attempt to attribute a direction to the scientific work of the social sciences must inevitably recognize the existence of a recurring movement which has alternately brought them closer to and drawn them away—although never entirely separated them—from real social situations and critical events; so that these have been incorporated into the field of reflection and intellectual discussion in many ways and from a great variety of angles. The problems, fundamental conflicts and potentialities of the real social world have been present, in one way or another, in the subject-matter of the social sciences of recent decades. The real history, changes and critical problems of Latin American societies have *pari passu* conditioned the intellectual history of their social sciences, although with a natural lag and perhaps some accidental breaks. The aspirations and hopes of each moment in history have weighed no less heavily. Thus reality and utopia have become interwoven elements in the specificity of the Latin American social sciences.

None of this is new or original, of course. The conditioning of the social sciences by history has been demonstrated repeatedly, especially in connexion with some of their specialized

disciplines. Nor has there been any shortage of broader studies stressing the importance of social problems in wider areas of cogitation in the social sciences over relatively long periods in the present century.¹

The adaptation of the social sciences to historical fact has not been merely a mechanical process of reaction, as might have been the case if they had developed by blindly following the course laid down by the direction of prevailing social events. This is not what has happened. On the contrary, in the dialectical play between thought and reality social ideas have had a by no means negligible influence on the development of Latin American societies. In the last analysis, they, and more specifically their ideological projections, gave rise to the objectives and strategies which in one way or another have helped to shape the historical development of the region.

It is perhaps in order to recall here that social reality does not exist *per se*, but rather manifests itself through one of its various possible interpretations. Without falling into the idealistic subjectivism that denies the objective existence of reality and reduces it to the mere content of consciousness, which implies

an inadmissible reductionist monism, it must nevertheless be pointed out that ultimately reality is reflected in the consciousness of individuals (social actors and/or agents), mingling with their ideas and interests in specific clusters which constitute the bases and guidelines of their social behaviour. Strictly speaking, ideologies are precisely a type of concrete ideas which fuse a combination of social needs, socially-conditioned judgements about reality and goals for action. Hence their importance in the process of development and social change and of course in specific historical situations.

It may therefore tentatively be said that the Latin American social sciences have in one way or another followed a path which converges with the historical course of social reality. Their greater or lesser distance from it has in no way represented a profound change in their connexion with social reality, still less a break in it. This has been due not merely to the deliberate efforts of some of their practitioners —an element of some importance— but also simply to the very nature of things, which presupposes a dialectical interconditioning of ideas and social reality. This reciprocal relationship is in a sense the core of the reflections which follow.

¹ A study which conclusively shows these correlations is A.E. Solari, R. Franco and J. Jutkowitz, *Teoría acción social y desarrollo en América Latina*, Mexico City, Siglo XXI, 1976. See also J. Graciarena and R. Franco, *Social Formations and Power Structures in Latin America* (at press in the Current Sociology Series of the International Association of Sociology), which analyses the trends in socio-political change and then the reflection of

that change in social thought, particularly in the fields of Latin American sociology and political science. Some of the arguments in this study had appeared previously in J. Graciarena, *Formación de Postgrado en Ciencias Sociales en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1974, *passim*, and in "Las ciencias sociales, la crítica intelectual y el Estado tecnocrático", *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 37, No 1, January/March 1975.

II

Before proceeding to other questions, it is perhaps worth recalling some specific aspects of the formation of social knowledge, particularly in relation to the creation of the social sciences, which over the years modelled themselves on the experimental natural sciences. Originally, any more or less systematic thinking about society contained elements of magic and transcendental projections, and thus became a kind of social theology, a mixture of God and the world, the desirable and the observed, knowledge and values, whose particular nuances depended on the social position, experience, idiosyncrasies and feelings of its proponents. Religious prophecy is perhaps the fullest expression of these elements.

At a later stage, under the influence of empirical rationalism and secularization, social thought tended to become more worldly, turning into social philosophy and subsequently social science. During this process social knowledge gradually abandoned its transcendental sources and references, although without thereby losing its teleological projections or its normative character.

This transition, which gained irresistible impetus in the eighteenth century and was largely completed in the nineteenth, brought two major problems to the fore. The first related to the possibility of isolating and separating the objective elements—or the scientific elements, according to the canons of positivism—from the subjective and doctrinal elements with which they had hitherto been deliberately fused, and, despite the process of secularization, still were combined, since the study of society in the nineteenth century continued to blend

judgements about reality, ideological projections of past and present and utopian forecasts of the future. Hence the close links established with the social movements and political struggles of the time, particularly obvious in respect of both liberal and marxist thinking.

The second problem concerned the new bases for the validity of social knowledge. According to the positivist model, these would essentially be the factual verification of theoretical propositions, and their rationality and practical efficacy. In either case what was called in question was not only the nature of earlier knowledge, but also the criteria of its truth, as well as its sources of legitimation, based on revelation and tradition in the more distant past, or more recently on reason and various types of social practice and experience. Positivist logic flatly rejected both possibilities, sticking to facts as the sole reliable source of knowledge.

Later developments are well-known, and there is no need here for more than brief mention of a few points of particular interest. The boom in the natural sciences soon made them the paradigms of scientific knowledge, and their methodological patterns rapidly became the blueprint repeatedly prescribed for the progress of the social sciences. Since the earlier tradition of speculative social thought, sometimes transcendental, at other times rationalist, was never abandoned even in the social sciences, their development has followed a course which swings between the pole of militant commitment and deliberate ideologization, on the one hand, and, on the other, hermetic isolation and thematic asepsis aimed at preventing scientific

knowledge from being contaminated by the controversies and conflicts of the moment. Despite all the intellectual efforts made in the latter direction, the results have fallen short of expectations. It has been demonstrated over and over again that in the formation of social knowledge the confusion between ideals and social reality is perennial.² This has been the case precisely because this interconnexion is deeply embedded in the very heart of social knowledge.

The study of the past suggests that the moments of greatest intellectual creativeness in the social sciences occurred precisely when their connexion with social change and historical crises was lucidly and consciously accepted. One has only to think of the obvious connexion which exists between various important historical events and the genesis of some of the social sciences.

It is perhaps worth recalling first of all that science, as organized knowledge, was the product of bourgeois society and of a type of rationalism which developed only in the urban environment. Thus empirical science was a result of the

² The sociology of science and of knowledge has repeatedly shown that this connexion exists. The literature on the subject is too extensive for references to be really needful, but I cannot resist the temptation of mentioning a brilliant critique in this tradition on the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons: A. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, New York, Avon, 1971. Still more important is the critical work of the Frankfurt School, on which Gouldner drew extensively. In this connexion, see M. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and The Institute of Social Research 1923-1950*, Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1973. A number of the problems discussed here owe much to the work of one of its founders: see M. Horkheimer, *Crítica de la razón instrumental*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sur, 1969.

social practice of urban life. In the case of the social sciences it is worth while to mention the obvious link between the appearance of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century, and political economy; between the formation of the European national societies based on the Nation-State, and political science; and finally, for the sake of brevity, the relationship between the nineteenth-century crises in the consolidation of bourgeois society and the formation of an urban industrial proletariat, and sociology. One of the most famous proponents of the historicity of the social sciences, Karl Mannheim, defined sociology as the science of crises, stressing that it not only was born of them but waxed with the stimuli and challenges they offered.

This has also been true of the other social sciences, whose development has been strengthened and whose potentialities have been increased whenever they have had to respond to social demands to weather moments of crisis, in the form of generalized conflicts and deadlocks which cannot be resolved by ordinary means. In such circumstances there have often been real "scientific revolutions" which have reshaped social knowledge from the bottom up. One example is what happened as a result of the capitalist economic crisis of the 1930s to liberal economics, which was completely overhauled by the 'keynesian revolution'.

The historical conditioning of the social sciences is assumed as a starting-point in this paper and is on the whole judged to be positive. It is assumed that this connexion exerts a beneficial influence which enriches both social knowledge and thinking on the one hand, and social ideologies and values on the other.

The fact that the connexion between the study of society and social reality is deemed to be beneficial does not mean that the former is invariably a good thing when it reflects the latter in some way, because knowledge can sometimes be alienating and repressive. At other times, however, access to it may open the gates to new social forces, thus generating

greater possibilities of substantial rationality among groups that are too deprived and downtrodden to feel anything but apathy towards a political and social life of which they are not an organic part. Both possibilities depend less on knowledge itself than on the frames of reference conditioning it. We shall return to this point later.

III

When stressing the fundamental connexion implied by the social conditioning of knowledge of society, it should not be forgotten that on many occasions and for the most diverse reasons there has been a persistent effort to free the social sciences from this dependence, either by converting them into "pure" sciences, which are mathematically formalized, abstract and unpolluted, in line with the scientific model of theoretical and experimental physics, or by ridding them of the infiltrated values and the human conditioning which have crept in at different stages through various chinks in the scientific process.

The ideal of a neutral science is imperishable and has sometimes been invoked from social positions and intellectual standpoints which were simultaneously deeply committed to the continuity of the prevailing hegemony. In such circumstances, this position was obviously contradictory, since the claim to a neutral science could not hide its ideological nature, placed at the service of maintaining the *status quo*. When this was the case, its truth became politically inapplicable purely because of the support it received from an authoritarian power which endorsed it.

However, it is not only the weight of political factors that has influenced this view of social science. A by no means minor role has also been played by the totalitarian pretensions of some of its variants or schools to become the Social Science *par excellence*, thus excluding as non-scientific all the other variants which do not recognize it as their paradigm, or which do not start from the same premises and accept the approaches and problems, as well as the methodological rules, advocated by neopositivist epistemology.

The efforts of this kind have been continuous and remain unflagging. In fact, the need to isolate knowledge by apparently freeing it from its social conditioning reaches giant proportions in the technocratic societies.³ The reason for this is that in such societies knowledge, which is their main source of social legitimation, must necessarily appear to be independent of technocratic power. The admission of the existence of a symbiosis between knowledge and technocratic power would deal a death-blow

³ An explanation will be given later of what is meant here by a technocratic social order.

to the latter's attempts to legitimate itself by means of the incontrovertible truth which knowledge provides and which it is striving to realize.

The paradigm of a value-free social science has always been strong and even, at some stages in Latin American development, dominant; and when predominant it imposed forms which were reflected in its scientific subject-matter and practice. This movement, although vigorous, was unable to dissociate itself completely from the social problems of its time, and failed to endure for more than a few years, much less than in the English-speaking world from which it came.

It would be pointless to attempt to explain the nature of this particular moment in the social sciences, *inter alia*, partly because there is no shortage of explanations of every kind, and partly too for brevity's sake, because it would be out of place here. Suffice it to say, elaborating on what has already been remarked, that the predominance of the empirical social sciences, self-styled as scientific in the strict sense of the word, which sought to differentiate themselves from the other forms of knowledge precisely inasmuch as they resorted to empirical proof and formal demonstration as their truth criterion, is linked with an optimistic phase in Latin America's development. Circumstances at the time appeared to be favourable in several ways: steady, self-sustained economic growth that ensured a flow of products and services, the more equitable distribution of which would pave the way for higher levels of social well-being and increasingly democratic forms of political life. All that was called for, therefore, was to study reality in order to eliminate the obstacles and resistances which hindered growth from becoming true

social development and consolidating the bases of consensus and well-being needed to achieve a more harmonious and just society.

This utopia was certainly attractive to many, among other reasons because they wanted change and development without useless conflict. It looked then as though peaceful progress towards a fairer society could be made through consensus and rational methods. Stern reality, however, was at work undermining the main pillars of the utopia. For example, to put it briefly, growth and development were not converging or even parallel processes; planned change did not remove the obstacles and resistances to social development, but instead frequently strengthened them by increasing social inequality through the concentration of resources and income in very small sectors of the population; balanced development and harmonious social change turned out to be useful myths, whose effectiveness depended in any case on the indiscriminate use of repressive and alienating measures necessary to contain or divert the reactions of the various social groups and sectors that were passed over and exploited.

Conflict reappeared as a resource, perhaps the only one open to some desperate social groups which by this means alone could try to satisfy their social demands and needs. As a result the possibility of a general consensus vanished, as did that of 'institutionalizing change' by resolving conflicts on the basis of peaceful settlements and reconciliation of interests. The clash between 'dangerous classes' and 'threatened classes' once again cast a menacing shadow over Latin American development.

For scientific neutralism to be possible a number of external requirements

and conditions must be met. We have already mentioned them in passing, but let us recall them briefly: an advanced and well-consolidated degree of autonomous institutionalization of the social sciences; the formation of a professional community with its own means of communication; a tradition of respect for independent academic work; an attitude of permissive indifference and limited demands on the part of the hegemonic order *vis-à-vis* the social sciences; and finally a predominantly conservative disposition, sometimes disguised by the apparent neutrality of its practitioners' aloof attitude towards the most pressing social problems. Their greatest open display of concern usually consists in observing the rules of the game and not overstepping the bounds of tolerance accepted by the authorities. The last condition is perhaps more important when reinforced by a professed indifference towards the immediate, practical effects and the political impact of the social sciences. This means that they are considered useless for conjunctural purposes and that social techniques derived from them are not desired or deliberately-pursued effects, but merely chance by-products of the study of society. Consequently, it is believed that the social sciences lack the necessary capacity to point the way to coherent and viable social action, and furthermore that it is not desirable that they should have it. Unquestionably, neutralism seems to insist on denying them this possibility, i.e., that of being knowledge that serves as a guide, and, for that very reason, a source of social values and ideologies.

This isolation –the ivory tower that many long for– is only possible, and then but to a limited extent, when social tensions are contained or repressed and

the power struggle is not open and does not go beyond circumscribed and well-defined social environments and power circles whose members move discreetly, carefully preventing their quarrels from rising to the surface. A situation of this kind can only result from the predominance of a generalized tacit consensus of apparent indifference towards the struggle for the control of the government machinery and the orientation of its policies. It sometimes stems –most frequently in fact– from a different kind of political apathy, namely, the apathy caused by the repression which crushes conflictual tensions either *a posteriori* or –when their public expression is stifled or collectively sublimated into other forms of alienated social expression– *in statu nascendi*.

In one way or another, autonomous social participation is externally repressed or psychologically inhibited. This narrows the margin of possibilities of raising the fundamental questions of society through rigorous intellectual criticism. But such an assertion does not mean that criticism disappears in repressive circumstances. One of two things may happen: either intellectual criticism –on a lesser scale, it is true, than in more stimulating conditions– dives into the national underground movement and expresses itself primarily abroad, thus attempting to reach a wider political public; or it withdraws to obscure levels of the subconscious mind and ceases to voice itself publicly, resorting instead to indirect and symbolic forms of expression such as literature, the theatre, the cinema and others. It may also happen that the 'thinking groups' which are organically embedded in the 'Establishment' devote themselves to the preparation of methodologies and to more abstract or specialized problems

than the critique of society. This is a form of escape with less repressive consequences, but it nevertheless remains conservative.

Whether the fluctuating connexion between the social sciences and the course of history can be considered positive or negative is a question which depends on the position taken with regard to different epistemological alternatives and to ideological preferences and personal values, since, as is well known, a wide variety of contradictory ideas exist on the subject. For many, however, what appears to be beyond question today is the fact of the historical conditioning of the social sciences. The positivist attempts to project them

beyond the bounds of social events and historical trends have sought to universalize them, either by raising their abstractness and generality to such a level that their concrete significance has practically disappeared, or else when their objects of knowledge have become so specialized and minimized that one cannot see the wood for the trees. In other words, autonomy of the social sciences with regard to the march of events has been achieved only when at the same time their possibilities of social relevance, i.e., their capacity to account for the direction of movement and change in particular societies at specific historical junctures, have been reduced to a minimum.

IV

The recent past in Latin America has shown that the broadest possible margins of intellectual liberty have existed when the hegemonic order has managed to become stable, without challenges to threaten it from abroad or internal fissures to militate against its continuity. When the consolidation of power has been followed by the conviction that nothing can undermine it or jeopardize its future, the levels of intellectual permissiveness and tolerance have generally been greatest, at least in the tradition of the Western societies. Indeed, academic liberty has simply been the obverse of almost uncontested power.⁴ But in Latin

America such moments have been short, if not almost ephemeral.

The questioning of the social sciences in Latin America reaches its lowest point when the trend towards specialization is strongest and also when the highest hopes are placed in the existence of an autonomous drive towards economic and social development. This set of conditions largely corresponds to the post-war world, which aroused utopian illusions that prevailed in the region until the late 1950s.

The pragmatic, neopositivist view of the social sciences was introduced at that time as part of a cultural and ideological package which was widely welcomed. The package contained developmentalism as

⁴ The capitalist bourgeoisie of Victorian England could afford the luxury of welcoming the exiled Marx and offering him the facilities of the library of the British Museum to help him write the most important critique of bourgeois capitalist society ever known, at a

time when that society was successfully and almost effortlessly building the greatest empire in history.

an up-to-date version of the philosophy of progress, modernization centred essentially on efficiency, rationalism and specialized knowledge, and the doctrine of nation-building as a process which, guided and stimulated by development, would inevitably culminate after a certain time in a democratic, Western-style Welfare State.

This came at a moment when there was great faith in the future, in the harmonization of interests and in ideological pluralism, all of which pointed to the possibility of progress towards open horizons from a present which was considered to pose no problems that development could not solve. Self-sustained, harmonious growth would rapidly shake off the deadweight of a traditional past, while at the same time ensuring the attainment of higher welfare levels in the

near—and happy—future. It was confidently believed that with practical reason planning the changes and growth of the economy and society, and harmonizing possibilities and needs, economic crises and internal and external structural imbalances could be overcome, making it possible to realize at long last the ideal of a society governed by omniscient, benevolent sages, who, with the help of scientific knowledge and technical measures, would be able to create a veritable golden age. With some nostalgia and a good deal of contrition it must be confessed that what appeared then to be undeniable truths, now, only a few years later, are wholly called in question. Little remains standing of this Panglossian vision so dear to an entire generation of Latin American social scientists.

V

The concept of crisis as used in the present paper covers a broad spectrum which presupposes the existence of a moment in history when the weight of social contradictions is so overwhelming that it disrupts the functioning of society and alters its structural foundations. The crisis thus tends to become a break in at least two senses. In the first place, something comes to an end, and something else begins. Hence a crisis is a moment of flexion between two differentiable historical periods, of social indecision characterized by a kind of deadlock in which the system is unable to resolve the conflicts stemming from its contradictions. Secondly, a crisis is accompanied by a state of dissociation which involves the loss of the notion of entirety, whether of an institution, a

social class, a nation-State or an international order. The social indecision this implies entails a fragmentation of reality springing primarily from the aforesaid dissociative nature of crises, due above all to the generation and accentuation of more and more conflictual confrontations, which are exacerbated by the loss of identification with the meaningful unit in question. Overcoming the crisis necessarily implies some degree of re-composition of the whole.

Transposing all this to the field of the social sciences, it may be assumed that the disciplinary diaspora constitutes an essential moment in a crisis of disaggregation which is advancing alongside specialization and methodologism. The return to fundamental subjects and to a concern for relevance may also be in-

volved in the crisis, but in a different way, which shows signs of a positive reaction. Those who are moving towards a way out can do so only in so far as they are aware of its existence; once aware of it, they place themselves above and beyond the crisis itself, i.e., in a position which brings with it some form of solution.

In more concrete terms, the present crisis is characterized by: (a) a progressive and irreversible breakdown in the social and political orders of industrial civilization; (b) a greater confusion and ambiguity of objectives and values; (c) a considerable weakening of moral respon-

sibility and of spontaneous consensus, with the consequent increase in dissension, apathy, alienation and conscious social repression; (d) the predominance and spread of decadent, sensualist life styles, of which consumerism is one of the most tangible expressions; (e) widespread questioning of the future possibility of indefinite economic growth; (f) and finally, dwindling confidence in the prevailing societal models and the absence of viable alternatives with which to replace them. What is at stake is the survival not of particular social orders but of nothing less than industrial civilization and the Faustian drive which animates it.

VI

As may easily be supposed, discussion of the relationship of the social sciences with the reality of history has always been controversial and has never reached a satisfactory or effective settlement of the question. As such, it is of no particular interest to us here. It is important to note, however, that this relationship has not been univocal or constant. On the contrary, upon close inspection a kind of swing of the pendulum may be seen, moving closer to or further from reality with the relative predominance of one epistemological position after another, according to structural trends and the existing combination of circumstances. The utopian and ideological content of the social sciences has swung in a similar way, in accordance with the historical conjuncture and the tensions of social change.

Let us now look at this question a little more closely, and distinguish two possible situations. When the social situa-

tion shows such signs of crisis as cause bewilderment and confusion, an appeal to the social sciences constitutes a direct connexion with the crisis itself. In such a case there is a growing call for an integral social science —if not for the total absorption of the more limited branches of social knowledge by a kind of supra-disciplinary Olympus— to which is attributed an assumed capacity for grasping all the more meaningful connexions of the process judged as critical.

From this intellectual grasp of the situation, some hope to find ways of saving the *status quo*, while its critics wish to obtain revolutionary solutions for ending it. In either case, such calls are made at times when discord and confrontation prevail. These are generally times of open conflict, although the dissension can sometimes be buried for a while when heavy repression prevents it from reaching the surface. Technocratic repression seeks to deny the existence of

these conflictual options and prevent their discussion.

The opposite occurs in periods when progress appears to be self-sustaining, when intellectuals are neither assumed nor asked to be able to change the 'logic of history' or planners to interfere in the delicate balances achieved by the 'invisible hand' in the dynamics of the market. It is in such situations that specialization and fragmentary knowledge flourish, gaining easy recognition at a time of relative apathy about the importance of

knowledge in a broader sense. Intellectual work becomes more academic and introverted. Knowledge becomes 'privatized', confining itself to an esoteric dialogue centred on the world of the professional community of social scientists, who thus become the main audience and consumers of scientific production. In such a case the academic-professional community devoted to its 'own' needs and occupations stands aloof, remote from the tensions and struggles of the political arena.

VII

Some points remain to be made in order to specify more precisely the sources and nature of the present currents in the Latin American social sciences. They essentially concern two problems which occupy a central position in the internal debates and the dialectics of their development. At the risk of oversimplification, we shall present these problems as polarizations, sometimes antinomical. Briefly, the first consists in the contrary ideals of integration —and perhaps unity— of the social sciences, on the one hand, and of disciplinary specialization on the other. The second, which was mentioned earlier, is equally persistent and important, since it is represented by the ideological and scientific tensions which stem from a permanent opposition between objective explanation and normative predication; in other words, between knowledge and doctrine. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the interplay of these opposing elements has varied according to an internal dynamics which is not unrelated to change in social reality. The two have together determined the degree

and kind of synthesis achieved by the social sciences at every specific point in time.

Let us look briefly at the discussion about the never-relinquished historical ideal of a unified social science in contrast to the actual trend towards a disciplinary diaspora or dispersion. Although it may appear to be —and to some extent is— paradoxical, the two ideals have coexisted since the very beginnings of the social sciences without its ever having been possible to reach either a satisfactory synthesis of social knowledge or else a total segregation of its disciplines. The coexistence of the two currents has been relatively peaceful, but nevertheless the contradiction implicit in the simultaneous assertion of both possibilities has not disappeared.

That the potential unity of the social sciences continues to exert a powerful attraction is proved by the fact that every now and then the concept is reborn, like the Phoenix from its ashes, when demands are renewed for a synthetic knowledge capable of grasping the complexities of social life as a compre-

hensive and intelligible whole. This concern has spread to the United Nations Organization itself, whose declaration on the Second Decade of the International Development Strategy advocates the adoption of a 'unified approach' for 'integrated development', in a desire to deal with the social development process in its entirety, after the repeated failure of disciplinary and sectoral approaches to create strategies and policies leading to fairer and more equitable development styles.⁵

On the other hand, and as a matter more of fact than of principle, new social disciplines have continued to proliferate, and once created and baptized they rapidly delimit their object of knowledge, isolating it from the hegemonic pretensions of its peers. This gives rise to languages which are open only to initiates, private methodologies which are increasingly sophisticated and hermetic, and institutionalized divisions both on the teaching side (professorial chairs, departments, schools, faculties) and in research (centres, institutes), all of which serves to strengthen each discipline's claim to the monopoly of its intellectual territory.

For a better understanding of the general meaning of the movement towards specialization as a partial process in the formation of a technocratic order, it is perhaps important to bear in mind from the start the multiform nature of

the concept of a discipline. Few words are used arbitrarily. All those which belong to the same conceptual family share a core of meaning in common. In this case, an intellectual discipline has at least two complementary meanings. In the first place, it is a field of knowledge formed as an offshoot of a basic social science, covering an intellectual territory with more or less definite boundaries and following a body of methodological rules which its members claim to be specific to it and autonomous. In other words, it is an organized, limited and specialized field of knowledge, a branch of social knowledge with an object of its own which tends to become independent and thus to break away from its overall frame of specific reference, as well as from the body of objects of knowledge from which it sprang.

In the other sense mentioned, which is by no means unrelated to the above, a discipline may be considered to be a body of knowledge with an inherent logic and order to which one must submit in order to gain access to it. Literally, discipline is subjection to an external order which a person may (but need not necessarily) internalize by accepting and espousing it. This is the more specific meaning of the idea of discipline in university education, where knowledge of any kind is organized into disciplines, the basic principle of classification of knowledge in the academic world. In other words, the reality and validity of the disciplines is postulated *a priori* and almost as something to be accepted as a matter of principle, so that it is more proper to discuss their content than their nature.

The discipline as specialized knowledge has become the prevailing model of knowledge in the technocratic order. This has occurred less because it has

⁵ For a recent discussion of these problems in the Latin American context, see the following articles: A. Pinto, "Styles of development in Latin America"; M. Wolfe, "Approaches to development: who is approaching what?"; and J. Graciarena, "Power and development styles", all three in the *CEPAL Review*, Santiago, Chile, United Nations publication, Sales No: E.76.II.G.2, first half of 1976.

been imposed in authoritarian fashion than because it is based on a division of scientific labour stemming from the idea that general truth is neither attainable nor perhaps even desirable, and that the only legitimate and exoteric truth is what results from the fragmentation imposed by the very existence of the disciplines.

Fragmentary knowledge is partial in two senses. In the first place, *de facto* it never builds up to reconstitute the whole of which it is part; the very proliferation of disciplines starts from the negation of this possibility. Secondly, fragmentation, not so much as a functional division of scientific labour but as a specialized approach to reality, is based on the creation of a dichotomy between fact and value, both of which are seen as independent entities. It is assumed from the outset that the event can be dissociated from its meaning (or the meaning imputed to it).

This is the point at issue. Specialized, partial knowledge is necessarily dismembered, mutilated knowledge, with respect both to the general corpus of ideas from which it originally stemmed and to its own object. Carried to an extreme, it may come to exemplify the oft-quoted paradox of knowing more and more about less and less. To this charge it has repeatedly been replied that in the future, once the specialization of empirical knowledge has progressed sufficiently, its theoretical integration will be brought about by joining up the scattered bits and pieces of its partial research. This effort, it must be confessed, has not so far been successful; nor indeed, have any solutions yet been found for the preliminary methodological problems of how to put the puzzle together.

At all events, split-up social sciences

which set their sights on a universe of knowledge that is deliberately atomized, which neither manage nor even seek to explain causally and prospectively the overall processes of society, and which are concerned to be pragmatic and neutral, are an instrument of the first importance for the functioning and legitimation of a technocratic order. There are a number of reasons for this: they may easily be converted into social techniques with a specific scope; they intentionally keep their distance from the power struggle and refuse to be a source of controversy and conflict; and finally, by making a cleavage between facts and their implicit value, they attempt to dissociate themselves from the social processes of the formation of values, ideologies and utopias.

The connexion, therefore, between partial, self-limiting knowledge and authoritarian technocratic power can only work to the detriment of the former, i.e., by turning knowledge into an auxiliary of power. This was certainly the case in the past, and for a long time, but the internal conditions of the relationship and the type of knowledge involved (religious instead of secular, total and all-embracing instead of specialized and partial) made it into something with a very different social significance. The present conditions are so different that any comparison of this kind with the past would be entirely arbitrary.

Power of the technocratic kind, which is by definition monolithic and authoritarian, is incompatible with pluralistic, open knowledge, which offers free options instead of authoritarian impositions. Hence technocratic power is intellectually repressive, because it needs an 'official' knowledge, an 'official' science to legitimate its policies.

An open market of ideas and

informational alternatives on which to base action is not in keeping with a world of policies and strategies which must above all be consistent and exclusive in order to be efficient and viable. This is also why specialized social knowledge must adopt *malgré lui* a dogmatic stance, because only thus can it be at the same time a source of truth and of belief. Economic truth cannot be tempered by any other truth or judged by reference to a different framework

from that in which it arose. If it were pointed out that the market is really conditioned by institutional, social and political factors, the orthodox economists, those who provide sustenance for the 'official thinking' of the technocracies, would answer that those are not the legitimate rules of the game. The market and its dynamics must be judged only by their own nature; anything else would be sociology, politicism, or – why not? – ideology.

VIII

The importance of knowledge as an instrument and the power it thereby acquires in modern societies constitute an extremely significant development. We are referring here not only to the technical by-products of knowledge but also to its critical and ideological projections. Its influence today is so great that it penetrates every pore of social life. Ours is a time that is under the government of instrumental knowledge backed up by the prestige of science.⁶ The question of the relationship between technical knowledge and domination, between pragmatic rationalism, economic organization and the structuring of power, is an important issue in reflection and discussion about

the technocratic trends in the world of today.⁷

Of the various possible approaches to the question of the formation of this connexion between social knowledge and technocratic power, we shall give preference to an examination of the restructuring of power around the State and the organizations linked with it. The starting-point is the concentration of power in large bureaucratic organizations which tend to become increasingly interrelated. Let us examine very briefly how this process takes place in connexion with the social sciences. Just as there has been an increasing technification of economic production, with considerable changes in the scale, nature and integration of productive organizations and patterns of division of labour, in equipment and in dependence on

⁶ Revealed knowledge, magical and mythical, is a knowledge characterized by subordination and subjection to transcendental events and determinants whose nature escapes the control of reason; on the other hand, scientific and technical knowledge is a matter of self-assertion and sovereignty over reality, and it is therefore the knowledge which prevails in the Faustian world of industrial civilization.

⁷ As indicated earlier, the idea of *technocracy*, is interpreted in rather broad terms here. We shall attempt below to define more precisely the meaning attributed to it in this paper.

information and control as essential sources of co-ordination of the economic process, a broadly comparable process is occurring in the structure and functions of the State. The functional units of the old public administration of a bureaucratic type are undergoing a process of hierarchization in the course of which some of them gain power and relative autonomy, largely based on the quasi-monopolization of rational sources of knowledge. Briefly speaking, the tops of the bureaucratic pyramids are becoming technocratized, which implies to some extent a new kind of power based on the predominance of technical knowledge.

In this process of technocratization it is difficult to draw a distinction between the private and public sectors. The top ranks of the State administration, of the armed forces, and of the public and private productive enterprises undergo a radical change in their decision-making systems and in the scope and interdependence of the decisions adopted, as well as in the cross-linkage of their activities, personnel and interests. They all depend on a knowledge of relevant situations and on the timely availability of the right information. Power in the technocratic order is made up of a conglomerate of organizations, its bastions being the State, the military institutions and the large enterprises, particularly the transnational corporations.

However, the relations between these entities, or between the top political circles and the highest technical levels which largely control information, are far from harmonious and easy. In general, the importance of the professional political class is declining, and therefore a good many of its leaders tend to project the image of technical experts, realistic and pragmatic men with practi-

cal knowledge and the capacity to organize and execute.⁸

This trend towards the conversion of politics into a technical matter was inevitable, since so much homage is paid to the truth of technical knowledge, whose infallibility is worshipped. This is not to say that it is the technocrats who are in charge, or that they form a 'power corporation'. The point we are making is that political authority is outwardly taking technical forms and expressing itself through them, and that the people who exercise it define themselves as persons of technical competence, even though they do not all possess it. In such conditions, technical knowledge becomes mythified as an *idée-force* which underlies the doctrine of efficiency as a social ideal and rational planning as a basic instrument needed to achieve it. In politics, corporativism is the régime which best reflects and adapts to the logic of a technocratic order.

Whatever the real situation, the specific nature of technocratic power stems from the monopoly of practical knowledge which it claims and largely manages to achieve, thus acquiring a great capacity to organize, manipulate and control, as well as to impose its purposes. And this has been possible with the help of science, which has thereby become a source of legitimation of technocracy and an instrument of its power. It is invoked both as a means of rationalizing reality and the processes

⁸ The case is different in a régime of political parties in which the leaders of the technocratic organizations or their representatives become "politicized", assuming political roles and playing their part in the representative political bodies, without thereby losing their status of technocrats.

deliberately designed to reach certain planned goals, and also as a source of inputs for the definition of political objectives. This latter aspect is flatly repudiated by its more orthodox practitioners, but it none the less exists, although the real bases of decision-

making do not strictly derive from science. What really matters, as far as instrumental rationality is concerned, is that the different components of the technocratic order's power apparatus can justifiably invoke it as an ultimate source of legitimation.

IX

A complementary aspect of this question may be found in the course followed by the social sciences in the recent past and the significance acquired during that period by social knowledge in a historical context which has changed enormously. Left to their own devices, since hardly anybody took them seriously as a source of power, the social sciences for a long time enjoyed considerable autonomy and sufficient liberty to develop without repressive restrictions. Both inside and outside academic walls there was an intellectual flowering such that the creativity and originality of that period has never been surpassed before or since. In general terms, it may be said that this phase of foundation and consolidation extended throughout the nineteenth century and came to an end with the advent of fascism and the technocratization of power in the years between the two world wars. During that interval the top circles of the fascist Establishment began to discover the political importance of knowledge and the need for an alliance with scientific circles. For totalitarian countries, an official science which not only nourishes but also validates their policies, legitimating the means and ends of State action, becomes an imperative. Their ideological monolithism also embraces science, and just as they have only

one party and one official ideology, they develop one official science.

Although to a lesser degree and more slowly, a similar process occurred in the democratic capitalist countries. While an official science was never established, conditions became such as to imply preferences, facilities, financing, differences in prestige and other subtle and often disguised forms of recognition and reward, or rejection and penalization, of the different scientific currents and schools. A process of social selection thus began which gives priority to certain problems and kinds of scientific work at the expense of others.

This selectivity has been more visible in the social than in the natural sciences, both because of their immediate ideological connexion and because they began to acquire particular importance in the policies and planned decisions of the technocratic world.

These trends have continued to grow stronger, accompanied by the decline and fall of the epistemological belief that the desideratum of the social sciences was withdrawal into independent academic institutions, and a platonic, self-indulgent retreat into pure, abstract knowledge, aloof from the conflictual vicissitudes of social life and from the struggle for power.

The technocratization of State power took place on this basis. Technological reason became the foundation of the cult of efficiency, which in turn became the main criterion of validity. Efficiency as a doctrine depends on the instrumentalization of knowledge, its conversion into technology, so that it may be used as a tool to control nature and also society.

When these conditions arose, the institutionalized neutrality of knowledge was no longer possible because technocratic power naturally could not forgo so valuable a resource. Consequently, its development could hardly be left to the hazard of its own rules or of the enterprise and mystique of its initiates and practitioners.

In other words, modern science, by becoming the main source of technical innovation and of elements for the formulation of ideologies and utopias, and by thus turning into a resource of major importance for the upholding of a technocratic order, has almost completely lost any possibility of isolating itself so that it could be governed by its own rules and adapt itself to objectives of all kinds.

This problem is no longer the exclusive concern of epistemologists and philosophers, as it was when they wrangled over what an independent science was or should be like. Rather than this—which today seems a somewhat irrelevant issue—, the real question now is what kind of political option is chosen, because commitment to the real world is already assumed in the very organization of scientific work.

Under the aegis of the technocratic order, the social sciences, which constitute its intellectual foundations and provide it with the necessary technology,

or, in other words, are an organic part of the order which they *de facto* support or legitimate, present a number of features which closely correspond to the nature of their structural position. Let us pause to examine some of the more significant: specialization in subject-matter is becoming increasingly pragmatic and instrumental; the growing preference for quantitative methodology and the mathematical formulation of problems, whose most obvious symbols are the computer and information sciences, have led to formalistic encapsulation and a considerable degree of disciplinary isolation; their language has become private and hermetic, and thus untranslatable for non-specialist society; the impoverishment of their subject-matter is indirectly reflected in a concern for methodology, which has paradoxically become the most important form of knowledge in some academic circles. In other words, it might be said that there is a sharp contrast between the critical fundamentalism of a past period and the present baroque methodologism, largely occupied with socially irrelevant subjects and the treatment of crucial problems without a critique of society and also without reference to their causes. Hence the recent epistemological criticism which repudiates all probability of establishing causal connexions, and instead speaks only of possibilistic relations.

There is no room, in the technocratic view of the social sciences, for intellectual competition and debate; hence its persecution of critical ideas. Thus a dialectical process begins, with use of repression as a defence mechanism increasing while criticism grows in response to the repression and strives to

expose it. While attempting to create an abstract entity, in accordance with its conception of the social sciences, the technocratic order splits up and alienates the social scientist by considering him separately as a scientist, an intellectual, an ideologist and a citizen. Such a separation of man-the-scientist from his

scientific activity is an arbitrary act which assumes that the commitment to science—which is a social product—does not imply a social commitment as a scientist. This problem, epistemologically elaborated in great detail, becomes a paradox when approached from the social angle at the present point in time.

X

The traditional university has undergone a number of changes in its structure and specific and social functions which are related to the problems discussed above. In a technocratic social order the classic type of university is no longer what it was; it loses to a large extent its unrivalled position as the nucleus of secular knowledge and source of social rank. Consequently, the formation of élites moves outside the mass university, and even outside the whole university system, which has ceased to be the fount of socially important knowledge. Under the control of the technocratic apparatus, a whole network of new public and private institutions becomes responsible for forming the candidates for the upper ranks of the organizations which produce and control a major share of technical and scientific knowledge, while the universities are made responsible for the wholesale vocational training of the middle- and high-level 'human capital' needed for economic growth.

At the same time as the importance of the university's contribution to the generation of new knowledge has declined, its intellectual and ideological influence on politics and society has diminished considerably. Other media, such as highly selective and low-profile private or public institutions military

academies, research centres organized as non-profit enterprises or foundations, and government bodies, are now responsible for the elaboration of official technocratic thinking, whether in planning the present or in forecasting the future. It is they that in the interests of the 'Establishment' define the most important issues and carry out its most confidential projects. Options for change are monitored and carefully weighed to ensure that the transformations do not take an undesirable course. The persons who are trained and act in these circles are examined meticulously and, when the results are favourable, co-opted, particular importance being attached to their loyalty to the technocratic order.

Largely deprived of their previous function of training élites, the universities have been confined to positions beneath and generally outside the inner circles of technocratic power. That is why the student movements challenge it, questioning it as outsiders. This is more clearly evidenced in the fact that Latin American student revolts have grown increasingly frequent and violent in the provincial universities, where the relegation and exclusion of their graduates from the commanding positions in society is more obvious. In these circumstances, the claims of the student

movements are more and more characteristically those of social sectors and classes which have to a large extent been cast out of the paradise in which they used to dwell.

In the era of the mass university, only a few of them will be chosen, and that only once they have given sufficient proof of their identification with the system, which means denying their contentious past.

The passage from one position to the other is unquestionably charged with tensions which are lived out in anticipation and which are perhaps at the root of the largely unprecedented conflicts currently taking place in the mass universities, now that they have ceased to be the natural environment for the formation of élites. The student conflict with the technocratic order has reached such a pitch that the confrontation has almost become polarized. Against the hermetic technocratic order the students take up

ideological positions loaded with anarchistic, irrational elements, and launch a Chinese-style anti-bureaucratic cultural rebellion which is the natural antithesis of the technocratic order as the culmination of a process of rationalist bureaucratization.

In extreme cases, the protest of youth and of students, which overlaps to a great degree, takes the form of withdrawal from society ('drop-out'), as in the 'hippie' movements which reject the advantages of industrial civilization and advocate life-styles better adapted to nature. The attraction of the return to more austere life-styles in tune with the natural world is today a major force which has spread beyond the framework of youthful rebellion and student struggles, creating strong movements of rejection of the present industrial, consumerist and predatory civilization closely linked with the technocratic order.

XI

Towards the end of the 1950s some authors in the United States jubilantly announced that we were entering upon the era of "the end of ideologies", implying that the constellations of values and knowledge generated by the class situation and class struggle had disappeared. Thus social knowledge would finally be rid of the distortions introduced by ideology, and the social sciences would be able to fulfil completely their function as producers of neutral, objective knowledge; in other words, thenceforward their social impact would be technical and not ideological.

The ideal of aseptic social sciences with no commitment to the world of

man had reached its zenith. Already stripped of myth and revelation, knowledge was now freed from its last fetter, ideology. The moment seemed ripe for raising a paean announcing the kingdom of God on earth.

Henceforth, the only utopia would be that of technocracy. Prepared by experts and planned by means of reliable techniques, the transformation of society and the orderly march of the world towards a future full of promise would be achieved through practical knowledge, flexible compromise and agreement among the parties concerned, together with the predominance of a continuing consensus based on mutual

understanding, and the institutionalization of change as the master key for the settling of conflicts. The passage was a swift one from the prophetic utopias of the past to the scientific utopias of the futurologists. Suddenly, the world of the future could be predicted, and planning would ensure well-synchronized progress, without fluctuations or unnecessary conflicts, towards the universal consecration of the consumerist utopia under a technocratic order.

The millenarianist ecstasy over the downfall of ideologies was far shorter, however, than many supposed and desired. The return to class confrontation and to the politicization of social differences and conflicts once again made itself felt at many levels, both national and international. A series of university conflicts and youth movements rocked the majority of the developed capitalist countries a few years later. The displacement of the 'hot' and 'cold' wars towards the developing peripheral countries, and various reactions against dependence and discriminatory policies, created conditions which encouraged the organization of blocs of developing countries at the regional and world level, converging in the formation of the Third World movement. In other cases, and along the same lines, the countries exporting certain commodities united to defend their common interests in the international arena.

These claims and demands appeared alarming, and were accompanied by a growing concern about the future of the world. The problems which were being identified—some of them without precedent in human history—were so great that some people began to think that they could never be resolved as long as the central features of the present world persisted, i.e., a consumerist life

style which destroys the natural environment and is based on predatory international relations at the expense of the majority of the world's population and countries, and on the limitless growth of economic production, in combination with a population explosion which threatens to swamp social institutions and human settlements. The nature and scale of these problems cast doubt upon the possibility of solving them without generalized conflict, i.e., using the conciliatory resources of negotiation alone, and in the framework of the present stratification of the international order; in other words, while respecting the hegemonic position of the central countries and their right to retain their immense relative advantages in terms of standards of living and consumption of natural resources.

In Latin America the social and intellectual climate was rather one of ideological confrontation, which heavily influenced the social sciences. From Cuba (1960) to Santo Domingo (1965) the historical parameters of social thought changed. An intellectual and political effervescence bubbled up which greatly influenced the new generations of social scientists and university members, whose intellectual and ideological criticism of academic 'escapism' or the commitment latent in the denial of social conflicts became so forceful that it prevailed over the predominant and still influential currents in the conception of the social sciences. Different variants of marxism gained ground in academic circles, and among teachers and preachers enjoyed a recognition without precedent in the region.

The validity of the neo-positivist conception of the social sciences was questioned from these and other posi-

tions. The time was one of militant commitment, in which the social scientist could not be a mere observer but had to assume the role of a witness, alert and sensitive to the course of events, if not directly to become a militant using science as an ideological and political weapon, as suggested by the more radical. However, those who took this extreme position were few and of slight importance. The others, while believing that the social sciences could not stand aloof from the criticism of reality, held that their main function continued to be the pursuit of knowledge. But their conception of knowledge too had changed. Now that pursuit demanded that they should immerse themselves in reality and penetrate to the very core of its major problems and contradictions. Marginalism, dependence, alienation and class struggle were the dominant issues in the early days of this questioning movement. Others were added later: the State and the new forms of power, the techno-bureaucracies and their alliances, the economic domination and political influence of the transnational corporations, income distribution and social justice — problems which reflect some of the most important features of the

internal composition and external relations of Latin American societies.

Whether this choice of problems and analytical approaches was sound, in other words, whether they were fully in keeping with the aspirations and aims of those who put them forward, is a very important question, which however, lies outside the scope of the present paper. Besides, whatever the answer, it would not change the significance of the above remarks. What really matters here is that this concern did exist, i.e., that the overriding motivation at the time was the pursuit of knowledge which would be relevant for the transformation of social reality. And thus many were convinced that the path to the society of the future, to a living utopia, lay mainly via a different kind of social knowledge, felt rather than thought out, because its epistemological foundations and methodological tools had never been clearly and explicitly formulated, despite some significant attempts to do so. Hindsight seems to justify the belief that this shortcoming did not weaken the initial strength of this drive, although later it was of some importance in cooling the fervour of those won over by such convictions.

XII

What contribution have the Latin American social sciences made to the generation of concrete social thinking, i.e., realistic and viable ideologies as well as guiding utopias, either to ensure the continuity of the *status quo* or to replace it by new conceptions of social life? It would not be easy, or even in order here, to give a specific answer to this question, which is certainly funda-

mental for evaluating the importance of the social sciences. However, there are signs that this contribution has not been lacking when different types of actors (groups, sectors, classes) have defined their aims, formulated strategies and chosen forms of action. Suffice it to recall in this connexion the influence of the 'CEPAL doctrine' on the course followed by Latin American develop-

ment in the 1950s, and—in a different direction—that of monetarist theory and of conservative and authoritarian political thinking on the structuring of several technocratic orders from the late 1960s onwards.

A more detailed review of the predominant subject-matter in the Latin American social sciences over the last twenty-five years could offer some interesting information in connexion with the problem dealt with in this paper. For the time being we can only make a more limited and modest survey. Since the 1950s the bigger, more frequently studied issues were undoubtedly those concerning national development, i.e., in economics the growth of production, in sociology the formation of modernized national societies, and in political science the political development and transformations of the State.

These comprehensive issues are temporarily and causally interrelated in a historical sequence in which—as envisaged by the major theorists of the time—the drive for economic growth encounters social obstacles and resistances which are only finally overcome when political development moves towards a democratic State. In order to avoid the complexities of causality, some maintained that at most there were temporary lags in what was nevertheless a consistent movement towards ultimate convergence in a utopia of liberal stamp—somewhat reminiscent of the philosophy of progress—in which the growth of production, social justice and political democracy would be finally harmonized.

These problems to which the social scientists of that time devoted their attention did not spring from their imagination alone but were deeply rooted in the reality of that period of history. They were very much in keeping

with the capitalist development style then being put into practice, with a broad internal political consensus and the firm external support of the United States.

This coincidence between scientific subject-matter and social reality appeared to derive from the nature of things, so much so that many believed that nothing in it was incompatible with the canons of neo-positivism, which insisted on independence and neutrality as basic requirements of scientific practice. Furthermore, it was widely believed that this ideal was being fulfilled and thus that there was no ideological dependence between the way in which the social sciences were conceived and what they were doing, on the one hand, and the course of social and historical events, on the other.

Towards the beginning of the 1960s, with the Cuban revolution and other events, these fashionable beliefs came under heavy fire in what has been called the 'crisis of developmentalism'. It took the form of criticism, very often militant and radical, of the prevailing model of development, from positions which were strongly influenced by marxism. This was accompanied by a return to a historicist approach⁹ as well as a rejection of the prevailing conception of the social sciences. The goals set instead

⁹ At this time, through different channels, the social sciences, primarily sociology and political science, turned towards history, to such an extent that sometimes they became confused with social history and political history. True, this trend towards historicism occurred without loss of concern for critical interpretation. Similarly, at the other extreme, history itself became critical and took up positions and problems that brought it close to the social sciences, which in turn influenced it considerably.

were greater participation in real life and a commitment to the social forces which were generally in opposition to, if not actively contesting, the capitalist style of democracy with limited popular participation, which was then entering upon a period of crisis.

The most radical criticism tended to focus on two connected issues: internal social marginality and external dependence. Its influence among the new generations of sociologists and political scientists, whether academic professionals or students, reached such truly impressive proportions that being 'up-to-date' implied being able to handle its sources and problems with ease. Despite the very strong attraction they exerted, and the abundant and sometimes contradictory literature which grew up about them, the fact is that neither of these two problems—still less the two of them together—ever came to be incorporated in a coherent body of theory. A few years later, some of their most dedicated and lucid original proponents recognized this limitation.

A related concern was that of identifying the possible agents of change and modernization, on the one side, or the presumed agents of revolution, on the other. Students, peasants, the military, workers, intellectuals, businessmen, politicians, the middle class and other groups were studied from the standpoint of the overriding concern for modernizing change and the revolution of development. The ideas of course varied, as did the interests at stake; but there was nevertheless a shared focus on expectations of change. This could be defined, from one position, as a process of peaceful transition towards modernization by means of planning and institutionalization of conflict, while from another position particular atten-

tion was paid to the points of breakdown and discontinuity in the prevailing development style and social order. Political instability, populist movements, internal colonialism and marginality, agrarian reform and revolts, peasant movements, external dependence and imperialism, were some of the topics which aroused the keenest interest.¹⁰

More recently there has been a shift of emphasis towards concentration on the structure of political power in the State, techno-bureaucracies, public policy, authoritarianism, the political participation of the armed forces, repressive trends and the decline of political democracy, the transnational corporations, national economies and international economic and political relations. These topics frequently appear in combination because generally they are viewed as fundamental elements in the national and international hegemonic system, and in the action and policies launched from its decision-making centres.

Sensitivity towards the basic problems and contradictions of society has remained great, but now a more mature and responsible attitude can be seen with regard to the possibilities of the social sciences, which are no longer supposed to be the *deus ex machina* of change through revolution and of the advent of the happiest of utopias. This greater soundness and diminished belief in omnipotence are perceptible in the relevance of the problems considered, in the less chauvinistic slant in the analysis of intellectual models and their heuristic possibilities, and in the use of a greater variety of methodologies and sources of information. Horizontal links among the disciplines are not negligible, and there is

¹⁰ Cf. A.E. Solari *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

a strong awareness of the importance of more comprehensive approaches to problems in order to deal with meaningful wholes. Concern for relevance remains

central and the choice of issues and problems responds, as always, to a variety of stimuli, including more realistic and better-substantiated diagnoses.

XIII

From the standpoint of the problems discussed in this paper, the social sciences may be considered to contribute in general to the pursuit of three objectives which are fundamental for society. The first —the most direct and visible— is to increase and deepen social knowledge; the second, to prepare social techniques to be used for different pragmatic ends; and finally —the most indirect, but no less important on that account— to assist in the definition of social targets and societal models, present and future, and, very closely linked to that, the formation of values and ideologies. Such contributions are made to a varying degree, according to historical circumstances, whether the social scientists like it or not, and although some of the effects and projections actually resulting are not included among their conscious, manifest aims, or, in fact, even if pains are taken not to produce them.

If the varying contribution of the social sciences to the different objectives is taken as a starting-point, and a meaningful connexion with the features and trends currently prevailing in Latin America is established, there appear to be two contrary options as to the role of the social sciences and their responsibilities as such towards society. We shall call the first the technocratic and the second the critical option. Obviously, these are merely typical, schematic constructs idealizing real trends which are never as clear-cut or uncompromising as is sug-

gested. To grasp the significance of these two options in the context of the present notes, they should be viewed primarily from the standpoint of what each of them emphasizes, i.e., their focus of attention and main functions. The technocratic option is characterized by its accent on the instrumental function, the critical by its concern for questioning and assessing present reality and future possibilities.

The *technocratic* option can be presented through a few very broad questions. What kind of social science, what questions and issues, what sort of methodological approach and what results are more relevant for a technocracy? Here, obviously, it is assumed from the outset that social knowledge is subordinate to the technocratic order. This subordination is primarily the result of the mimetic process undergone by the social sciences when they come to form part of the technocratic order. In other words, they become technocratized when they accept from the start fundamental values of the technocratic order and identify with them to such an extent as to make them an essential part of their own nature. Thus the social sciences become a highly important component of the technocratic Establishment.

The technocratic conception of the social sciences lays emphasis on the production of social techniques; a great variety of these are needed, ranging from the macrosocial to the extremely specif-

ic. Broadly speaking, their orientation is pragmatic and realistic, and they deal with practical, fragmentary, specialized and sectoral problems where clear-cut policies can be formulated and plans organized and implemented. Pragmatic knowledge is a sort of mortar for technocratic policies, not only because of the problem of how to attain their ends but also because of the justification it can furnish for their claims to legitimacy. The technocratic ideology is based on the apologia of pragmatic and technical knowledge, while technocratic power is founded on its possibilities of monopolizing the knowledge in question.

In short, the social sciences become an organic part of technocratic power and lead a peaceful, conflict-free existence so long as they toe the line, i.e., so long as they do not call in question the justice of its nature and policies.

This is a line of development which can be followed without high cost or needless risk. However, it presents certain problems which should be mentioned, although discussion of them would be out of place here. The chief of them could be summarized as follows: What will happen to the social sciences in future if they are little more than organic components of the power apparatus and merely react to its demands? In such a situation, what will remain of the social sciences as producers of critical knowledge, perennially renewed and relevant, which continuously reviews its data, discarding whatever does not stand up to the test of its truth criterion? Can the technocratic social sciences retain enough independence to surmount the barrier of the constraints of power when they have assimilated some of its essential ideological elements and when their foremost practitioners have

been co-opted and won over by its privileges and sinecures?

In its conception of the social sciences the *critical* option stresses other aspects, which are by no means foreign to the epistemological view of science but which have been of less importance in its scientific practice. A central point is the conception of science as a critical discipline which continuously revises its knowledge on the *a priori* ground that its truth is always temporary, historically conditioned, and therefore logically and empirically refutable. A social knowledge built on the basis of unremitting self-criticism must by extension also be a knowledge arising out of the constant criticism of reality, which must be studied with reference to the great humanistic values that have been converging, from different channels, in the progress of critical reason since the Renaissance, and in so doing have, *inter alia*, laid the foundations of modern science.

Those who adopt this position view the critique of society not only as a fount of truer and deeper knowledge but also as a potential source of intellectual renewal and social orientation. In this view, rather than being "pure", knowledge is testimony and judgement; whence its tendency to view society as a contradictory, problematic process which can only be revealed by subjecting it to objective, penetrating criticism.

What is more, criticism of the present is a projection of the past, on the one hand, and an anticipation of the future, on the other. Since the criticism of present society involves from the very outset taking up a position, the relationship between a critical science and ideological options and perceptions of the future is obvious —not that any particular effort is made in this case to

disguise it. On the contrary, although social science should not become confused with the ideologies and utopias with which it is linked in this task of critical appraisal, an approach which focuses analysis on the problems of society is adopted both as a justified and desirable epistemological position and also as a potential means of contributing to the shaping of the future. Thus, knowledge of society as a possibility of overcoming its problems and contradictions becomes a moral imperative.

Once again social knowledge is judged according to its potential for relevance and for change, although in a direction and with a meaning quite other than in the case of the technocratic option. In the first place, the critical position explicitly and positively assumes its responsibility for contributing through the critical study of society to the formation and transformation of social values, ideologies and utopias. In addition, the criticism of reality is aimed at enriching, through objective reason and social knowledge, the stock of solutions to the contradictions which constitute crossroads and deadlocks in the development of society.

The critical position centres its intellectual problems on a series of basic questions: What is the role of the social sciences in the progress of society? Should they share in any way in the definition and formulation of social objectives? Should they be concerned with the materialization of ideas such as liberty, dignity, justice, peace, creativeness, love, solidarity and others of a similar nature, on which the happiness and development of mankind depend? In short, what is the responsibility of the social sciences towards the world of man?

It has been said that the fate of the

social sciences will depend on their capacity to help man in his perennial struggle for justice and survival. It may be that they lack the possibility of judging the soundness of values and 'scientifically' recommending options and ends, but it is equally true that they can critically examine the validity of their foundations. Furthermore, every social science implies a social ethic. It may therefore be deduced that the different conceptions of them inevitably involve different social ethics, which imply various forms and degrees of relationship with and responsibility towards the world of man. What apparently cannot be demonstrated, on the other hand, is that there is any conception of the social sciences which does not have a social ethic.

Contrary to the assertions of critics, the fundamental questions of the real world can be raised without going to extremes, either in the shape of a complete ideologization of knowledge, which turns it into a science of the barricades, subject to the swings of the political pendulum, or in that of a folkloric and traditionalist fallback which views the present merely as a projection of the past. Critical science is neither of these things. Without renouncing the epistemological requirements of science, it consciously and openly accepts its social conditioning and responsibilities.

The critical study of reality is frequently accompanied by criticism of the hegemonic situation, its power and decision-making centres and its policies: seldom an easy matter, particularly in times of crisis when the weakening of consensus increases the dominant order's sensitivity and vulnerability to criticism. Its reactions may vary, but generally

speaking they tend to be openly repressive. In such conditions criticism becomes difficult but not impossible, as history has demonstrated over and over again. Fortunately, it has never been possible to root out criticism altogether. The day that happens, knowledge will cease to be what it has represented since the distant times when it was first secularized and then organized according to precise rules of method, thus

acquiring the characteristic of scientific knowledge, i.e., critical knowledge. In the course of history, secular scientific knowledge has travelled through much difficult territory, and has managed to survive despite all obstacles. It has done so precisely because it has never lost its capacity to renew itself under the purging influence of self-criticism and by watchful, independent observation of reality.

XIV

We have come to an end, and we seem to be back at the beginning, once again posing the question of intellectual freedom as a requirement of social knowledge and, in general, of scientific truth. No final conclusions can be drawn, however, from a few thoughts such as these, which have been put forward for the sole purpose of sketching a very general historical outline of the problems of the relationship between knowledge and social reality, and of the meaning acquired by the conceptions of intellectual responsibility and autonomy in some of their varying frameworks in Latin America's past and present.

The above remarks may perhaps serve to suggest that the discussion about the neutrality of the social sciences has been couched in terms which might now be considered out of date. The viability of free knowledge nurtured in an independent academic world is something which today may be recalled with nostalgia and even advocated as an ideal, but which can hardly be reconciled with the possibilities of the world around us.

The autonomy and freedom of knowledge are problems which will

always be a matter of concern and discussion in the social sciences, although their specific referents and their meaning will vary with the changes in the real world. Since there is no way of conceiving social knowledge without at the same time posing the problems of its objectivity and relevance—and hence inevitably the question of intellectual freedom, without which there can be neither truth nor objectivity—perhaps the most important issue is to determine what specific forms are assumed by those relationships in concrete historical-social contexts. To do so is to assert the relativity of scientific truth in the social sciences, and hence the constant need of re-examining the problems concerned in the light of the changes in the historical situation.

Neither wholly dependent nor unconditionally autonomous, social knowledge evolves in historically variable circumstances and conditions which shape it; but it does not thereby lose all its possibilities of relative independence, which it can retain in the face of all constraints, *only* so long as it does not renounce its critical calling.