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Is Anthropology Alive? Social Responsibility in Social Anthropology[1]

by Gerald D. Berreman

"The old formula for successful counterinsurgency used to be 10 troops for every guerrilla," one American specialist [in Thailand] remarked. "Now the formula is ten anthropologists for each guerrilla" (Braestrud 1967).

I

THE NOTION THAT contemporary world events are irrelevant to the professional concerns of anthropologists was laid neatly to rest when, at the meeting of Fellows of the American Anthropological Association in Pittsburg in November, 1966, Michael Harner rose to challenge the ruling of the president-elect that a resolution introduced by David and Kathleen Gough Aberle condemning the United States' role in the war in Vietnam was out of order because it did not "advance the science of anthropology" or "further the professional interests of anthropologists." Harner suggested that "genocide is not in the professional interests of anthropologists." With that, the chair was voted down and the resolution was presented, amended, and passed (cf. *Fellow Newsletter* 1966, Nelson 1966, Raymont 1966).

The dogma that public issues are beyond the interests or competence of those who study and teach about man is myopic and sterile professionalism and a fear of commitment which is both irresponsible and irrelevant. Its result is to dehumanize the most humanist of the sciences, as Eric Wolf has called our discipline; to betray utterly the opportunity and obligation which he has claimed for anthropology, namely: "the creation of an image of man that will be adequate to the experience of our time" (Wolf 1964:94). It forsakes the insights of generations of social scientists, social philosophers, and other men of knowledge who, since the Enlightenment, have been cast in the role of social critics (cf. Becker 1967).

That neutrality in science is illusory is a point which has been made often and well. Telling statements by social scientists in recent times have followed Robert Lynd's *Knowledge for What?*, published in 1939. That work is by now a classic, as are the writings of C. Wright Mills on the issue, most notably his articles, "The Social Role of the Intellectual" (1964*a*) and "On Knowledge and Power" (1964*b*) and his book, *The Sociological Imagination* (1961). A series of recent essays on the topic appear in a volume

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Berreman has done fieldwork in the Aleutians, investigating sociocultural change by means of a restudy of an isolated community 10 years after his original visit. On a Ford Foundation Foreign Area Training Fellowship, he spent 15 months in 1957–58 in a Pahari-speaking community in the Himalayas northeast of Delhi. Among the results of this experience were a monograph, *Hindus of the Himalayas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); a paper on the problems ethnographers face in doing fieldwork, and particularly the problem of establishing a relationship with the people whose life they wish to study, *Behind Many Masks* (Society for Applied Anthropology Monograph no. 4); and a number of articles on caste and social stratification, among them "Caste in India and the United States" (*American Journal of Sociology* 66: 120–27). He is now in India, on a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship for Advanced Research Abroad, studying intercaste and interethnic interaction in a medium-sized city.

The three papers here presented were submitted to CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY on the following dates: Berreman, 31 VII 67; Gjessing, 20 I 67; Gough, 25 VII 67. Of 51 scholars to whom the papers were sent the following responded with written comments: Olga Akhmanova, Ralph Beals, P. M. Butler, Daniel Cazés, Erik Cohen, Robert Cresswell, Andre Gunder Frank, John Gulick, T. Kawabata, Leo S. Klejn, David Levine, I. M. Lewis, Thomas McCorkle, Bruce B. MacLachlan, F. C. Madigan, Thomas Maloney, Otto von Mering, R. Mukherjee, Ethel Nurge, Sollie H. Posinsky, Cara E. Richards, Wolfgang Rudolph, Henning Siverts, and Peter Skalník. The comments are printed in full after the three papers and are followed by replies from each of the authors.

[1] *Proceedings of the Cultural Congress of Havana.* 1968. Appeal of Havana. Reprinted in *Granma*, weekly edition of January 21. [AGF☆]

honoring Mills entitled *The New Sociology* (Horowitz 1964). Among them are: Alvin Gouldner's "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology," Douglas Dowd's "Thorstein Veblen and C. Wright Mills: Social Science and Social Criticism," Sydney Willhelm's "Scientific Unaccountability and Moral Accountability," Andrew Hacker's "Power to do What?", Kenneth Winetrout's "Mills and the Intellectual Default." Other outstanding examples of the genre are Paul Baran's "The Commitment of the Intellectual" (1965), John Bennett's "Science and Human Rights: Reason and Action" (1949), and recently Noam Chomsky's "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" (1967). Much of what I have to say here is re-emphasis of their major points—an undertaking for which I do not apologize, for I think that there are few ideas in the world that are new and exceedingly few that are both new and important. These seem to me important.

For evidence, rather than statements of the problem, of social responsibility in social science, I refer the reader to accounts of Project Camelot (Horowitz 1965, Lowe 1966), to reports of the role of Michigan State University in Vietnam and its relationship to the C.I.A. (Horowitz 1966, Hinkle 1966), and to accounts of Project Agile, "the Pentagon's worldwide counterinsurgency research program," whose anthropologists and other social scientists are said to be working hard in Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia on projects of direct military relevance (Braestrud 1967; cf. the quote introducing this article). I refer the reader also to our illustrious forebear, Franz Boas, who was alert to startlingly similar problems in the uses of anthropology and anthropologists during World War I, and deplored them publicly (Boas 1919:797; cf. Stocking 1966):

> . . . A number of men who follow science as their profession [including "at least four men who carry on anthropological work"] . . . have prostituted science by using it as a cover for their activities as spies.

Especially relevant to our contemporary problems are discussions of the nature and implications of the relationship between academics and universities and government sponsorship of research. This problem is posed vividly for anthropologists in reports in the *Fellow Newsletter* of our national association (cf. Executive Board 1966, Beals and Executive Board 1967). For those of us in the University of California system it has been discussed at some length by students and faculty in the *Daily Californian Weekly Magazine* (Briemberg *et al.* 1965, Glazer 1966, Shechner 1966). Anyone who thought scientists, academics, or intellectuals could work in a value-free vacuum has been disabused of that fantasy by the revelations in the daily press and in the March, 1967 *Ramparts* (Stern 1967) of the influences of the C.I.A. in student and professional organizations and in foundations.

This should not surprise us. Scientists, we know, are creatures of culture and society like anyone else. "By the fact of his living," C. Wright Mills reminds us, every individual "contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of his society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove" (Mills 1961:6). We as social scientists are not exempt. What we do even as scientists is conditioned by our culture and has meaning in that culture. As Morton Fried (1967) has said, and as Robert Lynd said before him, science has no responsibility, but scientists do. Scientists are people. They cannot escape values in the choices they make nor in the effects of their acts.

If we choose to collect our data and make our analyses without regard to their use—leaving that choice to others—we may believe that we are adhering to the most rigorous scientific canons (and hence the most highly *valued* canons—note the word) by not intervening in society. But to say nothing is not to be neutral. To say *nothing* is as much a significant act as to say *something*. Douglas Dowd has noted (1964:63):

> the alternatives are not "neutrality" and "advocacy." To be uncommitted is not to be neutral, but to be committed—consciously or not—to the *status quo*; it is, in Mills' phrase, "to celebrate the present."

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1966) referred to this fact when he wrote of what he called "conservative thought in applied anthropology" and its pervasiveness as a premise of our work.[2] "The questions of human value," Lynd (1939:184) pointed out, "are inescapable, and those who banish them at the front door admit them unavowedly and therefore uncritically at the back door."

Our silence permits others in the society less reticent, perhaps less scrupulous, almost certainly less informed, to make their own use of the material presented. It leaves to politicians and journalists, to entrepreneurs, scoundrels, and madmen, as well as to statesmen and benefactors—but especially to the powerful—the interpretation and manipulation of matters about which they frequently know little, and nearly always know far less than those who collected the material or made the analyses. Baran notes in this regard (1965:8):

> It should be obvious that society's "elections" [or choices] do not come about by miracles, but that society is guided into some "elections" by the ideology generated by the social order existing at any given time, and is cajoled, frightened, and forced into other "elections" by the interests which are in a position to do the cajoling, the frightening and the forcing. The intellect worker's withdrawal from seeking to influence the outcome of those "elections" is far from leaving a vacuum in the area of "value" formation.

It is therefore wishful thinking to assume that our work can be put before the public without context or interpretation, there to be judged freely and intelligently on its merits without prejudice or manipulation and acted upon accordingly. To assume *that* is to contribute to misuse born of ignorance or worse. We cannot divorce ourselves from the consequences of our scientific acts any more than we can from those of any other of our acts as human beings. This is a fact of existence in human society, and it is a tenet of democracy.

II

Science—even social science—has finally arrived in our society. The rewards to be obtained for supplying social science data and social science interpretations of the right kinds and in the right places are generous in the U.S. To paraphrase Kenneth Winetrout (1964:156), the intellectual today can join the hired myth-makers and harsh

[2] Cf. O'Brien (1966). These two articles should be required reading for anthropologists and especially those with applied interests.

announce not only his knowledge, but its implications and consequences.

III

Winetrout (1964:160) evinces the indecorum, the passionate commitment, which offends some of his colleagues in the closing paragraph of his essay honoring the courageous Mills:

> In our present-day world it is not enough to be scholarly; one must be concerned and angry enough to shout. It is not enough to understand the world; one must seek to change it.

The world is going to change in any case, I would argue, and our knowledge will contribute to the change whether we want it to or not. What we have a responsibility to do is see that our knowledge is used for humane changes, as we define humaneness.

Alfred Schutz (1964:134) suggested that "it is the duty and the privilege of the well-informed citizen in a democratic society to make his private opinion prevail over the public opinion of the man in the street." This is done not by force, but by reason. I do not advocate special powers (beyond those which come to reasoned statement) for the well-informed, but I decry special restrictions on them, whether externally imposed or self-imposed. The late Robert Oppenheimer is quoted (Stewart 1964:442) as having spoken before the National Academy of Sciences in 1963, "on the difficult matter of how and when scientists should speak on 'common and public questions.'" He said,

> If I doubt whether professionally we have special qualification on these common questions, I doubt even more that our professional practices should disqualify us, or that we should lose interest and heart in preoccupations which have ennobled and purified men throughout history, and for which the world has great need today.

Lynd (1939:186) maintained that

> either the social sciences know more than do . . . *de facto* leaders of the culture as to what the findings of research mean, as to the options the institutional system presents, as to what human personalities want, why they want them, and how desirable changes can be effected, *or* the vast current industry of social science is an empty façade.

And Kathleen Gough Aberle (1967) has asked "who is to evaluate and suggest guidelines for human society, if not those who study it?" Our professional obligation is to present what we know and the inferences we draw from our knowledge as clearly, thoughtfully, and responsibly as we can. This is a value position with practical and humane consequences and with scientific legitimacy.

Chomsky (1967:16) holds that the responsibility of intellectuals is "to speak the truth and to expose lies," and he documents brilliantly the fact that this seeming truism is not manifest in the contributions of Establishment intellectuals (primarily social scientists and historians) to current and recent U.S. foreign policy.

C. Wright Mills insisted upon the application of reason and knowledge to practical problems and decried the "divorce of knowledge from power" (1964*b*:604). Mills said (1964*b*:611):

> As a type of social man, the intellectual does not have any one political direction, but the work of any man of knowledge, if he is the genuine article, does have a distinct kind of political relevance: his politics, in the first instance, are the politics of truth, for his job is the maintenance of an adequate definition of reality. In so far as he is politically adroit, the main tenet of his politics is to find out as much of the truth as he can, and to tell it to the right people, at the right time, and in the right way. Or, stated negatively: to deny publicly what he knows to be false, whenever it appears in the assertions of no matter whom; and whether it be a direct lie or a lie by omission, whether it be by virtue of official secret or an honest error. The intellectual ought to be the moral conscience of his society, at least with reference to the value of truth, for in the defining instance, that *is* his politics. And he ought also to be a man absorbed in the attempt to know what is real and what is unreal.

I know of no statement which speaks to the responsibility of social scientists in our time as cogently as does that one.

Douglas Dowd says that the current American crisis is "the chasm between reality and ideal" (1967:198), and he identifies the key fact for those who oppose the status quo as *hypocrisy*. In this regard, as scientists and as teachers, we have a paramount responsibility: to speak the truth, to provide "an adequate definition of reality." Candor is a major precondition for trust and for rational action, and this is what is lacking or threatened in our society—in foreign policy; in race relations; in poverty programs; in support of scholarship and research; in university administration; in virtually every sphere of our national life.

The reaction of many of us is to say and do nothing about the problems of the day; to retreat into our research, our administration, or our teaching, lulled by activity into a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and virtue, and to hope that things will somehow work out. Do we need Edmund Burke to remind us that "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men [and, I might add, informed men] to do nothing"?

We, as anthropologists, have not lacked outspoken champions of truth—about race, about poverty, about professional ethics, about the heavy hands of government and private capital in formulating our research, about war, and especially about the current war in Vietnam. Probably we have more of them in proportion to our numbers than any other academic discipline. So far, however, we have failed to emphasize and value their contributions, and we must do this if we want to counteract the powerful and irresponsible professionalism which belittles or condemns them in favor of the mindless and trivial successes obtained under the illusion of freedom from responsibility for one's self and one's work.

In a world where anything we learn is likely to be put to immediate and effective use for ends beyond our control and antithetical to our values, we must choose our research undertakings with an eye to their implications. We must demand the right to have a hand or at least a say in the use of what we do as a condition for doing it. That demand may most often fall short of realization even when it is granted, but unless it is a minimal condition of our work we may become instruments for inhumanity in the guise of humane scientists.

We must seek to apply our knowledge and skills to real problems, defined by us and not simply accepted from the sources which provide our funds. We must ask questions which address the problems of our time rather than merely those which minimize or obscure them. *This* is the acceptance of Wolf's challenge to create an image of man

adequate to our time. *This* is the acceptance of the responsibility of the social scientist, identified by Lynd (1939:250) as the responsibility

> to keep everlastingly challenging the present with the question: "But what is it that we human beings want, and what things have to be done, in what ways and in what sequence, in order to change the present so as to achieve it?"

This question is as scientific as any question we might pose. Nor does the incompleteness of our knowledge disqualify us scientifically, rationally, or morally from asserting what we know. Mills (1964*a*:302) pointed out 20 years ago that

> if one half of the relevant knowledge which we now possess were really put into the service of the ideals which leaders mouthe, these ideals could be realized in short order. The view that all that is needed is knowledge ignores the nub of the problem as the social scientist confronts it: he has little or no power to act politically and his chance to communicate in a politically effective manner is very limited.

Gouldner (1964:205) has followed logically with the statement:

> the issue . . . is not whether we know enough; the real questions are whether we have the courage to say and use what we know and whether anyone knows more.

This is why we must not be timid in asserting ourselves individually and collectively wherever we can. This is why our professional associations should not now be reluctant to express views on matters of public policy, as they have done in the past (cf. Executive Board 1947, 1966; *Fellow Newsletter* 1961*a*, 1961*b*, 1966, 1967; Beals *et al.* 1967) and as other professional groups do. For students of human behavior to decline comment on human behavior is irresponsible in a democracy, no matter how controversial the issues.

Most of us are teachers. As such our most immediate responsibility is to our students. We must show them by our example that, as Robert Lekachman has observed, honesty, *not* neutrality, is the prerequisite for good teaching and for good scholarship; that knowledge legitimately leads to informed opinion as well as fact, to understanding of consequences as well as causes, to commitment to act as well as to consider. We must show them that humanity is not incompatible with science; that science without humanity is a monster and social science without humanity a contradiction in terms as well; that we are proud to join Robert Redfield (1957:141) in placing ourselves squarely on the side of mankind, unashamed to wish mankind well; and that we will not sell our souls for money or professional advantage to the anti-human forces in society. It is not merely alarmist to take seriously the reminder (Gouldner 1964:216) that

> if today we concern ourselves exclusively with the technical proficiency of our students and reject all responsibility for their moral sense, or lack of it, then we may someday be compelled to accept responsibility for having trained a generation willing to serve in a future Auschwitz.

That day appears to be much closer now—if indeed it has not already arrived—than it was when those words were first spoken in 1961.

IV

When I asked, "Is Anthropology Alive?" I had in mind a scene in a Marx brothers film wherein Groucho, fearing for the life of a prostrate and inert Harpo, gropes for the pulse, consults his watch, and reports: "Either he's dead or my watch has stopped." The standards used by some of our colleagues to judge work in the discipline as either vital or moribund are like Groucho's watch; it is the standards that are dead more often than the work to which they are applied. The vitality of the discipline is to be judged not by the stopped watch of value-freedom, but by what it says about people—how, why, and with what effect people do what they do. This requires an anthropological version of the sociological imagination so brilliantly described by Mills, which entails a recognition of the relationship between the events—including the troubles—in the lives of people and the social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which they occur. The vitality of anthropology is in doubt only when it is humanly irrelevant or is judged by the dead measure of value-freedom.

To paraphrase the graffito—"Is God dead?" "No, he just doesn't want to get involved."—Anthropology isn't dead; it is just that many of its more nostalgic practitioners do not want to get involved. If they were to succeed, it might in fact be dead. But since their science is man, and since what they want to avoid involvement in is the affairs of men, their desire is hopeless of achievement. They are involved whether they wish it or not. The question is not "Shall I get involved?" but "How can I be involved responsibly—in a way consistent with humanity as I understand it?"

Chomsky closes his article by referring to a series of articles published 20 years ago by Dwight Macdonald on the same topic as his own—the responsibility of intellectuals. He says (1967:26):

> Macdonald quotes an interview with a [German] death-camp paymaster who burst into tears when told that the Russians would hang him. "Why should they? What have I done?" he asked. Macdonald concludes: "Only those who are willing to resist authority themselves when it conflicts too intolerably with their personal moral code, only they have the right to condemn the death-camp paymaster." The question "What have I done?" is one that we may well ask ourselves, as we read each day of fresh atrocities in Vietnam . . . as we create, mouthe or tolerate, the deceptions that will be used to justify the *next* defense of freedom.

It is worth thinking at this time of the grounds for prosecution and the rules for determining guilt and punishment at Nuremberg.

I believe that we should think of these things as we teach, as we advise, as we make administrative rules and decisions in our universities upon which our male students' lives may well depend, as we undertake consultations to provide information or interpretations for agencies of the government or private beneficiaries of the war, as we accept monies from those sources—even as every man must when he pays his taxes or registers for the draft. In the context of genocide in Vietnam and the possibility of spying by our students and our colleagues, I would suggest that we think twice when we are asked to provide services which support the war or which commit ourselves, our

knowledge, or our students to the war, even if only indirectly.

Each of us, in these circumstances, will choose to act differently, but I think the crucial thing is that we act as human beings and as social scientists according to our consciences and our knowledge—for the two are inseparable—and that we not be scared off by the myth of value-freedom. Our acts can have direct effect and can serve as examples to others. If we do not act, our science will die as it did in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's, and with it truth, reason, humanity, and ultimately ourselves.

James Agee's assessment of the atomic bomb written at the end of World War II has new and timely relevance. He said (quoted in Matthews 1966:23),

> . . . man's fate has forever been shaped between the hands of reason and spirit, now in collaboration, again in conflict. Now reason and spirit meet on final ground. If either or anything is to survive, they must find a way to create an indissoluble partnership.

We are finding, I think, that passion is not incompatible with reason; that, in fact, reason goes hand-in-hand with passion, and both with courage. The spokesmen for our current national policies are not reasonable, and few of them are impassioned; most of the dissenters from that policy are both. True, the former are currently more powerful than the latter; but power is not truth, nor, as history shows, is it even durable, while reason is.

Future history, if there is one, will bear out the reasonable men and women of our country and of the world today, and it will honor those who act on their reason, if only by bitterly regretting their lack of power. It is our duty as scientists and as human beings to be among them. This I hope we can understand and communicate to our students, our colleagues, and whatever other audiences we may reach.

I am aware that this discussion is unconventional anthropology; but these are unconventional times. We are all involved in unconventional and portentous military and political events in this country, perhaps more directly than many of us have realized until recently. These events have world-wide consequences. It is time that we accepted some unconventional responsibility for our acts, be they acts of commission or of omission.