The Breakdown of Authority and the End of Community

Wayne Allen

WITH THE RISE of the mass society to power (suffrage) and the de facto achievement of the major goals of liberalism as a political philosophy (voting rights, representation, majority rule, etc.), and the general well-being of most citizens in the Western democracies, interest has been diverted from politics to economics. This shift in human goals was accompanied by the slow ascendancy of the group as the focus of theoretical concern. This was partially due to the reverence for science and the growth in popularity of Marxism.

As political scientists withdrew from political inquiry and gravitated into methodological "tool-making," sociology was assuming the mantle of theoretical construction and commentary. Not the least of these constructions to which sociologists directed their attention, is the problem of authority and the basis of legitimacy. This is partially due to the breakdown of authority as an empirical reality (institutional), and its eclipse as a normative impulse by the increasing secularization of social life in America. This has led to a socialization of authority and the destruction of the classical liberal theory of community.

I

The Western theoretical understanding of authority is actually derived from Roman practice whose source was the Roman foundation, the Republic. The Roman founding legend became instructive to much of the Western world.

Authority is derived from the Latin root, *augere* (augment), which formed the noun, *auctoritas*. Under the conditions of the Republic, the "great ones" (*maiores*) were responsible for confirming the origins of the Republic. That is, the *auctoritas maiorum* of the representative body (Senate) was charged with augmenting the foundation. Each Roman actor, the exemplar of "great deeds," thus became a reified *auctor* whose action confirmed the original beginning. This established the traditional relationship, since it connected citizens to their fathers, and between the *auctor*/actor and those who command; that is, between those who are *in* authority and those who obey.

This was coupled to the Roman understanding of religion whose root, *re-ligare*, means to tie back, to anchor to a fixed point. Thus the Roman trinity of authority, religion, and tradition projected the foundation into an unknown and uncertain future. These three guides were restraints on action, served as stabilizers to the community, and formed the philosophical axis around which the body politic turned. Thus, authority to the Romans had a communal sentiment to it, because it was generational by defini-

tion; but it also lacked the rigid hierarchical command-obedience characteristic we associate with it. This also explains the static, or conservative, impression we have of authority, since it precedes our experience with it. Each *auctor*/actor, each political act, must be justified or legitimated in light of the founding principles.

Because of the slow disintegration of the Roman Empire, and of the Republic that was its heart, Western civilization was left with no institutional source of authority. While the Roman Church was anchored to a specific event and served authoritatively for later bodies politic, medieval clerisy finally gave itself over to restraining secular passions rather than instituting theological dogma. Indeed, Thomas Hobbes noted in the seventeenth century that the lack of a *theologia civilis* was the source of contention that plagued the state of England in the Puritan crisis. By the eighteenth century and the foundation of America as a new body politic, authority had all but disappeared as a salient principle of political conduct.

The disappearance of authority from the American political scene did not go unnoticed by Alexis de Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America* he is puzzled by its absence:

> In no country in the world are the pronouncements of the law more categorical than in America, and in no other country is the right to enforce it divided among so many hands.
>
> There is nothing centralized or hierarchic in the constitution of American administrative power, and that is the reason why one is not at all conscious of it. The authority exists, but one does not know where to find its representative.[1]

It was more than creeping egalitarianism that troubled Tocqueville, it was the obvious absence of class or institutional authority. The nation lacked an established church, aristocracy, and crown. But worse, there was no centralized government, and its people were deeply suspicious of their leaders while simultaneously celebrating the "common man."

Perhaps Tocqueville was too influenced by Jacksonian democracy. But he understood that all societies are governed by some matrix of authority, whether the exemplary deeds of those who inspire the actions of others, laws or institutions that circumscribe human behavior through sanction, or implicit cultural norms that regulate behavior through internalized absorption. His search for authority in America led him to the doorstep of "public opinion" as the guide for conduct. Of course, "opinion," public or otherwise, is not authority, and it leads to one of the deepest ironies and most dangerous incongruities in American life: the illusion of individual freedom and the specter of social repression. When based on opinion, authority is degraded to mean little more than what others think.

This has the consequence of reducing authority to little more than social sanction, while it turns legitimacy into a function of popular mood. Tocqueville himself emerged from a political life that was founded on the evanescent theory of popular sentiment. The social messianism of the French Revolution (1789) transformed the authority of the crown into an idolization of the masses. When the Jacobin liberals erected the goddess of Reason it was intended to serve the calculated interests of all the people: the rights of the individual were supposed to coincide with (rather than be a product of) the Rights of Man. Of course Reason conceded to the passion of the masses by setting up a new authority; themselves, embodied in an abstraction, *The People*. The French rejected God, crown, and tradition, and thus disconnected themselves from an authority that had always stood above or beyond

man. The secular state was born.

But this also had the effect of de-legitimating political authority since the masses had nothing superior to themselves to look to for obedience. The French never answered the question, "Whom do I obey, and why?" Of course the question was never entirely settled in America. Images of authority suggest Old World practices of oppression and religious persecution, aristocratic privilege, a resistance to change (usually understood as "progress"), mindless obedience, and, contrary to the Protestant Ethic, a refusal to accept responsibility for one's own actions.

Yet another reason authority has diminished both among the masses and in philosophical discourse is the growth and final dominance of social theorizing. The political was associated with the state, while society suggested a concern with the individual. Social theorists were given an immediate advantage in the popular mind since "man" seemed a more noble (or perhaps, flattering) enterprise for study than the state, which was associated with the "political" and considered at once corrupting and oppressive of The People. Simultaneous with an increasing bureaucratization of public life, participation in public affairs was yielding to representation, while political action was giving way to administration.

The de-politicization of authority did not rest entirely on the inability of political theorists to offer theoretical alternatives for authority relations. While Rousseau was the first to socialize authority by trying to place it in the plebiscitary will of the masses, it was Hegel who removed authority from human construction by placing it outside of man. Hegel tried to locate authority in the hidden mechanic of reason which, as a mechanic, was outside of man's control. But it was still discernible. "With concepts as his instruments" the individual in manifold could determine reason's order whose sole purpose was the elimination of "chance."

This point of view led to the complete de-politicization of authority by placing it first, outside of human augmentation (therefore, outside the pale of human action) and, second, he placed it in a social will comprehended through history determined by the medium of reason. The conclusion that followed appears inevitable: society is responsible for the loss of authority through its inept institutions or unfavorable organization. This allowed for the expansion of the meaning of authority from an aggregate of geographically defined persons to all humanity. While Rousseau diffused authority to the masses, Hegel removed it from the purview of a fixed community with its own traditions.

It should be no surprise that a Marxist (with Hegelian mechanics as a guide) would finally socialize authority entirely. Jurgen Habermas places authority in the functional class of social concepts whose sole purpose is the maintenance of, and compatibility with, a larger human order. In other words, the social self-interpretation which can be found in a Hegel, Marx, or Spencer forms the locus of political authority. For Habermas authority is an ordering instrument with "cognitive and moral-practical significance" whose sole purpose is the elimination of contingency; hence, the very basis of ethical freedom.[2]

Since Rousseau and the French Revolution, and with the concomitant rise of the masses to power, society became the source of authority; at least this is where the search started. Of course locating authority in society, as opposed to the state with its attending ideas and institutions, is going to yield far different results for the individual, whether singular or in aggregate.

The social theorist's perspective is different from the philosopher's or even the historian's. The social investigator

tends to turn to the social sciences for explanations of problems that may be ethical in nature so as to determine how a "system" functions rather than to analyze the validity of the principles which supposedly govern the system. The consequence is that philosophical (or theological) norms are not studied on their merits, but considered as forces of the social structure itself. The standard of good (or God) is then reduced to a "function" of the system.

Sociologists often assume that behavior is determined by pre-existing patterns of conduct, and focus on the various institutions of society, such as religion and the family. These are seen as mechanisms of social control, and they are institutions which need neither rational questioning nor theoretical justification. Here the social investigator may explain why and how people submit to authority without explaining the ethical reasons for doing so. Yet authority is a complex phenomenon involving much more than a description of how people behave and what forces shape this behavior. At base it is a moral question: Whom should I obey, and why?

According to the canons of contemporary social theory, society is a "system" of organized control whose rationality lies in its structure. But this view leads to the conclusion that any society that functions contains its own legitimacy for doing so. And it is only the disintegration of that society that delegitimates it. Then *there are no philosophical foundations* for defining authority outside of the society in which it exists? Hitler's atrocities would then be "legitimate" so long as they were confined to his own borders. This perspective not only dramatizes the socialization of authority but also hints at a secularization of social life as well, since authority no longer has to be grounded on anything higher or beyond the society itself.

II

Certainly one of the earliest expressions of authority in America is that of John Winthrop's two sermons: "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630), and his "Speech to the General Court," (1645). These sermons embody a spiritual authority whose source is above and beyond man himself. Winthrop invoked the ideas of love and grace as transcendent religious norms whose "proper end and object of authority" is God's "love and mercy." This, he felt, would counter the forces of "natural liberty" (licentiousness) by cementing the bonds of community. Winthrop made his appeal to the mind, not the body, to transcendent ideas not mundane interests. His hope was assent by conviction, not coercion. Obedience, then, could be attained by the dignity conferred on those who submitted. Legitimacy, in this case the basis of moral duty, means an act of transcendental self-fulfillment.

Winthrop's concern was political as well as religious. He hoped to conform public life, community, to the standard of goodness set by Scriptures. He wished to establish a "rightful authority" and seek voluntary submission by virtue of an inner power capable of persuading the regenerate mind. He wanted to preclude the need for a formal authority which generally enters social consciousness as some external compulsion. This too often established a struggle between what the individual desires and what society actually permits. Of course the basic weakness of Winthrop's effort was manifest in the secularization of American life. Formerly the authority of Scripture sought to tame the passion of politics through a vision of transcendent goodness. This formed the foundation and adhesive of community. But a detached politics raised the question fateful to community and the early liberalism upon which it was founded. If the source of authority is located in God's com-

mands and is manifest only in a community with shared values, what happens to authority when God disappears as an agency and community collapses as a reality?

This problem was only beginning to surface during the American founding. Bernard Bailyn notes that the American Revolution, a clear break with constituted authority, actually succeeded in reversing traditional norms and the idea that authority descends from superiors to inferiors. Instead, "popular sovereignty" means that authority ascends from citizens to leaders.[3] This means that authority is immanent in community even though its source lies outside and beyond it. However, the Enlightenment spawned the notion that every individual is endowed with the capacity of critical thought, which means that authority rests on an intellectual foundation of doubting it. Finally, the sectional and class strife that erupted after the Revolution convinced the Founding Fathers (as we still call them) that authority could not rest squarely on belief, the precursor to moral sentiment.

Instead of appealing to men's minds the Founders, especially in the Federalist Papers, appealed to the varied interests of the citizenry. They were convinced that government generally could not be the agency of moral education that could, in the tradition of Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards, infuse the public with the authority of the Good or God. In fact the idea of "checks and balances," the system diffusing power, was an attempt to sustain authority in the face of competing actions.

At this point, two main traditions of authority in America are visible. The first is the Puritan idea of transcendent authority contingent on internalized norms directed toward community. This process would allow for the promotion of politics. Simultaneously, religion, or at least faith as a source of conduct, would also set limits to politics, to what was permitted. The second tradition is grounded on the dark side of the soul, the Federalist appreciation of self-interest. The Federalist understood that interest ("faction," Federalist 10) would preserve liberty, but abandon community. The hope was that a community founded on faith would blunt interest regulated by government. But by the beginning of the twentieth century both traditions were swept aside. Science, especially Darwinism (as interpreted by "Social Scientists"), the illusion of Progress in both literary and philosophical discourse, and the growing belief that Puritanism was a guise for superstition and repression (of the "self"), combined to subvert authority as moral sentiment.

From a secular view, political authority was in disrepute. It was Alexander Hamilton who insisted that "the majesty of national authority" should rest on an independent judiciary. But he also knew that the Supreme Court had neither the "force nor will" to effect its decisions. Here the Founders succeeded in separating power from authority, popular passions from judicial wisdom; yet they also consigned to the Court the role of judging the law, not making it. In the Roman sense, there was authority with no augmentation, and command with no method to inspire obedience. The Court was an advisory agent which could appeal to little more than self-interest. By the end of the nineteenth century judicial review on matters of morals and social policy undermined the authority of the Court entirely. Progressive historians saw this as an assault on political authority because the very purview of the Court was called into question.

The first formidable attack came from Charles Beard whose *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) shattered the aura of authority of the Court by exposing some of the squalid motives behind it. Of course he merely disclosed

what certain scholars and justices already knew: that power is the basis of politics, property the foundation of government, conflict and struggle the essence of life, and that law is not the expression of justice but the despair of morality. This anti-romantic view was firmly held by a whole generation of scholars influenced by pragmatic philosophy.

Charles Beard, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Arthur Bentley, and John Dewey felt that the source of authority issues from current "problematic situations" and, hence, the past cannot authorize the present. Pragmatism not only assaulted tradition as a reservoir of authority, which had the effect of destroying the generational bonds of the community, but it raised a shattering constitutional dilemma: if the Constitution does not transmit authority then why the need to return to it? Neither government institutions nor the founding documents could offer guidance to a people in search of themselves.

This was coupled to the diminution of religion as an intellectual influence on American life, particularly in the arbitration of justice. American scholars now felt they had to look for a new constraint on the boundless pressure of interest groups. What was sought was a new social theory that could provide restraint for self-reliant individualism and the self-regulating political economy of the nineteenth century.

So-called "progressive" sociologists rebelled against this individualistic tradition and the free-market that supported it. This rebellion helped usher in the discipline of sociology as a counter to the conservative doctrines of political economy. Whereas political theorists argued the necessity of reforming the machinery of politics on the assumption that good government makes for a good society; the new sociologists maintained that a good society would produce good government. Of course this view presupposes that society is the source of authority. Obligation is then seen as a reflection of one's own will in association with others.

When examined closely, this position collapses into a dualism between the self and society as a representative of the self. In order to redirect the value system of America, and with it the earlier moral foundation of authority relations, sociologists had to assault the main pillars of liberalism and free it from what Albion Small termed the "preposterous initial fact of the individual." This led to the normative posture of "progressive" sociologists: man is social in nature and society cooperative in spirit; or, "one man is no man."[4] This proposition solidified the notion of social causation: man is actually a product of social forces. The implications for later legal and moral reasoning were devastating to the American community.

With these principles as a backdrop for theoretical construction, Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) developed the sociology of selfhood; the reflexive phenomenon he called "the looking-glass self." His work subsequently produced the two major canons of the new sociology: first, the individual stands in a reciprocal relation to society, and, second, the impressions people have of one another produce the "solid facts" of society. Opinion was thus elevated to authority.

These canons were augmented by the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) who saw mind and society as organically related by the very nature of human activity. Mead was convinced that the proper study of man is society, and the search for authority must begin and end within the dimensions of the social world. What Mead sought was a theory and intellectual system that could explain how the order of society and direction of history flowed from the rational character of society itself.

Indeed, both Mead and Cooley saw society as a reified amalgam, a compos-

ite of roles, not human subjects. But more important, authority was seen as intrinsic to functional relations, not individuals or institutions or principles that transcend the undifferentiated mass. Thusly viewed, authority has no meaning outside the "whole," and cannot command the self since the self belongs to "others." But it was Talcott Parsons, more than any contemporary sociologist, who employed the new techniques of science to absorb and redefine political concepts in terms of the social system.

III

While Parsons was familiar with and sympathetic to the works of Cooley and Mead, he relied more on the works of European thinkers: Durkheim, Pareto, and Weber. His theoretical conclusions resulted in the school of thought known as "structural-functionalism"—the effort to explain human societies in terms of organizing principles akin to those which relate the cell to the organic system. Parson's identity with Cooley and Mead made his subsequent theories more accessible to Americans. This also made his contribution more influential, since his work suggested a progression in sociological development.

All three theorists were concerned with the problem of rationality and, consequently, directed their attention to the regulative principles that would help make society more cohesive than a composite of individuals pursuing self-interest. Rejecting the privatism of the older political and economic theories, each sociologist convinced himself that the subjective and irrational nature of individual conduct can only be rationally understood in terms of collective interaction. They then opposed what came to be known as "methodological individualism": the notion that society is an extrapolation of facts about the individual.

Thus Parsons actually followed Cooley and Mead by rejecting the ideas that authority and legitimacy derive from social contract theories, from deep-seated fear and insecurity, or even from the crass motives of self-interest. He holds that collective order lies in the structure and patterns of human activity within a social system. In turn, this action is guided by values that have been internalized in the personality and institutionalized in society and culture. Hence, the "social system" collapses into a kind of moral cosmology in which human behavior conforms to or deviates from the role-expectations of others. This has the effect of generating the cultural relativism so often employed by sociology since the 1960s.

Authority is then understood by Parsons as a relation and not a "property." In *Authority, Legitimation, and Political Action* (1958), Parsons describes authority as "a category of institutionalization." By this he means a complex of norms which do not prescribe particular acts but, on a broad level, define the general conditions under which the patterns of collective life are regulated. Legitimation is then approval of action in light of shared values. In a non-democratic society this approval is difficult to ascertain, given the fact that assent can be couched in acquiescence.

Of greater importance is the fact that Parsons really does not isolate the meaning of authority and separate it from a "system" of authority as a substructure that can be explained by its workings in society. In other words, authority is removed from the panoply of political concepts which now requires nothing more than description. To conceive authority as a function, separated from the empirical question of why a system functions, or the normative question of ought it continue to do so, is to reduce authority to little more than a paradigmatic tool. But this procedure inverts the study of any society to an examination of its "unacceptable" minorities.

IV

Now, working backwards from structuralism, we can look at the tradition of authority in America to see how sociology's inability to deal with the problem of obedience has undermined confidence in authority and eroded the foundation of liberalism.

We must keep in mind that Parsons presupposes the existence of authority relations and assumes obedience is extant in the social arrangement. His concern is, therefore, with explanation and not the moral basis for complying with authority. This is why many critics have doubted that structural-functionalism can live up to its objective since it mistakes a function for a cause, and a relation for an explanation. But this epistemological weakness suggests two further errors which hasten the defeat of politics and undermine liberal canon.

The first additional criticism involves an obvious ontological fact. Since functionalism cannot justify authority, its failure to explain why men obey or whether they should obey, entails an implied denial that they possess the will to resist. In other words, it denies the free-thinking, free-acting individual as an historical fact. Instead, modern sociology presumes people are obedient and does not ask them to become so.

This is the logical consequence of a school of thought which attributes the "social system" and not the free, self-determining individual with the status of autonomy and ontological cause. The presumption of socialization, without the belief in the individual's will to act against it, violates one of the earliest canons of liberalism—the right of voluntary submission to legitimate authority.

Secondly, structural-functionalism confuses efficiency with legitimacy because of its concentration on consequences rather than causes. This removes duty and obedience from the pale of moral concepts. Understood in the Roman sense, and implied in most social contract theories, authority signified origins, not conclusions. It was a search for foundation, beginnings, not results. The implication was that those who governed, those in authority, must augment the foundation which served as the justification for people submitting to authority in the first place. This anchored community relationships to those who came first; to those who helped us arrive at where we are. The moral suasion immanent in authority is found in its capacity to guide future generations. Understood as a political and not as a social phenomenon, authority bonds one generation to another; it gives community a durative dimension.

Unlike the Greeks and Romans, who felt that events were made by individuals who acted against the petrification of history, thereby establishing exemplary deeds, modern sociology takes its view of authority from the routine, the commonplace. Structuralism sees society not as something "made," a human artifact, but as a product of nature which assumes its own dynamic. Since the rationality of society lies in its structure, there is no need to search for the origins of its authority. As the logic of relations replaces the "logic of development," society no longer belongs to an order of events subject to causal explanation. Modern sociology thus robs the study of society from the historian and the political philosopher. Man is no longer an individual, but a cipher of the system of which he is a function.

George Santayana was perhaps the greatest critic of authority seen in terms of social organization. He pointed out quite early that American liberalism distinguished itself by abandoning the historical quest for political liberty in favor of the contemporary goal of social control. By so doing, the social sciences, ostensibly devoted to democracy, actually denied one of its most sacred prin-

ciples: the autonomy of the individual. It was also Santayana who helped us understand how pragmatism helped usher in functionalism and formed the groundwork for the complete secularization of the American community.

Santayana pointed out that Dewey's functional, instrumentalist formulation of truth as an idea has no meaning outside of a comparative context. He wrote, "Comparison is the expedient of those who cannot reach the heart of things compared; and no philosophy is more external and egoistical than that which places the essence of a thing in its relation to something else."[5]

With no concept of truth to expose the falsehood of authority, Santayana wondered how liberals could liberate America from liberalism. Before he went into exile Santayana concluded that liberal intellectuals were more interested in organizing power than in certifying authority. Without pursuing its implications, Santayana had seized on a significant philosophical connection between liberalism and sociology: truth had become one of the casualties of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century social science.

Prior to the twentieth century scholars pursued an objective, apprehensible truth. Thus conceived, truth existed as an element of external reality and was held to be discoverable by the rational mind. But an element of doubt was cast by science which soon spread to the social sciences. This doubt degenerated into a relativism on modes of living which transformed truth into something that could be experienced, even felt. This opened the door to a subjectivism in which the individual "conscience," unmediated by anything higher or more noble than itself, was the sole determiner of reality. Sociological theories then shifted to sentiments, opinions, which resulted in the distortion of reality itself.

Sociologists like Cooley and Mead, for instance, saw reality as a product sustained by "significant others." The task of sociology, as they saw it, was to explain how that which is objectively structured is subjectively perceived and experienced. But this does nothing to help us deal with the "tyranny" of opinion and settle the distinction between illusion and reality; *i.e.*, between popular impression and empirical fact. Since the mind is seen as the product of society, it bestows the status of "reality" on opinions, emotions, and images. Can the mind, then, apprehend the authority of the True, the Good, or the Beautiful? Are we to believe that a "system" of authority need not be just, or legitimate, so long as "significant others" think it so?

The primacy of liberal convictions regarding the status, the dignity, of the individual mind has yielded to a moral relativism in which the sins of the masses become the sins of the self. Simultaneously, virtue, formerly an individual trait, is replaced with "social consciousness." This changes our moral perspective. For instance, we should not ask why the German people under Hitler acted the way they did. Rather, we should ask why those who refused to act refrained from doing so.

Cooley, Mead, and Parsons were figures in American political culture. That culture not only resisted the socialization of authority, but also rejected the argument that the self has no independent existence. Indeed, Americans further repudiated the notion that truth and reality are experienced in and through the opinions of society. It was Emerson who called upon each American to "trust thyself," to insulate oneself against the flux of public opinion. This was an echo of what Jefferson tried to affirm in the Bill of Rights: the sanctity of the individual mind against intrusions by society and the state. In fact much American literature defines the integrity of the self against the pressures of society as the very foundation of moral character. Hence, one

may read with profit the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, John dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, and Sherwood Anderson.

The struggle between American liberalism and modern sociological theory is further exacerbated in the confrontation with important doctrines of the Enlightenment. Charles Cooley, for example, railed against the eighteenth-century concept of free individuals consenting to create civil society and govern themselves by contract. He thus defied the contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, as well as Rousseau: "This doctrine is wholly at variance with evolutionary thought. To the latter, society is an organic growth; there is no individual apart from society, no freedom apart from organization, no social contract of the sort taught by these philosophers."[6] These doctrines, Cooley maintained, were grounded in false conceptions of nature. As we move from political theory to sociology, there is a visible shift *from* thinking individuals in pursuit of a consensus for policy formulation, *to* a consensus as the basis for individual thinking, or public opinion. But it was precisely the fear of majority omnipotence, combined with a respect for individual contractual obligation, which informed the Founders as they forged American political institutions.

The Founders were painfully aware of the artificial nature of society and social organization. To their credit they refused to ground political freedom in popular sentiment. Madison in particular recognized that "all governments rest on opinion;" but he scrupulously sought to keep politics distinct from society in the erection of institutions that should have staying power. The very structure of American institutions—the House (people), the Senate (territories), the Presidency (the nation)—reflects Madison's concern in Federalist 10 to keep a single opinion from forming. Madison also knew that the impulse for freedom is as "natural" as the attraction of the herd; and to create a political system based on the latter would surely obliterate the potential for the former.

The rationality of the Enlightenment demanded that private thought and individual judgment be submitted to some external test for validation. Jefferson even went so far as to argue that "the opinions and beliefs of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to the mind."[7] Jefferson's rationalism contravenes a socially determined will, and demands a mind that will search out the truth to which all subjective perceptions must yield. Even a predisposed will, he felt, would finally concede to the reality of human existence and allow the individual to be the maker of the world. This *was* the foundation of American liberalism.

V

Thus begins the end of liberalism, with the final absorption of politics into society. What started as a demand for individual autonomy, the sanctity of a free will, and religious conscience unmediated by the necessities of opinion, has ended in a socially constructed *persona*. Christian teleology, the personal desire for self-transcendence, has submitted to worldly adaptation. Stripped of its spiritual and intellectual content, authority (in the words of Parsons) may now be found in the "motive-focused performance systems" of modern society. Seen in this light, authority no longer rests in God's inscrutable will, or in institutions that inspire rational consent. Instead, it is found in the banausic relations of society's predictable ways.

The quasi-religious sociology of Parsons, *et al.*, has left us with no transcendent reason for obeying authority. Are we to believe that members of society will continue to grant voluntary compliance to the "social system" merely because its beliefs and values are shared by all? Can any society be sustained by mere opinion? Of greater importance, can le-

gitimacy be attained and persist when placed in the hands of factional interests whose only purpose is self-service?

No longer located in the invisible hand of God, or in the nobility of human institutions, authority has been appropriated by the social sciences and used to explain the workings of society in dubious ethical terms in order to justify the machinations behind all human interaction. By investing all value in the social realm, sociologists have canonized society and blessed it with the status of an icon—the idolization of the system-builders.

1. J. P. Mayer, ed. (New York, 1969), 72. **2**. *The Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1973), 118. **3**. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 319. **4**. In Howard W. Odum, ed. *American Masters of Social Science* (New York, 1927), 152. **5**. Cf. *Dialogues in Limbo*, and *Character and Opinion in the United States* (New York, 1921). **6**. Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York, 1962), 47. **7**. Quoted in Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (New York, 1978), 198.