

A COMPARISON OF CONVENTIONAL AND
EXISTENTIAL APPROACHES TO SOCIOLOGY AS
APPLIED TO THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL
STUDY OF SELF CONCEPT

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
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1972

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF CONVENTIONAL AND EXISTENTIAL APPROACHES TO SOCIOLOGY AS APPLIED TO THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELF CONCEPT

By

Sherry Sank

I examine in this thesis, the differences between conventional and existential approaches to sociology. I enumerate and typify the ideals of the distinct perspectives; and then apply these outlined characteristics to specific examples of social psychological research on the self concept.

I find that the images of man and social life presented by conventional and existential sociology are quite different. The interpretive and self reflective nature of man emphasized in existential sociology shows him to be less determined than the conventional framework which views man's behavior more as stimulus responsive. Whereas conventional sociology positivistically poses a stable view of an empirical world, an existential awareness of the effects of situation and content coincides with a process orientation and a social construction of a changing reality viewpoint.

I conclude by supporting my preference for the existential point of view, and emphasize the need for a balance in the usage of both approaches to sociological inquiry.

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Sherry Sank

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

1972

PREFACE

Before beginning, I would like to note my constant struggle in writing this thesis. The struggle arises from the dilemma of writing a paper which appeals to an existential perspective in a conventional form. The schizoid nature of this content-form split is experienced uncomfortably by me.

There is also a contradiction involved in writing a thesis which criticizes the very preliminary assumptions implicit in thesis requirements. For this reason, this paper should be looked on as a thesis anti-theses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks:

to the parts of my world that who
know of the dis/ease of dividing and
integrating the world, but still allow
me my attempts at it. I accept, in
all fairness, (or at least some) my
responsibility of remaining aware of
my own large ineptness at it. I
value this ineptness and its
implications of the impossibility of the
endeavor, but also realize that
actually everything is possible in all
things, and nothing, really, is inherent.

(Pick at least a few)

Seeming contradiction
_____ intended.

- a. definitely
- b. not at all
- c. not at all definitely
- d. definitely not at all
- e. all of the above
- f. none of the above

[Special thanks to P.K.M.]

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this introductory chapter I will discuss the "conventional style" of sociological analysis, I will simply state, define and explain the theoretical and methodological characteristics of most sociological studies. I will discuss six "tools" which are conventionally used in sociology. Later in the chapter I will compare the discussed conventional orientations with other useful and stimulating alternatives. The differences between these alternatives lie in their relative emphasis - it is not that they are completely distinct and disjoint approaches. However, in order to clarify in grappling with the differences between conventional and existential sociology, I will sharpen the distinctions. In dealing with alternative possibilities I will try to show the drawbacks of the conventional style, and the advantages of the alternative approach. It is my general feeling, that although both approaches have disadvantages, the advantages of existential sociology are underplayed and its usefulness is neglected along with its use.

Conventional Sociology

Below are six selected characteristics of sociology. I am not claiming their universal use. I am simply pointing out several different modes of thinking common in everyday sociology. The content of sociological studies seems shaped by the forms of theory building and methodology felt necessary. While there is no single paradigm used by sociologists, these typifications describe an aggregate sample of conventional sociological ideals. These ideals can be seen as sought after in such things as modes of teaching, journal criteria, thesis and dissertation requirements and bases of evaluation for grants.

It should be noted from the start that these six characteristics are ideals rather than attained characteristics. Conventional sociologists strive towards these high statused ideals. However, the ideals set up are often not met in actual conventional sociological works.

1. axiomatic

Conventional sociology typically makes use of axioms. Assumptions are often expressed (or non-expressed) as axioms. Certain basic elements of a discussed theory or methodological approach are accepted as "givens." Concepts of a theory are often implicitly defined by axioms. Sometimes more explicitly, axioms define a theory. For example, the axioms of group theory define the theory

of groups by specifying what kinds of objects are called groups. In this vein sociologists frequently make use of what are seen as self-evident factors. Specific maxims are presented as if there were general agreement about their validity, even though this validity is actually undemonstrable. Principles are established which, although not necessarily true, are nearly universally accepted among scientists in a given segment of the field, and further built upon for theoretical and/or methodological considerations. Certain facts are taken for granted in order to work with propositions which have been derived from these axioms. Consistent statements about undefinable phenomena form the basis for discourse. Already prepared material (propositions, statistics) are transferred as a foundation of new material. In this way sociologists simplify epistemological issues, make assumptions, and avoid "starting at the beginning" for every new project.

2. deductive

Sociological methodology usually proceeds with a deductive model in mind. A conclusion is deduced from premises. The result follows in a logical way, reasonably and chronologically, from the premises. In this way, the use of a deductive approach is related closely to sociologists' use of axioms. A deductive model is seen as helpful in simplifying through explaining with "laws." It relates explanation and prediction as closely associated, by focusing on how events and phenomena follow from one another. A conclusion is certain and necessary if the

premises are certain and necessary. The result's credibility follows from the credibility of the steps leading up to it. A conclusion is seen as derivable by reason as a result or consequence of what came before it.

From a general principle, sociologists typically derive something about particular cases. With deductive reasoning, general broad conclusions are derived from (the already spoken of) axioms - sociologists proceed from general principles to other general principles and then go on to apply these to specific cases. Deductive methodology builds from given axioms. "Empirically described facts are explained by showing that they can be deduced logically from assured theoretical premises in conjunction with already given empirical conditions."¹

Deduction is an ideal for conventional sociologists. Although much induction is used, deductive methodology is aimed for. It is a highly prized characteristic for conventional sociology.

3. hypothesis testing

The social science model with which I am concerned involves ideally the testing of hypotheses. The sociologist makes testable assertions, statements or propositions - these are his hypotheses. He posits a relationship between two or more nondirectly related phenomena. He

¹Thomas P. Wilson, "Normative and Interpretive Paradigms in Sociology," in *Understanding Everyday Life*, ed. by Jack Douglas (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 61-62.

deduces hypotheses from axioms assembled into theories which are sources of further theories. Hopefully, the hypotheses will be fruitful: not only must they be tested, but the social scientist attempts to form them so that other hypotheses and theories can be deduced from the proof of them. Eventually, a decision must be made about whether or not given hypotheses yield predictions which can be tested, i.e., are capable of operational definition.

Sociologists have been very concerned with the testability of their hypotheses. In order to create testable hypotheses, only certain types of problems can be studied. Because of this, methods have often defined problems, rather than the problems defining the methodology. The premium on hypothesis testing has led to a triteness of the problems studied.

4. quantification

Conventional sociology seeks to be a systematic discipline. Methodology has been stressed as the means to theory building. Theoretical constructs are expected to be validated in a quantitative fashion, leaving ideal (as opposed to practical and applicable) issues aside.

Measurement - the ascertaining of dimensions and generalizability - has been displayed as the core of science. And in wanting to view themselves as scientific, sociologists have emphasized measurement. Statistical research is usually seen as the valid measuring technique.

Measuring has been looked at as a quantitative problem. Quantification through statistical methods has created a focusing on what can be viewed as objective (value - free) and empirical (observable). Therefore, in their scientific quest, sociologists have defined as meaningful those hypotheses which can be tested in a quantitative way. Their energies are directed towards studying observable behavior. Testing has been seen as a quantitative operation calling for percentages, probability, counting, etc.

An example where the high premium on quantitative analysis can be seen is significance testing. With it there is much debate as to what "constitutes correct use of tests of significance, and whether such use is practiced or practicable in behavioral research."² In spite of the controversy about the usefulness of these tests, they are still commonly used.

5. operationalism

Sociologists, with their concern with quantitative hypothesis testing, have found it important to operationalize definitions and concepts. Performance is studied and defined accordingly. In describing experience, operations that can be unequivocally performed

²D.E. Morrison and R.E. Henkel, The Significance Test Controversy, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), p. xiv.

are used. A definite, concrete operation is equated with the empirical meaning of a concept. Only definitions in terms of operations of measurement or of production and control should be referred to as operational definitions.³ In traditional sociology the terms are seen as having meaning solely as definitions from which operations enabling the determination of truth or falsity of the proposition can be formulated.

"Operational" has referred to physical and verbal - again empirical - behavior. And operational concerns have been the greatest in conventional sociology.

Kuhn's TST is a clear example of operational procedure and will be discussed in Chapter Two. The I.Q. test is another example. Here intelligence is operationally defined according to the person's ability to answer specific questions directly.

6. positivism

The positivistic tradition provides the central core of modern sociology. A positivistic approach is equated with science. Hypotheses must be formally laid down. The methodological approach in testing must be reasonable in terms of its logical and mathematical treatment, while conclusions follow from measurement, comparison and

³F. Adler, "Operational Definitions in Sociology," The American Journal of Sociology, LII (March, 1947), p. 438.

testing. Positivism refers to a philosophical approach which views the empirical method as important in learning about the real world. Logic is accepted while introspective and intuitional attempts to gain knowledge are rejected. The external world is the most reliable one, and what we are, how we feel and think is determined by it. Positivism values systematized, tested and rational clarity. Within a positivistic framework, the meaning of a proposition lies in its method of verification. Observation and data are considered more important than theory and speculation.

In summarizing these six categories I would like to note their structure. Starting from the concept of axiomatic moving towards positivism, we can see that each element leads to the next one. For example, axioms point to deduction. That is, deductive methodology is based on axioms. Positivism is based on the five previous items and is really a general philosophical position stemming from them. Axioms, on the other hand, seem to be analogous to cells of an organism - they represent the basic most elementary building block of a conventional approach to sociology.

I have presented these six characteristics of conventional sociological endeavor in a way which suggests that they are distinct and separate. I would like to emphasize, however, that I do not see these six modes as separate and easily distinguishable. Rather, I see them as overlapping waves of the same ocean. That is, they are highlights of a general tendency. This tendency is one which moves

toward a scientific discipline - meaning in general, that empirical data are quantitatively and objectively studied. Actually these categories are interconnected and all stem from a definition of what is meaningful and valid sociological information.

Existential Sociology

I would like to pose an alternative, contrasting six traits to those selected as exemplifying conventional sociology. This other tendency is existential. I frankly find it more aesthetically pleasant. The six tools of existential sociology are: inference, induction, process, qualitative, humanism, and idealism.

1. inference

Existentially oriented sociological learning begins inferentially, rather than axiomatically. Rather than starting from certain givens, it begins with maybes. Cognitive and/or belief judgments are made. Guesses are made with probability as their basis. Phenomena are indicated and pointed out. The sources of prior information are carefully considered. Existential sociology has a moving, informal foundation - it is laid with assumptions and loose implications. Self-consciously, though, it is aware of its shaky base, and cannot claim absolute certainty. The most basic element of an existential orientation is one of uncertainty. There is awareness of the non-necessary nature of inferential truth.

Existential sociology is interested in the meanings by which people define, sort and label their experience of the world. Meanings are seen as arising from social interaction and being modified continually through interpretive processes used by an individual in a social

situation. Rather than axiomatic application of established meanings, individuals are viewed as using formative processes wherein meanings are revised.

2. inductive

Existential sociology strives for inductive methodology. A polar approach to deductive thinking is sought after. Rather than forming general theories with which to look at specific cases, induction involves studying particulars and then inferring general conclusions. Induction is a method of sensing the whole by learning about the parts. It grasps at the universal by looking at restricted elements. I am reminded here of an experience in undergraduate school in an art class. I was taking a sculpture course and found building with clay enjoyable. I decided to try my hand at stone carving and got myself a beautiful piece of marble which was an old, replaced gravestone. But I could not get started. Instead of building up, as with clay and plaster sculptures, my mind needed to reverse processes and chip away at what was already mass in order to create. I found I could not work easily in such a "subtractive" process. I relate deduction to a reducing process: from a general theory, what can we discover about specific cases? On the other hand, with induction we are building from particular studies to general theories in an additive manner.

Induction considers the complexity of phenomena and is aware

that many explanations can be offered for any event. The possibility of confirmed laws (from which we can deduce) in the social sciences is questioned.

3. process

Instead of an emphasis on hypothesis testing, existential sociology has a process orientation. Movement is emphasized. Human interaction is seen as a continuously developing procedure. Change is constantly recognized, not in a sharp start-stop-start fashion, as described by Mead as the "knife-edge-present," but rather in a flowing gradual way. Hypothesis-testing involves segregating variables and in a step-by-step method, testing correlations between them. Process orientation looks at processes of becoming rather than states of being. Research scope is broadened, since the unknown is not eliminated as "not there." Rather, uncovering the unknown is a goal in existential sociology. Problems in studying elusive phenomena are interesting to existential sociologists. They may look at why there is difficulty in studying such things (example, the self).

4. qualitative

In opposition to quantitative statistical importance, existential sociology is interested in qualitative methodology. The method must fit the phenomenon to be studied. Standards of excellence need not involve quantitative measureability. Social observation and case studies are at times valid methodological, theoretical explanations and plausible exercises. When concentrating on quantitative analysis such things as intensity, degree, duration and extent can be learned about. However, difference in kind is not looked at. Qualitative methodology searches for characteristics and identifying elements of an event and what makes it distinctive and peculiar. (See Appendix B) A qualitative orientation struggles to understand, and not simply know about, a phenomenon. Value judgments are seen as ultimately unavoidable and value commitments may be encouraged. Experiential rather than measureable aspects of social life are captured with qualitative methodology, (participant observation, open-ended interviews, etc.).

A qualitative perspective even within scientific methodology realizes not only the importance of quantitative procedures, but also of premises, problems, etc., as aspects of scientific inquiry.

5. humanism

Webster's dictionary defines humanism as "a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a

philosophy that asserts the dignity and worth of man and his capacity for self-realization through reason and that often rejects supernaturalism."⁴ Existential sociology promotes a humanistic stance in describing human behavior.

Man is not seen only in terms of behavioristic and mechanical terms. Intentions and meanings take on importance in the recognition of man as interpretive. He is seen to respond even to his "self" by interpreting the role of the other. His self-definition is reflective and relational. He is not simply a response to the environment, but rather must construct, guide, and take responsibility for his actions. This interpretative view of man is one which is respectful of man's dignity.

6. idealistic

And lastly, this alternative follows an idealistic rather than a positivistic tradition. Man is seen as a symbolic creature trying to make sense of his world. This alternative sees the problem of knowledge as a problem of self-consciousness. Reality is known through our senses and immediate experiences. Ideas are emphasized as shaping reality. Idealism validates subjectivism and values imagination.

Introspection and intuition are recognized as actually part of

⁴15th Edition, 1965.

the scientific process, not only initially, but actually throughout the process.

Again, I would like to point out that these six characteristics of existential sociology are not the only six; nor need they all be used in every example of existential sociology. Also again, I do not view these characteristics as clear-cut and separate as reflected by the way I present them. They are presented in this way in order to make comparison between conventional and existential sociology possible.

There is a loose, metaphorical connection between the enumerated qualities of existential sociology. As seems appropriate to the overall quality of the existential approach, these six "tools" seem to work together rhythmically, but not in a repetitive fashion. The characteristics are not rigid but rather flow along in some general - although hard to generalize- way. No enumerated characteristic seems encompassing of the next or previous one.

In the next chapter I will look at studies where these two separate models have been used.

CHAPTER II

THE ALTERNATIVES COMPARED

In this chapter, I will compare the two typified forms of sociology - conventional and existential - outlined in chapter one. I have chosen to contrast several studies which use the alternatives. In the long run, the comparison should show how much the understanding of the social situation is based on the approach taken of the study. In this way I would like to stress the importance of the choice of the alternatives.

I have chosen four examples of sociological approaches. Two I use as examples of conventional sociology, two of existential sociology: all four examples are within the area of social psychology, all four deal with the topic of the self concept, and all four use a symbolic interaction perspective - making a comparison along a conventional-existential continuum clearer.

In the first part of this chapter I will simply critique the four examples - discussing the main points of the authors. In the next section I will pinpoint and compare qualities of the conventional and existential model - depending on which one was used in these studies. In concluding the chapter I will discuss the overall general

studies. In concluding the chapter I will discuss the overall general perspective provided by each. In this last section, I will also make direct comparisons between the articles.

Conventional Approach

1. John W. Kinch, "A Formalized Theory of the Self-Concept", The American Journal of Sociology, LXVIII (January, 1963), pp. 431-436.

Problem:

In this article Kinch is developing a formal theory of the self concept. He defines self concept as "that organization of qualities that the individual attributes to himself" (p. 431) Here the word "qualities" refers to attitudes and roles. The theory Kinch develops about the self concept is: "the individual's conception of himself emerges from social interaction and, in turn, guides or influences the behavior of that individual." (p. 431) Cooley and Mead are cited as a basis for this theory.

Kinch evaluates his own formalized theory in terms of its advantages and disadvantages as compared to less systematic approaches in sociology. In his view, formal theory is economical in summarizing research finding. Through deduction, for example, one can support many more propositions than the number actually tested. Formalized theory also has an advantage in accumulating present knowledge on the subject. Distinctions between definitions and empirical propositions are made clear with formalized theory. Therefore the problem of proving by definition is eliminated. The conditions where the theory is expected to hold are considered with the approach Kinch is using. Kinch points out that formalized theory bridges gaps in data with the

use of inference, and in general, makes communication easier. Because of these advantages, Kinch views a systematic approach (as used within his article) as more valuable than the more informal approach used by other sociologists. With a systematic approach, information is cumulative, testable, parsimonious and easy to measure. On the other hand, an informal approach gathers diffuse and complex information which is difficult to test and measure. In the positivistic tradition, Kinch sees the ability to test and measure a theory as a prerequisite for valuable material, and an inability as theoretical weakness.

Methodology:

Kinch derives several basic propositions from his general theory:

1. The individual's self concept is based on his perception of the way others are responding to him.
2. The individual's self concept functions to direct his behavior.
3. The individual's perception of the responses of others towards him reflects the actual responses of others towards him. (p. 432)

Then Kinch outlines the variables contained in the propositions.

These are: the individual's self concept, his perception of the response of others towards him and his behavior (p. 432). He continues in using deductive methodology and derives three more postulates from the original three. Then he rectifies his theory: "the actual responses of others to the individual will be important in determining how the individual will perceive himself; this perception will influence

his self-conception which, in turn, will guide his behavior " (p. 482) Kinch provides a story involving self concept change. This helps exemplify phenomena with which the theory is concerned. He then develops operational definitions of his variables. He rearranges the variables in order to create postulates or inferred relationships.

Kinch's study is a clear example of positivistic methodology. The variables to be measured are real, formal and stable over time. He is concerned with overt behavior and the empirical realm; with logical and deductive treatment of hypotheses. Kinch is interested in systematizing theory and information on the self. Kinch is concerned with a systematic collection of data, stable patterns of behavior reflecting fixed attitudes, and deduced, formal, precise, logically clear theory.

Applied Characteristics of Conventional Sociology

In this article, Kinch is concerned with many of the traits common to what I have enumerated as those of conventional sociology. It contains a formalized theory of the self concept which is conventionally developed through the use of axioms, deduction and hypothesis testing. Hypotheses are created concerning the interconnection between variables. Examples which serve to operationalize definitions are used. And in accordance with the positivistic tradition, logic is upheld as a valuable method for explaining empirical truths.

First, we scrutinize the theory to search out what seem to be its basic propositions and make these postulates explicit; second, the variables or concepts are identified and carefully defined; third, all interrelationships between the variables that can be derived from the basic postulates are considered. We will use those rules of logic which are part of ordinary language rather than the rules of mathematics. Finally, after the formalized theory has been explicated, we can consider those conditions under which each of the basic postulates will be expected to hold. (p. 181)

Of our enumerated qualities, particular use is made here of axioms, deductive methodology and a positivistic approach.

Conventional Sociology (continued)

2. Hanford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland, "An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes", American Sociological Review, XII (February, 1954), pp. 68-76.

Problem:

"An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes" is another example of conventional sociology. Kuhn and McPartland are interested in this article in being able to identify and measure self-attitudes through empirical research. They are concerned with constructing tests for investigating an individual's attitude toward himself.

They create a test directly aimed at self-attitudes rather than one where "long chains of inference" (p. 69) would be necessary. They are concerned with the validity of their test. A condition of validity is the use of logic to connect the test with the theory being tested; and comparing the results of the particular test with those results of other tests already done on similar problems.

Methodology

Kuhn and McPartland devise a twenty statements test. The statements are responses to the question "Who am I?" It was given to undergraduate university students. The students were given twelve minutes to complete their responses.

The results of the "Who am I?" twenty statements test are

sorted through content analysis. They were categorized into one of two general classifications: consensual and subconsensual. Consensual statements "refer to groups and classes whose limits and conditions of membership are matters of common knowledge," (p. 69) (example - student). They are often statements referring to status and/or class and refer in general to self-identification with some social system. The statistical size (variable) of the consensual variable is what Kuhn and McPartland call the "locus".

On the other hand, a subconsensual statement is one which "refers to groups, classes, attributes, traits, or any other matters which would require interpretation by the respondent to be precise or to place him relative to other people" (p. 69) (for example - happy). Subconsensual statements have "no positional reference or are obscured with unclear modifiers." (p. 69)

Kuhn and McPartland look at variations in an individual's self-attitudes according to "known groups." The example used in this article is one of differential religious affiliation. Subjects were directly asked for their religious membership.

Findings

Results of the test show that the average rank of consensual responses supercode subconsensual ones - supporting the hypothesis that "consensually supported self-attitudes are at the top of the hierarchy of self-attitudes." (p. 75) This shows that the more "directly socially anchored" (p. 75) elements of an individual's

self-attitudes are the more salient components. Salience here refers to "a person's readiness to respond in a certain way" (72) i.e., the responses made first. It was the consensual statements which were made first.

With the specific example of the TST used on religious affiliation variables, the authors find that in majority religious groups, the religion identification itself is not as salient in self-attitude as it is for members of "differentistic" religions (i.e., minority religions, marginal members, etc.) They find that "differentistic" religious group members have a higher locus score than conventional religious group members. With differentistic religious group membership affiliation is more salient than with majority religious groups. The religious group as a reference group appears more frequently among self attitudes of "differentistic" group members.

Interpretation of Findings

It is Murn and McPartland's assumption that the order of statements reflects the salience of an individual's attitudes. Consensual statements such as: "I am a girl," "I am a Baptist," "I am from New York," "I am studying sociology," etc., were made first and are therefore seen by Murn and McPartland as reflecting salient self-attitudes. A person's conception of himself then, is derived from his perception of his positions in social systems. This perception is what is being defined and elicited by this test. Subconsensual responses, on the other hand, were made after consensual ones and therefore were less salient. It is concluded that a person's self-attitudes do not get defined

as sharply by less socially anchored identifications. Kuhn and McPartland take a very sociological view, then, in showing how social structure and group interaction define the self.

Applied Characteristics of Conventional Sociology

As is clearly stated in the title, this article is directly concerned with the positivistic trait of empiricism. The authors are interested in a testable framework for a person's self attitudes. Their test is based on logic and its validity is discussed in terms of (1) the connection between the test and the hypothesis and (2) the relation of the results as compared with results of similar tests. These tests supposedly reflect the objective nature of their study. While with Minch a study of the self concept made extensive use of axioms and deduction, with Kuhn and McPartland we find strong usage of quantification of operationalized hypotheses which are tested. Manifest responses on a questionnaire are considered meaningful indications of the self concept. These responses fulfill the operational quality desired in conventional sociology. They are seen as real reflections of attitudes and behavior of the respondents. The article gives one the impression that the self is equated with the responses to the TST. The hypotheses Kuhn and McPartland test are (1) consensual aspects of the self concept are more salient than subconsensual elements, (2) on a volume basis, persons vary greatly in terms of consensual - subconsensual components of self-conception

and (3) this variation can be measured empirically. In this article critical hypotheses are stated and tested for results. Laws of behavior are looked for. With their concern with empiricism, the authors omit the importance of a positivistic stance.

Conventional sociology is exemplified in both the articles of Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland.

Existential Approach

1. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959).

Assumptions

1. One of the basic assumptions which Goffman makes is that life is an information game. In their face-to-face relations, people are engaged in "reading" each other. These readings are made in order to establish such things as reflection of self (checking one's own presentation) definitions, expectations, etc. Goffman gives us a view which visualizes man as being very adept at watching and interpreting cues which other individuals give and give off. Acquisition of information about another individual is a common and essential part of social interaction.

2. Goffman also views interactions as having a suspicious character. In gaining information about another non-verbal cues are particularly important and noted by the actor. This stems from the actor's awareness of the easiness of manipulating verbal cues. In trying to size up another, an actor watches for cues in non-verbal behavior, since in being more difficult to manipulate, these may be more revealing. Here Goffman distinguishes between expression "given" and expression "given off." The former refers to symbols which are directly used to convey information, while the latter involve actions which can be

treated as symptomatic in that they are performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way. Social interaction is constructed with methods of "seeing" which cut through suspicious expression given.

3. Goffman makes an assumption that, although man is suspicious, he must act on inferences made. There is no way to really know another in an encounter, and much interaction is based on trust. Goffman gives us an example from W.I. Thomas: "I am, let us say, your guest. You do not know, you cannot determine scientifically, that I will not steal your money or your spoons. But inferentially I will not, and inferentially you have me as a guest." (p. 3) In a scientific manner, it could be said that we rely on statistical probability here; however, no matter how high the probability, counter possibilities are never completely ruled out. And so the element of trust shakes hands with that of suspicion in human interaction.

4. Goffman sees man as a symbolic creature. Because of this assumption of his, intentions, inner subjectivity, meanings, etc., are important. They are important to the individual in relating to others, and they are important in studying relationships.

5. Goffman portrays individuals as small men. We get a picture of man as weak, frightened and vulnerable. He is busy trying to

maintain an acceptable impression - and this needs to be carefully done. A performance is a fragile affair. Related to this is Goffman's assumption that man is a victim. Social performances are often attempts to deal with social institutions. Because of social organization we are sometimes caught between standards or ideals. For impression management, frequently violations of one of the ideals takes place. Goffman "locates phony behavior not within the actor but within the complex of social relationships containing the actor."⁷ Man is therefore a victim of the complex of his social relationships, in that at times he is forced to be inauthentic because of role conflicts and discrepancies.

Perspective

Goffman's perspective of social life is one of theatrical performances. The principles he applies to sociological study are dramaturgical ones. He discusses dramaturgical terms such as "frontstage"; "backstage" and "props" in conceptualizing social life.

Goffman begins by discussing initial encounters of persons. Information about the other is immediately grasped and made use of in order to define the situation. An attempt is made to measure expectations.

⁷
R.P. Cuzzort, Humanity and Modern Sociological Thought, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969), p. 180.

It is recognized by Goffman that much crucial information lies outside of the time and place of the interaction. Also, crucial information may be concealed. Therefore, there is a tremendous amount of inference by which we live in our everyday interactions with other people. For example, we do not know, and cannot determine scientifically, what actions another person will take, but rather we must infer meanings and expected behavior for the individual.

Every actor has interest in controlling the conduct of others by influencing the definition of the situation. An actor is said to effectively influence the definition of a situation insofar as others act upon the particular impression the actor has given. A definition of a situation is dependent on an individual's projection of it, and the other's response to it.

Goffman points out that it is easier to make choices as to the line of treatment at the beginning of an encounter than, trying to make alterations after the interaction has begun. Therefore the initial definition tends to carry a plan for the activity which is to follow. Goffman stresses this as an "action point of view" (p. 13) and believes this to set up a moral character of the projected definitions. There are two ends of this moral character. 1. An individual's performance should indicate that he is what he claims to be and 2. An individual has a right to expect that others will treat him appropriately in respect to the social characteristics given and given off.

Defensive and protective practices are techniques used to safeguard an impression fostered by an individual. Maintenance of expressive behavior is necessary. Contradictions to the impression are avoided since they may bring the interaction to an end. Jokes and games are ways of preventing disruption of projected definition. Role discrepancy is uncomfortable.

Generally, Goffman is dealing with the ways in which people sustain desired impressions, and is concerned with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presentation of self. He is concerned with how we present our idea-of-the-self to others in everyday life. He uses a dramaturgical framework in trying to understand life-in-society.

Example

For an example of Goffmanian analysis, I will use that of an actor as cocktail waitress.

I am working part-time as a cocktail waitress at Rocky's Teakwood Lounge. The Lounge is my setting. The frontstage region is carpeted, plush and dimly lit - giving it a romantic atmosphere. The backstage region consists of the kitchen, cooler room for beer stock, and several backrooms. Only employees are allowed in the backstage region. In this case they are the performers while the

customers are the audience. In the backstage region the employees will drop their waitressing front (a smile becomes a disgusted look because of a spilled beer).

I have several props - the most important being my uniform. This prop is essential to impression management and dramatic realization. In training, I wore a regular dress and found that customers didn't accept my performance. My cue to this was expression given - in this case tips not given. This was partially due to my inexperience but that seemed to be sufficiently covered when my uniform covering came in.

A waitressing front consists of a friendly professional manner. The waitress is always pleasant to the customer. Sometimes this is an example of cynical behavior, as there are some very obnoxious customers. She moves quickly. Maintenance of expressive control is important. When a waitress stumbles or spills a drink, she deals with her accident with the least noticeable behavior possible.

The boss is a distinct member of the audience. When he is around the waitresses' service gets even better. Occasionally the boss calls a meeting and yells angrily at the waitresses - setting up a team structure. After the boss leaves, there is a renewed feeling of unity - not in response to helping him out as requested - but as a response to being yelled at.

The boss is concerned with the waitressing service because his business is making money. The waitress may be interested in delivering good service for the same reason (tips). However, she may be more

concerned with her role as a woman and getting dates. Role discrepancy may occur here if a prospective dater isn't drinking enough and claims poverty. The waitress may decide not to fulfill the expectation of drink-pushing in order not to push the fellow out of her setting.

This example is brief and therefore limited in assessing all of the intricacies of Goffman's work, but I think it is an example which reflects his form of analysis.

Applied Characteristics of Existential Sociology

Goffman's work is difficult to summarize. The style and organization of the book are hard to capture in any outlineable form. This style reflects the dynamic nature of human interaction - it is changing in a flowing form. Presentation of Self in Everyday Life seems to have little logical chapter order. Why any chapter appears where it does is an unanswered question. The style of the book seems to reflect the theoretical conceptions which made up the content of the book. It scans presentation of self, just as actors scan actions of others. This seems in line with Denzin's idea that research methods themselves are a form of symbolic interaction: "research methods are not sterile atheoretical tools. Instead, they are symbolically laden lines of action that represent one or another of the major forms of interaction the sociologist carries on as he moves from theory to

reality. All research is a form of symbolic interaction."⁸ In Goffman not only is the research method connected to the theoretical concerns, but even the presentation of the "findings" reflect them.

Goffman discusses the self in terms of presentation. He existentially approaches studying self presentation in that he points out the importance of inference in everyday life. Uncertainty of perception of performance and unpredictability of performance are central to Goffman's dramaturgical discussion of self. Induction is procedurally used in accordance with the existential idea that meanings are arising and changing through social interaction. He looks at particular situations and then makes general theories based on them. Confirmed laws are not looked for. Goffman has a process orientation. He describes the movement in human interaction - which is continuously developing. Goffman's methodology is largely descriptive analysis and he searches for the distinguishing characteristics of episodes. Goffman is humanistic in recognizing the interpretative mechanisms of human behavior. I perceive myself by interpreting my performance through your response to it. The concepts of self and other are interconnected. The self is critical in interpreting the other. All in all, the mind is an essential consideration throughout Goffman's work; therefore, it takes on idealistic tones. The

8

Norman K. Denzin, "The Methodologies of Symbolic Interaction: A Critical Review of Research Techniques," in Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction, ed. by Gregory P. Stone and Harvey A. Farberman (Assen: Noron College Publishing, 1970), p. 443.

characteristics Goffman's work most sharply uses are those of inference, process orientation, and qualitative methodology using a humanistic - idealistic base. One's self is seen as a problem of self-consciousness arising from other's impression of one's performance. In wanting to cast particular impressions we choose appropriate articulation and actions. In this guidance of action we are making choices in a humanistic framework and in our perception of our impression management we are idealistically defining and evaluating the situation.

Existential Sociology (continued)

2. R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1959).

Fundamental Concepts

Laing is a psychotherapist whose main purpose in this book is to "make madness and the process of going mad, comprehensible" (p. 9). He is unhappy with the psychoanalytic view of madness.

His dissatisfaction with psychoanalytical approaches to understanding madness is based on several factors. The first of these is a conception and priority factor. He sees man's existence, his being-in-the-world, as a crucial concept to begin with in studying schizophrenia.

Unless we begin with the concept of man in relation to other men and from the beginning 'in' a world, and unless we realize that man does not exist without 'his' world nor can his world exist without him, we are condemned to start our study of schizoid and schizophrenic people with a verbal and conceptual splitting that matches the split up of the totality of the schizoid being-in-the-world. (pp. 19-20)

Man is not abstracted from his relation with the others in his world. Experiencing oneself in relationship to others in one's world is the existential conception reflecting totality - described by the words "existence" and "being-in-the-world". The old view of madness does not begin its understanding with this conceptual priority. Instead, it does abstract man out from his relations with others. It isolates

the "mad" individual and thereby takes him out of context. It neglects, for example, looking at the relationship between the therapist and patient by setting up distance between them instead.

This distance set-up is the second way in which Laing is unhappy with the old view of madness. The distance is partially based on language. The language developed in psychiatry keeps the patients at a distance from their therapists. According to Laing one does not say one thing and entirely mean another. There is a relationship between what we say and what we mean. Our language in other words shapes our conceptualizations. Therefore, distancing language creates distance. This can only perpetuate the patients feelings of splittance with his world. Laing points out that the objection to technical psychiatric language lies in the splittance of man characterized by the words used (example - id, ego, superego). There is a lack of language conceptualizing a unitary whole.

The third dissatisfaction of Laing's with the old view lies in its neglect of understanding the perspective of the patient - a neglect of the patient's context. For Laing there is a prerequisite when working with psychotics to orient oneself to the other's scheme of things. Instead of using our own frame of reference, it is necessary to understand the other's networks. One cannot understand the schizophrenic's experience when seeing him as an object in one's own world.

Seeing another through one's own eyes only is a way of negating the other's existence. This brings us to the last of Laing's dissatisfactions, one closely related to the previous one. Laing is

unhappy with "thinging" the patient - that is, viewing the other as a thing and not a person. "Expressed in the language of existential phenomenology, the other, as seen as a person or as seen as an organism, is the object of different intentional acts." (p. 21) The intentional act refers to the point of view taken. One chooses one's point of view according to what one is looking for with the other. "Each intentional act leads in its own direction and yields its own results." (p. 21) Laing's intention is to view man as a person, which necessitates awareness of his fears, desires, etc. He wants to avoid depersonalizing the patient. The schizoid individual is one who already experiences himself as a non-person (example - robot) and is not helped with perpetuation of these feelings due to the therapist's definitions and reflections of him.

A point importantly made with the dissatisfactions mentioned is that Laing accepts the "madman" as experiencing his mad world and having a relationship with it; he does not believe therapists should persuade the "insane" to accept the therapist's point of view (intentional act).

Perspective on Madness

In understanding madness, one must be aware of the difference between "ontologically secure" and "ontologically insecure". The ontologically secure person has a sense of self as real, alive, whole, and continuous. He experiences his being-in-the-world.

The ontologically insecure person has a sense of self as unreal, dead, "precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question." (p. 42) He may not sense himself as having consistency or integration. He may feel his self and body as split. He experiences himself as split apart from the world.

The ontologically insecure person must contrive ways to be real, to preserve his identity, etc., in order to prevent losing his self. He may encounter three kinds of anxiety. (1) Engulfment - relatedness with anyone is feared, lest autonomy and identity be lost. Isolation is the tactic taken here in order to fend off engulfment. (2) Isolation - the individual experiences emptiness. This feeling of emptiness is felt as his self. There is fear of reality which might fill the vacuum (self). (3) Petrification and Depersonalization - the individual fears being treated as an "it" with no subjectivity. He searches for constant confirmation of his existence. Experiencing another's existence is terrifying in that then one may experience oneself as an object of the other's experience. So the defense to feeling depersonalized is to depersonalize the other and thereby take away the other's power to thing him.

To experience oneself as autonomous one has to recognize oneself as a separate person. If one does not feel autonomous, he cannot experience his separateness, nor his relatedness to others. The ontologically insecure person has trouble in experiencing autonomy, and therefore also in experiencing his separate-but-relatedness.

In the existential phenomenological tradition Laing describes a person's experiences in terms of his being-in-the-world. This experience of self is not predefined but is an element of how one structures one's perceptions. It is this context of the schizophrenic's world which must be understood if we are to understand his statements and actions. We need to look at his meanings. Communication is necessary, and in order to communicate one must learn the other's language.

Laing completes the book by undertaking the task of describing the schizophrenic's being-in-the-world. The schizoid's experience is split in his relation with his world, and is also split in his relation to himself, (example - mind body split, disembodiment). He experiences himself as alone and isolated and also as an incomplete and disintegrated person.

Applied Characteristics of Existential Sociology

Laing discusses the self in terms of schizoid and schizophrenic divisions. Existentially he is concerned with existence and man's being-in-the-world. Phenomenologically, he is interested in man's experience of his existence. Laing emphasizes the importance of grasping at understanding the experience and context of the other.⁹

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Experiencing the "not I" is described in D.H. Lawrence's poem found in Appendix A.

This context creates a frame of reference for the person through which meanings are created and experienced. Experiencing our existence as related to - although separate from others, is existentially based as a reflection of the totality of reality. We make contact by understanding another's words and/or actions for what they mean for him. In this way we relate. We remain separate by recognizing differences in definitions. My acting a particular way would possibly mean something different for me, than what it would mean for you if you acted exactly the same way. Laing here points out the part of inference in relating to others. We infer meanings. Laing sees process in the interconnectedness of totality. One is not abstracted out from the world, but rather has being-in-the-world. Humanism is very much a part of Laing's discussion of the problems of depersonalizing and thinging people. He uses the phrase "intentional act" in expressing our view of the other. Intention implies choices - again the humanistic trend. We personalize and avoid thinging the other by understanding his context. In our existential schema, Laing specifically and pointedly makes use of inference, induction - in looking at individual particular meanings, qualitatively searching for information, using insight and introspection humanistic tendencies and an idealistic overview. Laing is not interested in predetermined meanings of behavior.

Laing uses case studies as his method of focus. He specifically relates to the question of quantitative approaches. We can have many statistics on hand about schizophrenia and understand little about

schizophrenic experiences, according to Laing. Quantitative analysis produces quantitative information. Laing points out there is other information which is also valuable. In the existential-phenomenological "tradition", Laing is interested in inferring feelings and meanings of actions, rather than seeing behavior simply as signalling sanity or madness. The mind is obviously essential to Laing in looking at the differences of the mind workings of "mad" and "sane" men.

Overview: The Conventional and Existential Perspective

All four of these studies involve a symbolic interactionist view of the self conception. This view stems from mainly the works of G.H. Mead and C. Cooley. It is one which sees (1) the influence of others in shaping self definitions, (2) (a) the actual attitude of the other as related to one's self concept, (b) the perception of the response of the other as even more closely related to one's self concept, and (3) the self as making use of taking the role of the generalized other. "Taking the role of the other" and "looking glass self" are familiar phrases from the works of Mead and Cooley respectively.

Symbolic interaction theoretically views man as reflective and interdependent with other men. It is an approach which recognizes an active relationship between an individual and society. Obviously, interaction is a basic quality of human relations with which symbolic interaction is interested. Group membership is seen as a prerequisite for individual satisfaction.

All four studies herein discussed show self conception as reflecting (a) present social relationships and activities and (b) the salient social world, for example, work. However, the Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland, studies of the self then take off in a completely different direction than the Goffman and Laing studies. Conventional sociology emphasizes different aspects of interaction than does existential sociology. Kinch, and Kuhn and

McPartland, treat the self as stable and free from situational specification, while Goffman and Laing, on the other hand, emphasize the self as temporal and processural, with tentative attitudes which are continually redefined. The survey method of Kuhn and McPartland's TST neglects the complex nature of the self. It is ill equipped at measuring process, and structure winds up replacing the dynamic quality of self concept. Surprisingly, in terms of the symbolic interactionist tradition, the fluid relationship between the self and the other is not considered with the TST.

Goffman and Laing view the self concept in humanistic terms. They both see the self as interpretive. They concentrate on substantive conceptualization. In contrast, Kinch and Kuhn and McPartland are interested in empirical findings, making operationalization of self concept necessary. These conventional sociologists want to overcome the conjectural, intuitive nature of Mead and Cooley's theories by using a deductive orientation which can set up generalizations which are amenable to testing and measurement. They therefore elicit a stimulus - response image of human behavior.

Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland are interested in predicting social behavior while Goffman and Laing are concerned simply with making social interaction intelligible. The conventional example looks for agreement among investigators and methodological precision; the existential examples, on the other hand, are interested in the actor's meanings and in theoretical relevance. From the distinct approaches of the conventional and existential sociologists used we get different images of man and different findings on self concept.

In an article by Meltzer and Petras¹⁰ is a discussion of the Chicago and Iowa schools of Symbolic Interaction. The authors compare Blumer's approach (Chicago School) with Kuhn's (Iowa School). The differences found in relation to self conception seem fitting to the comparison between Goffman and Laing and Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland. I am using their article as a guide in the following table.

TABLE I

Self Conception - Image of Man

Goffman; Laing	Kinch; Kuhn and McPartland
1. Action - inner impulse involved (interaction between - Head's "I" and "Me" seen)	1. Action - socially determined (self seen strictly as Head's "Me")
2. Behavior unpredictable (because person is reflective - self interaction - he is more than product of what plays on him)	2. If know reference group can predict self attitudes and therefore behavior (antecedent conditions determine self)
3. Role-making (rehearses, makes and assesses plans)	3. Role-playing - self seen as structure of attitudes derived from internalizing status and roles.
4. Man seen as "carving out" his world of objects	4. Assumption of conformity
5. Self concept as changing possibly due to internal conversation. Can come to view self in new way - process	5. Self seen as structure of self attitudes which serve as systems of pre-established plans of action

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Bernard M. Meltzer and John W. Petras, "The Chicago and Iowa Schools of Symbolic Interaction," in Human Nature and Collective Behavior, ed. by Tamotsu Shibutani (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), pp. 3-17.

Conventional and existential sociology take different approaches and make different assumptions in studying self concept. They develop distinct images of man. It seems that the information received from the articles studied correlates directly with the general approach we see developed. The very approach used influences the information received.

The qualities of: axiomatic, deductive, hypothesis testing, quantitative, operationalistic and positivistic are what I have enumerated and typified as conventional ideals. Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland use what I have outlined as conventional sociology. Through their work is developed an image of conventional man. He is static, predictable, overt, and easy to describe. The complex and problematic nature of man is not emulated by conventional work. So with Kinch's article we watch while a neat methodology describes a packaged man. An individual's self concept is almost a package deal. With Kuhn and McPartland's study we learn that by asking someone "who are you?" we find out about their attitudes towards themselves. By responding to our question with 20 statements they tell us vital categorizable information. An assumption Kuhn and McPartland make is that answers given reflect true inner attitudes, and that the ones given first are more spontaneous and important than later responses. It is my opinion that often a person's true feelings about themselves are the ones least likely to be revealed on an impersonal questionnaire. It is true that answers given may show social anchorage, but what else do they show? They show possibly very little about how a person experiences his relationship with his

world. They show nothing about a person's hope and despair, and everyday inner struggles. Such sociology through its fragmenting methodology derives fragmented theories of disjoint peoples. Conventional sociology portrays man as mechanistic and literal - i.e. independent of any context. Kinch, and Kuhn and McPartland do not portray man as ambiguous and wavering but rather as stable and repetitive. Man is viewed as having fixed powers and capabilities. Not only are sociological phenomena seen as having an empirical nature, behavior is seen as all important.

In using existential sociology, Goffman and Laing point out a differing perspective on man - one which sees man and social situations as problematic. Human beings act according to meanings which arise from social interaction. Meanings develop and change through interpretive processes which people use. There is no automatic usage of formalized meanings, rather meanings are revised continuously. Goffman points out in Presentation of Self in Everyday Life that roles have a tentative character. Because we are always using inferences about another and checking these inferences out, role definitions keep changing. Subsequent events may cause re-evaluation of definitions. Goffman does not show settlement about definitions and does not portray roles as pre-existing to situations. Negotiation of common social reality sometimes is a reality in Goffman's world - and then interpretations agree. Social interaction is not viewed as rule-governed as much as it is seen as an interpretive process. Laing also

views reality as reflective. The sense of sharing a world with others is the basis of a person's being-in-the-world. Understanding, rather than laws of behavior is sought after by Laing. He is not interested in general knowledge but rather in trying to make episodes intelligible. Understanding not only behavior but also feeling and sensing are essential for Laing. Intentions and subjective meanings are important. Laing uses a non-system building approach, and describes something other than systematic man. Through Goffman and Laing's approach we see man as having some freedom, as being flowing and ambiguous, changing and complex. By using assumptions and methodology based on inference, induction, process, quality, humanism and idealism we come up with a corresponding view of man and human interaction.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Chapter one dealt with a neutral enumeration of two forms of sociology - convention and existential. I categorized six tools of the approaches used in conventional sociology and then contrasted six analogous areas of existential sociology.

In the second chapter I showed how these outlined perspectives are put into use. By using two examples of each form of sociology - examples with similar content - I aimed at showing the differences of the approaches. By the very tone of the discussion I believe some difference can be seen. My point is that not only are the approaches and underlying assumptions different, but also the theoretical constructs and respective definitions of reality concerning human interactions. Using Laing's terminology, the two forms of sociology discussed have "differing intentional acts" pointing out distinct points of view. Agreeing with Laing, I see importance in an existential point of view in trying to understand people. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss what I see as the disadvantages of using a conventional sociological approach, and in contrast, the advantages which existential sociology offers. While conventional approaches are commonly used, I believe an existential point of view deserves greater attention among sociologists.

Conventional Sociology

Disadvantages

The disadvantages of conventional sociology stem from a methodology which is based on the enumerated points of this approach: axiomatic, deductive, hypothesis testing, quantitative, operationalism, positivism. Generalizing, one could say these disadvantages crop up in the sociologist's push for positivism.

In depending on axioms, the conventional sociologist must seek out cultural common denominators rather than reflecting the negotiability of reality. A determined pre-existing view of the social world is created. The social, situationally constructed nature of reality is overlooked.

An outgrowth from an axiomatic basis, deduction views description as having stable meanings which are independent of circumstances. Deduction is literal and is therefore independent of context. Facts stand and factual work is intersubjectively verifiable. Literal descriptions reflect symbols as unambiguous.

In order to test hypotheses, variables must be formed. Precise variables again reflect a world with stable and fixed definitions. The part of interpretative processes in defining situations is forgotten. Hypotheses involve prediction of behavior, leaving the task of making social interaction intelligible as only a secondary goal.

Quantitative studies reveal little understanding of a person's existence. Rather, they seek precision and to the same extent, relevance is lost. [American Sociological] "works aim in the first place at being exact, and only in the second place at conveying a knowledge of things."¹¹ The dynamic nature of human interaction is completely overlooked in statistical analysis.

In operationalizing definitions it is hoped that the intuitive nature of theory can be eliminated and generalizability and measureability made possible. Thereby a humanistic view of man is forfeited for a stimulus-response image of human behavior. Man's complex symbols and meanings do not fit into an operational mode of studying behavior.

Positivism is concerned with the measuring of the empirical world. Empirical findings are valued at the cost of substantive study. Empirical studies neglect the complex, and affective side of human nature in noting only observable, concrete behavior. Intentions and meanings are neglected. Empirical testing, again, does not reveal the dynamic nature of human relationships, and overlooks ambiguous feelings on the part of the subject. Positivism is also interested in systematizing research. Usually, understanding is shallow when closed systematic studies are a priority. A systematic emphasis tend to displace the knowledge of the shifting nature of the empirical world. Open systems are as yet underdeveloped in conventional sociology.

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Karl Mannheim, "The Ethos of American Sociology," in Sociology on Trial, ed. by Maurice Stein and Arthur Vidich (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 7.

There are three main points I would like to make in summing up the disadvantages of a conventional approach to sociology:

1. In its concern with precise measurement, conventional sociology poses a static picture of human relationships and experiences. The survey method, although one of the most frequently used methodologies in conventional sociology, in looking at the past and the present in a snapshot way, reflects human life as static. The wide use of survey methodology may be explained by its neat and precise workability. Process, however, is difficult to reflect with survey methodology.

Measurement calls for an operationalization of definitions and these become rigid in their emphasis on variables. Variables are necessary in hypothesis testing and predictions of human conduct. However, in Laing's terms, they are an example of "schizoid" thinking in that they split up and reflect experience as disjointed. This approach neglects the nuances of the relatedness of the parts.

2. Following from a methodology requiring precise measurement stems the second general disadvantage of conventional sociology. Precise measurement necessitates acceptance of the idea that the empirical world is fixed and uniformly perceived. The situated, negotiable nature of reality is overlooked. Time and space dimensions of human

conduct are neglected. The ongoing nature of social process is lost.

In this respect the researcher as well as the actor develops definitions and meanings, and a lack of awareness of this may lead to biased distortion in the research. Recognizing the human social construction of reality, and letting go of a fixed notion of empirical reality is necessary if the researcher's bias is to be minimized.

A uniformity of results may be attempted by uniformly used methodology in quantitative research, but each researcher generates different interpretations of the material, so the attempt is futile. The interpretative nature of human processes needs to be recognized in order to see the part it plays in the research project itself.

Quantitative methodology and measurement seek to find universal, generalizable, uniform results. However, this ideal is an impossible task. First of all, the researcher himself is negotiating reality. The researcher too is part of an ongoing, social process. Secondly, even slightly different methodology will reveal different aspects of the same process. Thirdly, each researcher generates different interpretations of findings. And lastly, we can expect different results from the same methods of the same objects by the researcher, because the world is in a continual flux.

Conventional sociology seeks to reflect a uniformly perceived empirical world, when in fact it needs to develop flexible theories in order to mine the actually changing, conflicting, chaotic nature of social life.

3. The last disadvantage of conventional sociology is again related

to the high premium on precision and measurement. In trying to be objective, the conventional sociologist rules out taking the role of the other. He often views the individual as isolated and thereby misses the relational quality of social reality. Unless the researcher takes the perspective of those he is studying, he will distract from the reflective nature of the self. Entering the field of study with preconceptions of behavior will not be helpful in terms of information about how the actors themselves perceive their behavior. We can study behavior and measure attitudes by using our own frame of reference in forming definitions of them; however, we cannot in this way appreciate or understand how the actor is experiencing his existence. In other words, we learn no new knowledge, but simply reflect ourselves, unless we can get the meanings and definitions which the actions have for the actor.

Conventional sociology can be criticized then on the following grounds: because precise measurement is considered valuable, the empirical world is described as static - ignoring process - and rigid, in devising operational definitions with an emphasis on variables for hypothesis testing. The outcome of methodology causing a fixed, uniform view of the empirical world, is an overlooking of the situated and interpretive constitution of human conduct and a neglect of the qualities of human interaction and social relationships. And finally, conventional sociology is negligent in applying a non-ethnocentric, taking-the-role-of-the-actor, perspective in trying to understand and describe human relationships and experiences. In these ways conventional sociology

distorts social reality.

Existential Sociology

Advantages

Point by point we can contrast this approach with the conventional one, and thereby see its advantages.

Existential sociology replaces the certitude and givens of conventionally used axioms with the uncertainty and maybes of inference. This gives a tentative quality to human interaction. Perceived meanings are always subject to revision - there is no stable fixed quality given to them. There are no absolutes in social reality.

In aiming at making social situations intelligible, existential sociology looks at particular episodes and inductively creates analysis from them. This is unlike conventional sociology where prediction is a premium, and general rules of behavior are formed and then applied to particular settings. Because prediction is not sought after by existential sociology, there is room for ambiguity of definitions and meanings. With an inductive approach, the situationality of behavior is taken account of.

Movement, process, and change are highpoints of the views of existential sociologists. Meaning is seen to be derived from the situated social interaction - meaning-making is therefore seen as a formative process. The actor's interpretive capabilities are carefully checked out in an existential approach. Social interaction is

seen as an interpretive process, and not as rule-governed.

Also, even empirical reality is seen as fluid rather than as having fixed properties

Reality is a social process, it is an orientation that is continuously supported by others... In this sense all knowledge is social... Societies, no matter how stable they may appear, are on-going things. The world is in a state of continuous flux, and as life conditions change, knowledge must keep pace... the emergence of new hypotheses and their acceptance as part of a modified outlook is a social process. ¹²

When quantitative measurement of empirical research is attempted, there is an outcome of a static, rigid view of the world. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, seeks understanding and relevance rather than general knowledge and prediction. A qualitative approach makes use of participant observation, case studies and/or nondirective interviews. The qualitative approaches allow for fluid, changing findings. Substance is considered more important than empirical findings.

Now, though possessed by an insatiable curiosity about everything, from mathematics to theology, I also feel a definite repulsion toward acquiring concrete precise facts: at first sight, this feature might seem a paradox or even a contradiction - I am curious but I do not want to know about things - and as such it has struck me when I began to observe this double trend in my nature - it is though, less paradoxical than it sounds. ¹³

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Tamotsu Shibutani, Improvvised News: A Sociological Study of of Rumor (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), pp. 170-171, 182.

13

Salvador De Madariaga, "The Dangerous Lure of Parrotland," in What I Have Learned, ed. by "Saturday Review" (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 205-206.

Human beings act according to meanings which arise from social interaction. These meanings change through interpretative processes used by the actors involved. Therefore, in line with a humanistic perspective, the individual is seen as confronting a world which he must interpret. This opposes a view of man as simply responding to some ultimate empirical environment. There is a place for freedom in this humanistic approach.

Humanistically, a study of interaction must be made from the position of the actor - since his action comes from his perceptions, interpretations and definitions. The researcher must take the role of the actor in order to understand the actor's context, and thereby, behavior.

Idealism is not interested in system-building but rather in the complex and dynamic nature of social interactions. Non-empirically natured material is considered important; for example, intention and meaning development are scrutinized. Overt behavior and actions are not complete indicators of attitudes. Existential sociology does not have a stimulus-response image of man, but rather one which views man as an intricate and intentioned organism always in the process of becoming.

I think I can sum up the advantages of an existential approach to sociology in a word used by Blumer: "sensitizing". Existential sociology is sensitive to the concepts of process, situation, and the actor's context. By "sensitive to" I am referring to a methodological

and theoretical openness. In having these sensitizing conceptualizations, an existential approach to sociology helps create an awareness of their reality in everyday social life. I will elaborate on how these concepts sensitize us to this awareness:

1. Process Awareness - Reality, and the definitions of it, are on-going. There is a tentative, uncertain quality to the empirical world. Meanings are ever changing with social situations, and therefore movement is always present. "Reality is that which is perceived and designated by our significant symbols and hence brought into formative lines of action"¹⁴ The empirical world is hereby not seen as having uniform, fixed, stable, or static characteristics. Many interpretations are made necessary by a shifting, moving reality; therefore, a temporal-processional approach to studying human behavior is called for. In order to capture the processional elements of human interaction, "the emergent relationship between self conceptions, designated meanings and reflective interaction must be recorded, analyzed, and explained."¹⁵

An existential approach to sociology is not a system building approach. There are no absolutes in social reality on which to build a system. Rather elements of society are arbitrarily defined. There is no built-in purpose of homeostasis. Interpersonal conflict is viewed as the fundamental structure of human action.

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Norman K. Denzin, "The Methodologies of Symbolic Interaction: A Critical Review of Research Techniques", in Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction, ed. by Gregory D. Stone and Harvey A. Farbman (Mass: Noron College Publishing, 1970), p. 449.

15

Ibid., p. 454.

Society is seen as a collection of conflicting subcultures. Change and growth are the ongoing outcomes of this problematic nature of human interaction. Existential sociology recognizes a fluid dynamic nature of self-other interactions and the importance of process in everyday life.

2. Situational Awareness - The second basic awareness to which existential sociology is sensitized is one of the situationality of meanings and definitions. These definitions are selected and rechecked in light of the situation.

Closed system is again negated. Rather than acting out prescribed enactments of roles, a person acts according to the perspectives supplied by the relationship of others involved, and their actions. Therefore a technique offering systematizing through rules of behavior falls short in reflecting what actually goes on in defining a situation. A systematic approach might describe roles and norms, which in being prescribed and pre-established miss the relational manner of behavior.

With due allowance for poetic license, the root metaphor of modern scientific sociology is clearly the notion of system. It embraces at least two clusters of associated meanings. Viewed as an observational attitude, system implies orderliness, certitude, objectivity, detachment, neutrality, and mechanical reducibility. Viewed as a quality of objects being studied it suggests interconnectedness, comprehension, generalizability, and impersonality. It smothers all consciousness of the terrors and the thrills, the heights and the depths that mark the concrete life of men in human society.¹⁶

The unique nature of the empirical moment is overlooked in system building and not in situational analysis of episodes.

The problematic nature of social situations is noted in existential sociology. The self is again not seen as stable and free from situational specification. The response of the other is taken into account.

Although situational characteristics can't explain all behavior, knowing the actor's interpretation of the situation is essential for understanding his behavior. The existential sociologist is sensitive to the importance of the definition and effects of the environmental and social situation.

3. Actor's Content Awareness - Similar to situational awareness in being sensitive to the environmental and social context, existential sociology is also sensitive to an individual's content. Because an actor acts on his perceptions, and interpretations, an existential approach respects the actor's content. The only way to understand the action of the other is by taking the role of the other. The meaning of an actor's behavior is clear to us only if we understand his meaning content, and not if we define his actions according to what we mean if we had made them (our meaning content). A study of interaction must be made from the position of the actor and his frame of reference. Again the realization is implied here that there is no determined world to be discovered by the sociologist - there are individual

differences in the interpretations of the situation. Because actors construct the social world, existential sociologists look at their point of view in order to reach an understanding of the social situation ¹⁷

Existential sociology is interested in "sympathetic introspection" (Blumer), and an intuitive *verstehende* approach in getting an intimate understanding of the actor and social life.

There are two dimensions of man which are clearly emphasized with an existential perspective. The first involves the interpretive nature of man, the second, his self reflective characteristic:

1. Man makes use of and changes meanings through interpretive processes. He acts on the basis of these meanings, which arise from the social interaction. Therefore, man is seen from an existential view as being behavior-constructing rather than behavior-releasing. This is a marked difference from conventional sociology. Man is

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Understanding the content of the other is a necessity in learning anything of the other. There is an element of love in this approach to sociology. Love, I think, involves experiencing the "not I". In experiencing another we relinquish for a moment our experience of our selves. Contact is made in mutual relinquishment of selves. Unless we can learn to lose and regain self we cannot love. It is this flip-flop with which I have tremendous difficulty, for my tendency is to make extreme the extremities: preserving self by defining the others actions through my own frame of reference; destroying myself through a total engrossment with the other - forgetting who I am as a separate me. I do not do loving very well. And I believe part of my academic training could be guidance in this respect - forgetting of conventional methodology and remembering to continually - in the existential vein - appreciate the content of the other.

not seen as simply conforming and reacting to an outside environment, but rather as acting and effecting the environment. There is a relationship seen in existential sociology between the actor and his environment. The actor has a part in creating the environment. This interpretive quality of social life necessitates a process point of view in surrendering the grasp for a stable fixed empirical world with predetermined ready-made patterns of human interaction.

2. Similarly, in perceiving man as self-reflective, we attribute a role-making, rather than a role-playing, image to his behavior. Man is capable of making indications to himself. By taking-the-role of the other, he can self interact. Therefore, he is more than a mere product of what plays upon him from the outside world. Rather, it is true that he rehearses, makes inferences, makes and assesses plans, etc. New behavior is made possible through exploring and practicing these processes. In the course of internal conversations a person can come to see himself in a new way. Role-making behavior involves a constant process of creating and constructing attitudes and behavior. It is a process which relates to becoming rather than an identification of being.

Both conventional and existential approaches to sociology have advantages and disadvantages. Since both uncover and highlight distinct aspects of social reality, they are both useful for sociologists. A research of the literature; however, shows the existential point of

view to be rarely used and/or appreciated in sociological research. This thesis points out the effects of this imbalance.

In order to make my point, I have run into the difficulty of simply reversing the imbalance. The enumerated characteristics of the approaches are exaggerated and the alternatives are thereby caricatured. For clarity I have made divisions which are actually arbitrary and unreal. Many points are overstated.¹⁸ I hope, that the price for clarity is not understanding as is often the case.

A comparison of conventional and existential approaches to sociology is itself a complex problem. Many important issues are unresolvable and, while I may have portrayed them as fixed, many guidelines of contrast are actually wavering and ambiguous. There is though definitely a difference in the approaches and their respective reflections of reality. My preference is based on this distinction. It is the image of man developed, the analysis of change, and the quality of sensitivity to human experiences, which make existential sociology more valuable than conventional sociology for me.

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I believe I have fallen into these traps as a result of the conventional requirements and criteria of acceptability for sociological Master's theses. In fulfilling conventional standards, this paper, although in some ways aided, to some extent has been self-defeating.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

I

And so I cross into another world
shyly and in homage linger for an invitation
from this unknown that I would trespass on.

I am very glad, and all alone in the world,
all alone, and very glad, in a new world
where I am disembarked at last.

I could cry with joy, because I am in the new world, just ventured in.
I could cry with joy, and quite freely, there is nobody to know.

And whosoever the unknown people of this unknown world
may be
they will never understand my weeping for joy to be adventuring among them
because it will still be a gesture of the old world I am making
which they will not understand, because it is quite, quite foreign to them.

II

I was so weary of the world,
I was so sick of it,
everything was tainted with myself,
skies, trees, flowers, birds, water,
people, houses, streets, vehicles, machines,
nations, armies, war, peace-talking,
work, recreation, governing, anarchy,
it was all tainted with myself, I knew it all to start with
because it was all myself.

When I gathered flowers, I knew it was myself plucking my
own flowering.
When I went in a train, I knew it was myself travelling by
my own invention.
When I heard the cannon of the war, I listened with my own
ears to my own destruction.
When I saw the torn dead, I knew it was my own torn dead
body.
It was all me, I had done it all in my own flesh.

III

I shall never forget the maniacal horror of it all in the end
when everything was me, I knew it all already, I anticipated it
all in my soul
because I was the author and the result
I was the God and the creation at once;
creator, I looked at my creation;
created, I looked at myself, the creator:
it was a maniacal horror in the end.

I was a lover, I kissed the woman I loved,
And God of horror, I was kissing also myself.
I was a father and a begetter of children,
And oh, oh horror, I was begetting and conceiving in my own
body.

IV

At last came death, sufficiency of death,
and that at last relieved me, I died.
I buried my beloved; it was good, I buried myself and was
gone.
War came, and every hand raised to murder;
very good, very good, every hand raised to murder!
Very good, very good, I am a murderer!
It is good, I can murder and murder, and see them fall,
the mutilated, horror-struck youths, a multitude
one on another, and then in clusters together
smashed, all oozing with blood, and burned in heaps
going up in a foetid smoke to get rid of them,
the murdered bodies of youths and men in heaps
the heaps and heaps and horrible reeking heaps
till it is almost enough, till I am reduced perhaps;
thousands and thousands of gaping, hideous foul dead
that are youths and men and me

being burned with oil, and consumed in corrupt thick smoke,
 that rolls
 and taints and blackens the sky, till at last it is dark, dark as
 night, or death, or hell
 and I am dead, and trodden to nought in the smoke-sodden
 tomb;
 dead and trodden tonought in the wour black earth
 of the tomb; dead and trodden to nought, trodden to nought.

V

God, but it is good to have died and been trodden out,
 trodden to nought in sour, dead earth,
 quite to nought,
 absolutely to nothing
 nothing
 nothing
 nothing.

For when it is quite, quite nothing, then it is everything.
 When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out,
 every vestige gone, then I am here
 risen, and setting my foot on another world
 risen, accomplishing a resurrection
 risen, not born again, but risen, body the same as before,
 new beyond knowledge of newness, alive beyond life,
 proud beyond inkling or furthest conception of pride,
 living where life was never yet dreamed of, not hinted at,
 here, in the other world, still terrestrial
 myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new.

VI

I, in the sour black tomb, trodden to absolute death
 I put out my hand in the night, one night, and my hand
 touched that which was verily not me,
 verily it was not me.
 Where I had been was a sudden blaze,
 a sudden flaring blaze!

So I put my hand out further, a little further
 and I felt that which was not I,
 it verily was not I,
 it was the unknown.

Ha, I was a blaze leaping up!
 I was a tiger bursting into sunlight.
 I was greedy, I was mad for the unknown.
 I, new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb,
 starved from a life of devouring always myself,
 now here was I, new-awakened, with my hand stretching out
 and touching the unknown, the real unknown, the unknown
 unknown.

My God, but I can only say
 I touch, I feel the unknown!
 I am the first comer!
 Cortes, Pizarro, Columbus, Cabot, they are nothing, nothing!
 I am the first comer!
 I am the discoverer!
 I have found the other world!

The unknown, the unknown!
 I am thrown upon the shore,
 I am covering myself with the said,
 I am filling my mouth with the earth.
 I am vurrowing my body into the soil.
 The unknown, the new world!

VII

It was the flank of my wife
 I touched with my hand, I clutched with my hand,
 rising, new-awakened from the tomb!
 It was the flank of my wife
 whom I married years ago
 at whose side I have lain for over a thousand nights
 and all that previous while, she was I, she was I;
 I touched her, it was I who touched and I who was touched.

Yet rising from the tomb, from the black oblivion
 stretching out my hand, my hand flung like a drowned man's
 hand on a rock,
 I touched her flank and knew I was carried by the current in
 death
 over to the new world, and was climbing out on the shore,
 risen, not to the old world, the old, changeless I, the old life,
 wakened not to the old knowledge
 but to a new earth, a new I, a new knowledge, a new world of
 time.

Ah no, I cannot tell you what it is, the new world,
 I cannot tell you the mad, astounded rapture of its discovery.
 I shall be mad with delight before I have done,
 and whosoever comes after will find me in the new world
 a madman in rapture.

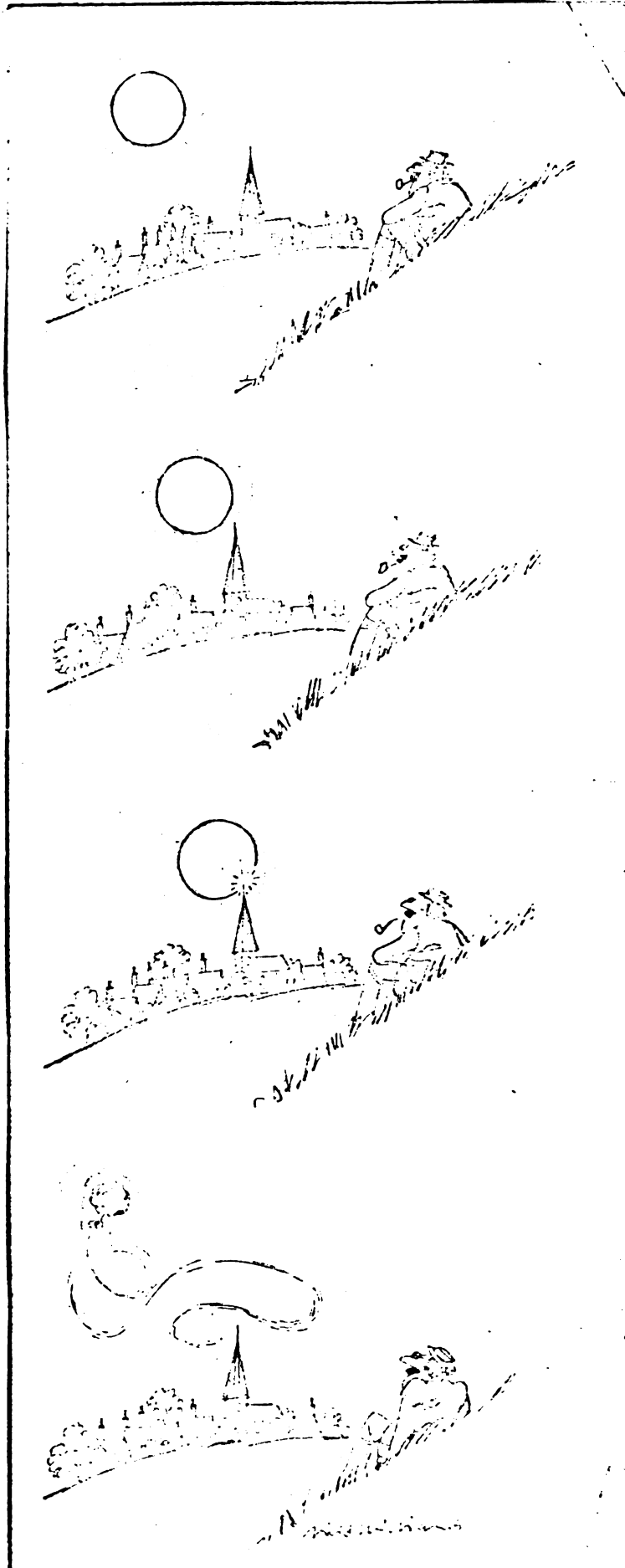
VIII

Green streams that flow from the innermost continent of the
 new world,
 what are they?
 Green and illumined and travelling for ever
 dissolved with the mystery of the innermost heart of the con-
 tinent,
 mystery beyond knowledge or endurance, so sumptuous
 out of the well-heads of the new world. -

The other, she too has strange green eyes!
 White sands and fruits unknown and perfumes that never
 can blow across the dark seas to our usual world!
 And land that beats with a pulse!
 And valleys that draw close in love!
 And strange ways where I fall into oblivion of uttermost
 living! -
 Also she who is the other has strange-mounded breasts and
 strange sheer slopes, and white levels.

Sightless and strong oblivion in utter life takes possession of
 me!
 The unknown, strong current of life supreme
 drowns me and sweeps me away and holds me down
 to the sources of mystery, in the depths,
 extinguishes there my risen resurrected life
 and kindles it further at the core of utter mystery.

APPENDIX B



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