

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Challenge of Service Sociology

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During his travels through the United States in the early-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville, in his reflections on civil society and attempts to capture the essence of its culture and values, famously noted the American spirit of voluntary cooperation. At a time when the national government was truly small, Tocqueville (1899) observed that, “When an American asks for the co-operation of his fellow-citizens, it is seldom refused, and I have often seen it afforded spontaneously and with great goodwill . . . The Americans, who are always cold and often coarse in their manners, seldom show insensibility; and if they do not proffer services eagerly, yet they do not refuse to render them” (p. 185).

Due largely to the economic crisis of the Great Recession that began in late 2007 and whose effects continue to the present day, we are currently witnessing deep cutbacks in social services and staunch opposition to tax increases (National Public Radio 2011; Rasmussen Reports 2011). As a consequence, it is no longer tenable to believe that the most creative solutions to society’s most vexing problems will come from government programs. Obviously the state has a duty to play a major role in addressing societal issues on a large scale, particularly in the areas of public safety, public health, and unemployment. But given today’s strained political and economic climate, nongovernmental voluntary effort is clearly the more reasonable and sensible strategy to take.

The fact is that there are currently tens of thousands of citizens involved in voluntary community service throughout the country (Corporation for National and Community Service 2011). Indeed, the national volunteer rate in 2010 was 26 percent, with nearly 63 million volunteers serving. These volunteers dedicated over 8 billion hours to volunteer service, and the economic value of this service was almost \$173 billion (Corporation for National and Community Service 2011). What is more, no less than 26 percent of college students volunteered in 2010, and over 3 million of them dedicated over 300 million hours of service to communities across the country, primarily in activities involving youth mentoring, fundraising, and teaching and tutoring (Corporation for National and Community Service 2011). This service work is being done by many ordinary people who are picking up the slack for a city, a state, a nation unwilling or unable to attend to many critical matters that directly affect thousands, even millions, of people (Coles 1993).

I contend that we have now entered a new era in this country, one characterized by a *culture of service*—involving various forms of civic engagement, community service, and volunteerism—that allows people, as citizens, to work together to ease or mitigate the predicaments and uncertainties created by poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, epidemics, calamities, and so on.

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In view of the current situation of economic downturn and divided government, what we need today is a new sociology: one that creates opportunities for all of us, as citizens, stakeholders, activists, and academics, to play active roles in the amelioration of social problems. Hence, I propose a sociology, or better yet an *ethos* of sociology—one that is not only practically and conceptually distinct from other sociologies, but that also emphasizes its moral character—that I call *service sociology*.

In what follows I endeavor to articulate a sociology of service by first considering the sociological legacies that have influenced its development and, second, by considering as well the intellectual crisis and political context necessary to its theoretical formulation. I then describe in broad outline the sociology of service; map its location in the system of disciplines, professions, and specializations; identify its unique strategic approach to social problems; and offer a few programmatic statements toward the fulfillment of its task and promise. Finally, I turn to the practice of service sociology—its facilitating actions—and propose some postulates in its implementation.

The Sociological Lineage of Service Sociology

The word “service,” and indeed its very notion and practice, is not at all foreign to the discipline and harks back to its early days. At the turn of the twentieth century, when American sociology was gaining acceptance and an institutional foothold in the universities, it basically took two forms: sociological theory and the practice of ameliorative reform and service. At that time, sociology as philanthropy was the prevailing conception among the general public (Ward 1902). Graduate departments typically included a single professor of theoretical sociology and a number of part-time practical sociologists, with curricula combining general theoretical courses with courses such as Methods of Social Amelioration, Charities and Corrections, and Preventive Philanthropy (Breslau 2007). Undergraduate sociology programs were even more focused on training in charity and social service work. Indeed, what drove the growth of sociology at the turn of the twentieth century was, quite plainly, not a demand for academic research, but the demand for instruction in practical matters (Breslau 2007).

The newly formed University of Chicago, with the first full-fledged department of sociology in the country, combined philosophy and the history of social thought with a close relationship to social reform, Christian socialism, and ideals of ethically informed action. During the first decades after that university’s founding in 1892, sociology at Chicago was assiduously engaged with applied social reform and philanthropy (Calhoun 2007). What is more, the early academic sociologists including Albion W. Small, George Herbert Mead, W. I. Thomas, and Charles Henderson from the University of Chicago, and E. A. Ross from the nearby University of Wisconsin at Madison, were all associated with the settlement movement generally, and intimately involved with Hull House. And so was the young W. E. B. Du Bois, who was not only influenced by the research methods of settlement sociology, but also lived in the College Settlement House of Philadelphia’s seventh ward while researching his classic 1899 study, *The Philadelphia Negro*.

Amelioration and philanthropy were not unique to Chicago. Indeed, at its origin Columbia University’s sociology department was equally concerned with social reform (Calhoun 2007). None other than Franklin H. Giddings, who in 1894 was appointed to the country’s second full-time chair of sociology, at Columbia, had previously taught courses at Bryn Mawr on scientific approaches to charities, social services, and corrections. He had also served as a member of the central council of the Charity Organization Society of New York.

At Columbia, Giddings’s appointment was based on an idea similar to Small’s assignation at Chicago: that a scientific sociological theorist should direct the university’s administration and training in settlement and charity work (Breslau 2007). Although Giddings acknowledged that, contrary to popular perception, sociology was not philanthropy per se, he nonetheless saw sociology as “the scientific groundwork on which a true philanthropy must build” (as quoted in Breslau 2007:56).

These reformist impulses of *fin de siècle* American sociology took the form of the three types of early service sociology, namely, the social gospel, settlement sociology, and charity sociology.

The Social Gospel

At the turn of the twentieth century an important legitimation for sociology in the United States was not only centered in academia (whether at Chicago, Columbia, or elsewhere), but also in progressive religious concerns, particularly those of the liberal Protestant doctrine known as the “social gospel.” Other terms that were used to refer to the social gospel movement include Christian sociology, biblical sociology, social Christianity, and applied Christianity.¹

One of the important leaders of the social gospel movement was the political economist Richard T. Ely, who asserted several ideas on service sociology in his small book, *The Social Law of Service* (1896). Basing his philosophy on Christ’s injunction to love others as we love ourselves, Ely advocated the establishment of right relations, or fraternity, with others. Fraternity and solidarity find expression in the ethical obligation that we are to serve our fellows in need. The law of society, according to Ely, is service. But how is such service, intended ultimately to address the various problems of industrial society and promote the general welfare, to be practically carried out? The guiding principle should be to “do the next thing”—by which Ely meant that everyone has a moral duty, in their every action, to exhibit right conduct and beneficence toward others. Because society is a living organism with a vast network of interdependent parts, “[e]very improvement in your own character and in your own surroundings is an improvement for every [social] circle, large and small, of which you form a part. Every helpful word, every kind deed, is a contribution to the perfection of society” (Ely 1896:252). For Ely, the social law of service, as postulated in the social teachings of Christ, contributed to the problem-solving efforts of charities, correction, and child saving.

The social gospel movement was important to early American sociology in two respects. First, although it endorsed the notion of moral uplift, the social gospel rejected an individualistic approach to the problem of social reform. Indeed, the social gospel movement got its name because it argued that individuals must come to God not as discrete atomistic individuals, but in neighborly relation to each other (McLoughlin 1978). And second, despite supporting an ethic of charity, at least the more “radical” wing of the social gospel movement, which included sociologists Shailer Mathews (1895) and most especially Walter Rauschenbusch (1896, 1897) (both of whom published their ideas in the *American Journal of Sociology*), advocated for more than philanthropic amelioration; indeed they looked to larger issues of economic and social justice (McLoughlin 1978). However, in exhibiting a preference for volunteerism over government intervention in social welfare, the social gospelers endorsed a gradualist, ameliorist strategy of problem solving.

Settlement Sociology

Concurrent with the development of the sociology department at Chicago, between 1885 and 1930, a unique, active, and engaged sociology was being implemented in many of the settlement houses that had been founded in major cities throughout the United States. Some settlement-house workers saw themselves as sociologists involved in the practice of sociology as the science of reform. Many of the leaders of settlement sociology, like Jane Addams, “were almost indistinguishable in their political and social philosophies from the social gospelers and Christian sociologists with whom they often worked closely” (McLoughlin 1978:166). As one historian expressed it, “settlement houses were the brick and stone embodiment of the social gospel” (Sealander 2003:227).

By taking the urban neighborhood as their primary social unit, the settlement sociologists played a key role in improving the lives of people and communities in two ways. First, they provided their destitute and distressed neighbors with various needed services through classes, adult clubs, clinics, “civic” organizations, and so on. Second, and just as important, they

1. For a commentary on the expansion of the social gospel that followed a line of development parallel to that of sociology see Dombrowski (1977).

conducted research on the plight of the poor immigrants in the community. This research was executed with the explicit goal of shaping policies to promote a more just society and to solve urban problems.

In 1889, Addams cofounded the most famous and successful of the settlement houses, that great experiment in social service, Hull House, in Chicago's desperately poor nineteenth ward. Addams and colleagues (1893), explicitly and intentionally, considered the settlement as an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social problems of the modern city.

Settlement sociologists like Addams (but also Crystal Eastman, Graham Taylor, Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, Edith Abbott, Florence Kelley, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and others), sought empirical evidence on various social problems through painstaking, detailed descriptions of the conditions of groups living in poverty. In this regard they pioneered several methods of doing research (including the survey, the interview, and secondary data analysis) and of presenting data (including photographs, detailed colored maps of neighborhoods, and narrative accounts) (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 2002). And while the hallmark of settlement sociology was, to be sure, the linkage between empirical research and practical reform, some settlement sociologists, including Addams, formulated a coherent social theory. This theory was unique in that, along with its rich methodology, it specifically focused on the *neighborly relation* (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 2002, 2007). From this neighborly perspective, as well as from the fact that settlements were located in impoverished neighborhoods, Addams (1895) maintained that the settlement "put itself into a position to see, as no one but a neighbor can see, the stress and need of those who bear the brunt of the social injury" (p. 184).

For the settlement sociologists the predominant and most troubling feature of the rapid social change that was afflicting many American cities at the turn of the twentieth century—caused, as it was, by large-scale urbanization, industrialization, and immigration—was that it produced "disconnection," or the condition in which people relate to each other only as means to some selected end (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 2007). Whether the disconnection was relational, societal, or subjective, the solution to the various social ills resulting from it centered around the theme of "the neighborly relation" and how it was constructed. Thus, settlement sociology built its theory of social problems on the assumption that people are motivated by an ethical need to be in communal affiliation with each other.

After two decades of providing a wide variety of community services, including securing support for deserted women, conducting a kindergarten and day nursery, implementing various enterprises for neighborhood improvement, and establishing a relief station, the historian Henry Steele Commager (1961) aptly described Addams's Hull House as "a clearinghouse for every kind of social service" (p. xii).

Charity Sociology

Somewhat distinct from, but nonetheless similar to, both the social gospel and settlement sociology was the charity sociology of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Although the settlement sociologists made a very real life choice through which they endeavored to fulfill their desire for ameliorative action, social justice, and the alleviation of suffering, Hull House was not a charity organization and the settlement sociologists were not engaged in charity work. Indeed, not only did the settlement leaders completely reject the term "charity," many, like Addams, took care to distance their movement from charity sociology (Carson 1990; Crocker 2003).

Like the other two, charity sociology was also based on reformism and social welfare, but it underscored a couple of things the others did not: a pointed focus on *efficiently organized charity* in the form of personal service, and *self-reliance* through character building. One of the main purposes of charity sociology was to eliminate the startling increase in pauperism that had arisen throughout many U.S. cities, by restoring individuals to self-sufficiency. This was to be done not through almsgiving nor the redistribution of wealth, but by recreating a sense of community through the development of neighborhoods (Kusmer 1973).

One of the leading advocates and practitioners of charity sociology was Charles A. Ellwood. Motivated largely by Christian social concerns, Ellwood served as director of the Charity Organization Society in Lincoln, Nebraska and taught courses at the University of Nebraska on modern charities and then, in 1900, at the University of Missouri on philanthropy. Indeed, he remained continually committed to charity work until the 1920s (Turner 2007).

The Charity Organization Societies were private agencies, found in many large cities, that existed in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a means of coordinating and organizing a number of independent charities that had formed to ameliorate the problems of urban poverty caused by rapid industrialization.²

For Ellwood (1908), charity, as an expression of the spirit of social solidarity, refers to social help for those who are in social need. The scientific form of charity that Ellwood advocated involved skillful effort, guided by established principles, in organizing and coordinating the existing disordered attempts to aid the needy.

Ellwood (1908) placed charity between relief giving and neighborliness and identified three social functions of scientific charity. The first function was to help those out of adjustment with society to get adjusted if possible. In this case charity was delivered, on the one hand, through individual treatment and, on the other hand, by making more just and humane the social conditions and institutions that affect the unadjusted individual. Charity's second function had to do with the care, in various humane institutions, of all who could not be adjusted to society. Finally, the third function of charity was to further social progress by developing social sympathy and by removing the causes of human misery.

The year Ellwood graduated from the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. in sociology, 1899, he gave a series of lectures entitled "Sociology and Charity" to the members of the Charity Organization Society in Lincoln. In these talks, Ellwood (1988) makes it clear that the charity organization "does not mean 'an arrangement for the distribution of alms,' but 'concerted action in neighborly service'" (p. 21). Indeed, for him, the two important factors in obtaining justice are good government and neighborliness.

Another main proponent of charity sociology was Charles R. Henderson, who taught sociology at the University of Chicago and served as president of the National Conference of Charities and of the Chicago Charity Organization Society. Henderson believed that charity, in the form of temporary public relief, frequently only aggravated begging by the poor classes. For him, relief should be provided only as a preliminary step in a carefully considered and frequently perdurable effort at amelioration. Thus, the ultimate goal of charity sociology was not simple almsgiving "but rather fellowship in opportunity and justice" (as quoted in Kusmer 1973:662).

There are several principles useful to the development of a sociology of service that can be derived from these three early sociologies, but I will briefly mention only a few. To begin with, all of them had *neighborliness*, fellow feeling, as a fundamental value that gave primacy of focus to the neighborhood, or community, and that rendered assistance in the spirit of neighborly service. All three sociologies prized systematic coordination of services and cooperation with various service providers for the purpose of *efficiency* in the delivery of needed assistance. They emphasized the communal *reciprocity* of people working together in dealing with a problematic situation. And, finally, they all believed that the individual or community in need of help had to ultimately achieve self-reliance or *sustainability*.

Three Current Sociologies

In addition to the social gospel, settlement sociology, and charity sociology there are also three more current sociologies that can, as well, contribute to the articulation of a new sociology

2. For a historical account of the development of the organized charity movement see Kusmer (1973).

of service. These three contemporary forms are humanist/liberation sociology, communitarianism, and public sociology.

Humanist/Liberation Sociology

Alfred McClung Lee is doubtless the social scientist most directly credited with developing the notion of a humanist sociology. He is also perhaps best known in the history of the discipline as the cofounder of two professional associations—the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and the Association of Humanist Sociology—both of which espouse humane values in their efforts to bring about a more egalitarian and participatory society. According to Lee (1973), the SSSP came into existence as “an effort to bring sociological research and theorizing closer to pressing human concerns of the day” (p. 134).

Convinced that the sociology of the time could not adequately help people to live more effectively and satisfyingly as fuller participants in society, Lee (1973) called for a sociology in the service of human needs, values, and aspirations as they are popularly defined. This humanist sociology gives individuals greater self-understanding, participation, and responsibility, and allows them to relate more humanely to one another. As such, it is a democratically oriented emancipatory sociology designed to free people from oppressions and manipulations by providing them with practical ways of coping with personal and social problems impinging upon their lives.

The direct service that humanist sociologists render to people comes in the form of a social “sensitivity” to others, one that will give people a realistic sense of the social betterment they can accomplish with their individual and collective potential. But before sociologists can proffer this service, it is necessary that they themselves acquire sensitivity—empathy—for those they are helping. As the sociologist becomes increasingly and intimately involved with diverse types of people involved with actually coping with life and living, he or she is exposed to humanizing experiences and thoughts that stimulate empathy and sympathy. For Lee (1978), the humanist sociologist must therefore gain a sufficient sense of empathy through joining in the emotions and activities of the people to be served. In its endeavors to serve, humanist sociology considers the problems of people in all their humanity.

Although Lee (1988) at times equates humanist sociology with liberation sociology (and indeed, the two traditions share much in common, which is why I combine them here), in the paragraphs that follow I look at liberation sociology as discussed by its major proponents in recent years, Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera.

Feagin and Vera (2008) advocate “liberation sociology,” which they consider a contemporary term for the activist and progressive sociological tradition of Lester F. Ward, Jane Addams, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other sociological pioneers. The term itself dates back to at least 1968 when a small group of graduate students, mostly from Columbia University, and some faculty from the University of Chicago, formed the Sociology Liberation Movement at the American Sociological Association meetings in Boston.³

Liberation sociology is first and foremost committed to social justice, and its sociological analysis and moral concerns has been greatly influenced by liberation theology—the emancipatory tradition among Catholic activists in postcolonial countries, especially in Latin America, to work among the disenfranchised and the poor. Contrary to liberation theology, however, liberation sociology is not a type of pastoral work or ministry.

For Feagin (2001), “social justice entails a redistribution of resources from those who have unjustly gained them to those who justly deserve them, and it also means creating and ensuring the processes of truly democratic participation in decision-making” (p. 5).

Feagin and Vera (2008) propose that sociologists examine injustice, not just in its misdistribution of resources (goods and services), but also in the deep-lying oppressive power relations

3. Interesting eyewitness remembrances of the Sociology Liberation Movement and of the politics of the time—in the country in general and in sociology in particular—are found in Oppenheimer, Murray, and Levine (1991).

responsible for that misdistribution. The attainment of full social justice necessitates the complete reorganizing of the structures of domination, oppression, and impoverishment for the greater good. Moreover, liberation sociology aims to contribute to people's freedom, to help them attain their full human self-realization, by building more just and democratic societal arrangements.

Liberation sociology sees as a central sociological problem the oppression of various groups in society. Such oppression is usually expressed as classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism. A sociology of liberation is an emancipatory sociology, one that finds its critical tradition in neo-Marxist, feminist, and anti-racist theory. As such, the sociology of liberation identifies and empathizes with groups that have traditionally been oppressed, exploited, and dominated: women, people of color, the poor, gays and lesbians.

Liberation sociology is an action-oriented sociology that, in combination with community activism, has developed concepts, methods, and practices to assist people in their everyday struggles as well as to better understand and improve their daily lives. But it is also a solutions-oriented sociology. Thus, one of its core strategies is the implementation of participatory action research in order to help people solve their own community problems without outside agency. The first step toward this goal is to empower community members by instilling in them a critical consciousness of their oppression. The various participatory action research methods—which include participant observation, demonstration projects, in-depth interviews, role-playing exercises, and so on—are employed in producing local relevant knowledge in finding progressive solutions to people's oppressive realities. In sum, a sociology of liberation “envision[s] a society where people are reflective, develop empathetic compassion for human suffering, and commit themselves to changing that suffering” (Feagin and Vera 2008:246).

Communitarianism

Believing that the United States was in need of bolstering its moral, social, and political environment, a group of ethicists, social philosophers, and social scientists met in 1990 at the invitation of political theorist William Galston and sociologist Amitai Etzioni. Adopting the name “communitarianism,” they began a movement to restore civil society in two interrelated ways: (1) by emphasizing the common good and strengthening social bonds through the promotion of a core of shared values, and (2) by balancing individual rights and social responsibilities.

Looking at the moral order of the United States since mid-twentieth century, Etzioni (1993) contends that during the 1950s there existed a clear set of values that spoke firmly to most Americans, most of the time. This solid affirmation of traditional values not only produced a well-established social order, it also inspired in people a strong sense of obligation to each other. The conservative moral values of the 1950s, however, were not only authoritarian, they were also unfair to women and minorities. Thus, during the 1960s, these forces of traditionalism were strongly challenged in favor of expanding liberty for all individuals. Unfortunately, the rejection of authoritative means of social order did nothing to fill the moral deficit left in the wake of that challenge. Then in the 1980s—the decade characterized by a general mood of self-centered meism and by an unfettered pursuit of self-interest and greed—the problem of a decline in moral suasion continued to intensify. By the 1990s, the changes that had transpired in U.S. society—whether based on excessive order or on excessive individuality—led to a sharp decrease in moral conviction and a loss of community (see Bellah et al. 1985; Putnam 2000; Selznick 1992). For the communitarians it was time to return to community by shoring up the moral order it requires.

Communitarians called for a restoration of community and its moral voice through shared substantive values that are commonly affirmed and to which most community members are committed. These basic value commitments include, among other things, treating others with love, respect, and dignity, and the notions of hard work, responsibility, cooperation, as well as being committed to democracy and individual and minority rights. In essence, Etzioni (1993) asserts, there must be “some measure of caring, sharing, and being our brother's and sister's keeper” (p. 260).

The second communitarian approach to rebuilding community and enhancing civil society involves balancing individual rights and social responsibilities. Communitarians found that by the early-1990s a major aspect of American civic culture had come to be characterized by a strong sense of entitlement, coupled with a rather weak sense of social responsibility. In other words, Americans were all too eager to demand that government provide more services and strongly uphold their individual rights, but were all too slow to give something back to others and to the community. The communitarians contended that it was now time to rectify the imbalance between excessive rights (often a legal expression of individual autonomy) and insufficient responsibilities (chiefly a factor of social order) that had existed for a long time. They thus issued a call, not for curbing individual rights, but for enhancing social responsibilities and moral commitments through increased community service and civic involvement.

The communitarians believe that the more individuals dedicate themselves to fostering a communal web of social bonds, the more their fellow persons will join in and bring about the revival of communities where they are waning (Bellah et al. 1992). Strengthening this communitarian nexus requires voluntary participation in activities that are informed by shared moral values and that are done for the common good: from organizing neighborhood crime watches to becoming volunteer fire fighters, from a greater willingness to assume the responsibilities for paying taxes to running soup kitchens. All this requires a change of heart, says Etzioni (1996), a different way of approaching community life, and one that is articulated in a “new golden rule,” which should read: “Respect and uphold society’s moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy” (p. xviii). The new golden rule maintains the two necessary virtues of a good society—social order and individual autonomy—in a carefully crafted, continuously challenged equilibrium.

Public Sociology

In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association Michael Burawoy (2005a) posed the rhetorical question, “What is public sociology today?” His answer: Most simply, it is taking sociology to publics and engaging them in dialogue about public issues that have been studied by sociologists (Burawoy 2005b). Put another way, “public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation” (Burawoy 2005a:7).⁴

Burawoy (2005b) maintains that a mature public sociology is one that contributes to public debate and discussion about the values and goals of importance to civil society. Ultimately, for Burawoy, public sociology is intended for the purpose of expanding civil society—which is seen as a complex of associations, movements, and publics—and defending it against market resurgence and state authoritarianism. Thus, in the type of public sociology that Burawoy promotes, the sociologist enters into an unmediated dialogue in certain pockets of civil society such as neighborhood associations, with communities of faith, with labor movements, and with prisoners.

In sum, the core activity of public sociology, as a bulwark to the tyranny of market privatization and governmental despotism, is the dialogue between sociologists and their publics, and its political role involves the sociologist “talking to publics and at kings” (Burawoy 2008:372; see also Mills 1959:181).

As with the three early reformist sociologies, there are some principles to be found in each of the contemporary sociologies that we can identify as theoretical and practical lineages of importance to service sociologists today. From humanist sociology we learn that sociologists must render

4. The commentary on public sociology that follows considers those statements made only by Burawoy who was the first to publically, and *ex cathedra*, sound the clarion call for a public sociology. Thus, while public sociology—or sociologies, in the plural—means different things to different people, I will largely confine myself to what Burawoy has said about it in three sources: his ASA presidential address mentioned above (Burawoy 2005a) and two follow-up articles (Burawoy 2005b, 2008).

direct service with a sufficient sense of *empathy* that is acquired through personal involvement with the people to be served. With liberation sociology we confront the significance of being committed to social *justice*; a commitment that is reinforced as we consider, first, the oppression of various groups in society, and, second, the fostering of *equality* through more just and democratic societal arrangements. From communitarianism there is the call for strengthening community bonds through increased participation in volunteer activities, of *community service and civic involvement*, which are done for the common good. Lastly, public sociology prompts us to bring sociological knowledge into a *public discourse* with citizens, neighborhood associations, and community stakeholders for the purpose of protecting their communities against predatory business practices and governmental abuses.

Before undertaking a detailed discussion of service sociology inspired mainly by the six legacy sociologies just discussed, it is first necessary to briefly locate its conceptual development in a metatheoretical and sociopolitical context.

The Theoretical and Political Framework

As I see it, the main problem with the social problems theories of today and of the past is not that they are overly objectivist or overly subjectivist, that they blame the victim or blame society, that they are too radical or too conservative. Rather, the main problem of social problems theories is that they are deficient in rectifying troubling situations. Social problems theory has done a splendid job of explaining the origins and natural histories of social problems, but a poor one of offering practical remedies; remedies that have to do with useful diagnosis and control. Where the sociology of social problems has failed, and failed miserably, is in developing an analytical framework for meeting the urgent needs of people.

The sociological approach to social problems will remain cloistered in academia and inconsequential to policy makers unless it engages in a real effort at relieving human suffering. The aim of the sociology of social problems should not only be to increase knowledge of definitions, causes, and conditions, but also to render assistance to those who need it and to insure and promote the welfare of the community. Today, just as it was at the time that Lee (1978) was writing, it is ever urgent that sociology be involved in “efforts to relate the immediate, specific, and personal to existing theory” (p. 41).

Over the past 100 years, numerous and conflicting theoretical perspectives have been developed in the study of social problems (Rubington and Weinberg 2010). These perspectives have disagreed not only about the causes of social problems and what, if anything, can be done about them, but even in their very conceptualizations of what constitutes a social problem. More significantly and regrettably, they have not been able to alleviate the suffering of real people. This glaring deficiency in the theory and practice of the sociology of social problems constitutes, in my view, not only a “scientific crisis” (Kuhn 1962) that has made it intellectually inadequate, but also, and more gravely, a “legitimation crisis” (Habermas 1975) that has made it pragmatically irrelevant.

This is not to say that there are any easy answers; indeed, most of our major social concerns—underperforming schools, food insecurity, unemployment, and so on—are exceedingly difficult to get a grip on. But if it is, in fact, the case that “nothing improves theory more than its confrontation with practice” (Zetterberg [1962] 2002:189), then it is service-oriented sociology that currently holds the most, and perhaps only, promise for producing a workable theory of community-based solutions and then translating that theory into practice.

But the construction of a theory of social problems with practical application can only come about in the context of a new politics of transformative change. Thus, as was the case with the gospel, settlement, and charity sociologies that flourished during the Progressive era of social activism and political reform during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a service-oriented social theory for today requires a new progressivism. For Etzioni (1993) this “neoprogressivism”

must bring about a set of reforms intended to reduce the role of special interests in the government of our local and national communities. For Anthony Giddens (2003) neoprogressivism requires, among other things, strengthening civil society by having the state (as well as nonstate agencies such as voluntary associations) provide social services—education, health care, welfare, and so on—in a way that helps people, as citizens, to help themselves.

Whatever its particular forms, one thing is certain: a new type of progressive thinking, couched in the culture of service, demands that we reconceptualize the role of civil society, the state, citizens, and communities—and of sociology itself—for the express purpose of helping people to cope with the most immediate social, economic, and environmental problems. And, I argue, that this reconceptualization can produce a service-oriented theory that engages in a metanarrative of progressive politics and that is informed by the three moral imperatives of its legacy sociologies: justice, equality, and neighborliness.

A Service-Oriented Sociology

In their informative critical narrative in which they chronicle sociology's historical relation to social work, Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge (2007) point out that the two fields did not begin as distinct. Indeed, both were part of a general impulse for social science that emerged out of the reform activism of the mid-nineteenth century and continued through the Progressive era of the early-twentieth century. However, beginning with the publication of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess's *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), the foundational text that established sociology as a separate and distinct scientific discipline, sociology and social work came increasingly to be seen as two fields with distinctly different professional identities (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2007).

So while many of the early sociologists were clearly committed to the practical amelioration of social problems—in the guise of the gospel, settlement, and charity sociologies—by the 1920s, as sociology became more professionalized, it became less politically engaged and activist. A new generation led by Park and Burgess was eager to achieve the status of value-free “scientists” rather than to continue to be regarded as “reformers” or “do-gooders.” Accordingly, they began to distinguish themselves from their founding predecessor's poor-relief philosophy, as well as from contemporaries such as Addams and Ellwood, and the various forms of service sociology became increasingly contested. Indeed, even though Park retained an engagement with social reform, he kept this distinct (at least in principle) from his academic work and insisted vehemently that there was no room in sociology for “moralism” (Calhoun 2007). Park and Burgess distinguish science from philanthropy on the basis that the many empirical investigations of neighborhoods, institutions, and immigrant groups, that they and their students conducted, could only be elevated to scientific status by the theoretical work of inserting them into the city (Breslau 2007).

In addition to this rejection of reformism, mainstream American sociology, at least since the 1920s, has largely stripped flesh-and-blood individuals of their humanity, their needs and desires, as it has transmogrified them into actors, respondents, and publics. Particularly culpable in this regard have been some of the most salient and influential strands of twentieth-century sociology including, for example, the various “action” perspectives of Talcott Parsons (1937; Parsons and Shils 1951), Erving Goffman (1959, 1967), and James S. Coleman (1990); the research methodology of Samuel A. Stouffer (1955) and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1993; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955); as well as the more populist styles of Thorstein Veblen (1918, 1923) and C. Wright Mills (1958, 1959).

Service sociology, by contrast, is a problem-solving endeavor that relates to individuals as real people. Motivated by care and compassion, a service-oriented sociology is a sociology of social problems aimed at helping people meet their pressing social needs.

Although the term “service” is fraught with a variety of desirable as well as undesirable imagery given its wide usage as in when we talk about, for example, military service, civil service, human services, service learning, customer service, service encounters, service work, service

sector, religious service, service provider, and so on, I use it nonetheless as it provides me with a most serviceable concept, particularly in reference to sociology's moral ethos.

The sociology of service believes that the personal needs of one individual are not so different from the collective needs of others in similar life circumstances. This belief is why service sociology treats individuals as *people in community* with each other. The core activity of service sociology is to help people by meeting their essential needs and concerns through service.

But who exactly are these people in need of help and assistance? Typically they are individuals who have experienced patterns of exclusion and subordination, as well as people and communities who are victims of natural disasters and man-made catastrophes. They include people in physical discomfort, emotional distress, and in financial crisis, but also in psychological and even spiritual anguish. The sociology of service, however, is not only about meeting the pressing needs of individuals but also the shared needs of communities—communal needs such as improving the environment and beautifying the land.

Helping means providing, in some cases, the material relief necessary for physical survival. In most cases, however, it means providing nonmaterial services, such as dispute resolution, education, and professional consultation. Plentiful and suitable examples of sociologists who use their sociological service—solutions-oriented teaching and research, consulting, facilitating, advising, and creating organizational structures—in addressing social problems are found in Kathleen Korgen, Jonathan White, and Shelly White (2011).

As I use the term here, “service” constitutes a variety of practices informed by sociological knowledge. These practices, or *facilitating actions* (about which I will have more to say below), may be performed routinely, sporadically, or only once. The chief task and promise of service sociology, then, is to alleviate and ameliorate social problems by helping communities promote sustainability and by helping people to achieve self-determination in order to better cope with their lives.

The Place of Service Sociology

A few words are in order about the place of service sociology. To begin with, service sociology cuts a middle path between scholarship and social activism, between social science and social reform. It cuts a narrow but extensive swath between clinical sociology and the helping professions, between public sociology and academic sociology. Between case work⁵ and social theory lies the sociology of service.

The main goal of service sociology is to render help and assistance to those who need it in a way that is more efficacious than can be done either by folk wisdom, religious inspiration, speculation, or by simple charity (Wirth 1931). If it is objected that this is the task of the the psychotherapist, the priest, or the philanthropist, it, in fact, requires all of these efforts and others. Moreover, it is not advisable, or even desirable, that the service sociologist displace the physician, the psychiatrist, the psychologist, or the social worker. But the service sociologist should contribute sociologically informed interventions in alleviating problems of human hardship and suffering. This is done through skilled activities that most applied and academic sociologists already engage in: teaching, researching, writing, dialoguing, facilitating, listening, coaching, training, aiding, and tutoring.

Service sociology provides a vital check and balance to erroneous or ill-informed conventional wisdom, common sense, and organizational policy. Informing the facilitating actions that service sociology provides are the methods, the themes, and the theories that come from academic sociology.

5. Service sociology is not typically involved in the clinical aspects of treatment. The notion of the “case”—as in the pathologizing of a person presenting concrete problems—and the practice of providing individual “treatment”—as in a therapeutic procedure—are not generally part of service sociology's conceptualization or activity.

Service sociology is intended to be complementary with other forms of service, and the best way to ensure more and better-targeted facilitating actions requires working in tandem with other people (residents, volunteers, activists), professionals (educators, community leaders), and institutions (schools, community agencies, religious organizations), who as stakeholders have similar interests in rectifying the troubling situation in question. Indeed, many are quite ready to end social afflictions like hunger, poverty, and illiteracy in their own communities.

All this, however, begs the question as to whether the service sociologist has anything to contribute to mitigating social problems that is not already adequately provided by the social worker, for example. “The answer,” as Louis Wirth (1931) noted long ago, “will, of course, depend upon the resourcefulness, the imagination, the insight, the interests, and the specific training of the social workers and the sociologists in question” (p. 63).

While psychotherapy, social work, and sociology have very different cognitive orientations, when it comes to implementing concrete practices—facilitating actions—in the world of the here-and-now, they are all basically the same. The differences between them have been based on a traditional and authoritative arrangement—or as Andrew Abbott (1988, 2001) has put it, on “jurisdictional claims” by the professions and on particular “structural and cultural functions” within the academy—rather than on actual differences in concrete practices of technique (Wirth 1931). This is particularly true of sociology, which is best conceived as organized around a complex “archipelago of particular subject matters,” such as crime, deviance, family, work and economics, demography, individual attainment, race and ethnicity, communities, as so on (Abbott 2001:140). Indeed, the approaches that the various disciplines and professions contribute to addressing problems of everyday life (both social and personal) are frequently less a matter of technique, than of conceptualization, or of a particular “axis of cohesion” (Abbott 2001). However all this may be, it is eminently clear that the sociological approach, to a greater extent than the others, considers the individual in the context of social structure.

Service sociology is part of a broader division of sociological labor that also includes academic sociology, public sociology, and clinical sociology. It also can learn much from sister disciplines like sociologically informed social work, applied anthropology, and restorative justice practices. But unlike its sister fields, service sociology is not so much *patron* focused as it is *people* focused; not so much practiced in clinical settings as in everyday social and community settings. In its mandate to help people through various interventions, service sociology navigates a path between, on the one hand, serving patrons, the task of clinical sociology, and, on the other hand, talking to publics, the task of public sociology. Between patrons and publics we find *people*.⁶

Patrons (or clients), which is to say employers and contracting agents, are not the main public of service sociology. Thus, the chief difference between it and clinical sociology, whose research, as Chet Ballard and Rudy Prine (2009) state, “tends to be conducted for a set of clients, funded by them, and to have a pragmatic focus (that is, designed for use by or on behalf of those clients)” (p. 43), is that service sociology is typically performed *pro bono*. This means that while it benefits much from the assessment tools and methodologies of applied sociology—data collection design, needs and resources assessment, outcomes-based evaluation, and so on—service sociology (while sometimes necessarily cognizant of the how and the how much of funding), is frequently performed voluntarily and without payment. But also in the larger meaning of the Latin phrase, *pro bono publico*, service sociology is always done “for the public good,” and not for a particular benefactor. Thus, service sociology responds not to the needs of an employer, but to the needs of a community. And these needs are best articulated by stakeholders on the ground who know what is really going on and who have been grappling with the problems for far longer than the sociologist.

Another important difference is that in clinical sociology, the relationship between researcher and client is clear-cut and one-way: from client to researcher. This means that all major parameters of the research study are defined by the client, especially time, money, and how the results

6. The distinctions between public sociology, clinical sociology, and service sociology often blur in practice. Sociology can simultaneously serve publics, patrons, and people.

will be disseminated. In contrast, service sociology is much more democratic in that facilitating actions may be requested by the community or, perhaps more commonly, initiated by *the sociologist as volunteer*. Each of the parties, and in their own way, contributes time, energy, and knowledge to resolving the problem at hand. The effort is reciprocal and cooperative.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that service sociology takes place in a wide variety of settings: in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and in the streets; in retirement homes, hospitals, classrooms and lecture halls; in day cares and on playgrounds; in prisons, charity organizations, NGO's, nursing homes, camps, and schools; on crisis hotlines, in halfway houses, support groups, and in neighborhood clinics. We find the sociology of service anywhere the sociologist is assisting people in need of assistance. It involves working with ailing poor and elderly people, with children and the un- and under-employed, as well as the marginalized, the displaced, the injured, and the victimized.

The Strategic Approach of Service Sociology

The type of social reform that service sociology comes closest to implementing is what Karl Popper ([1945] 2003) described as "piecemeal democratic engineering" over and against "utopian social engineering" (p. xviii). This is not to say that service sociology does not address the structural conditions that give many social problems, like sexism and racism, their perennial and pervasive character. But structural conditions make such problems exceedingly difficult to root out. Getting to the root causes of the problem requires making major transformations in social structures that have existed for centuries if not millennia.

What is more, social conditions, whether understood from "systems" (Luhmann 1995) or "liquid" (Bauman 2000) perspectives, are interconnected in a variety of complex and largely unpredictable ways. This means that addressing one condition—lack of income, for example—will not necessarily address the other conditions of the problem of poverty such as malnutrition, poor health, illiteracy, hopelessness, and powerlessness. Considering structural conditions demands considering the deeper or "root" causes.

It may be objected that gradual improvements in the lives of people treat only the symptoms and do not get to the structural roots of the problem. But service sociology is always about redressing gross injustices and inequalities. Service sociology is also about altering factors such as the repression of human rights and civil rights that *exacerbate* social problems.

Many, perhaps most, sociologists reject small-scale reform, seeing it merely as a stopgap measure—perhaps necessary, but not really effective in resolving the major problems of modern life (Wuthnow 1991). They argue that such an approach postpones people's total emancipation from the exploitative social arrangements. But I argue that even a limited victory is no less a victory. And while it is difficult to know for certain if occasional, small achievements will bring about a just and nonrepressive society in an unpredictable future, we do know that these beneficial services can provide for people's needs in the concrete now.

Service sociology first attempts facilitating actions on a small scale, usually at the community level. But it must also have the ability to quickly scale up solutions that work in order to address social problems in the relations between society at large, what Etzioni (1996) calls the "community of communities," and its member communities and subgroups, and among societies. Such an approach enables each community to resolve its social problems while still working with other communities to solve their social problems. What is more, service sociology tries to move toward better systems that are sensitive to local conditions and that liberate the dynamism of individuals. The fact is that the dynamism of the people at the bottom has much more potential than plans at the top (Easterly 2006). A bottom-up approach is more democratic and contributes to community self-governance.

Service sociology is not a panacea. We will not have a more just and equal society because all homeless people are housed, all hungry people are fed, and all schoolchildren read at grade level. Service sociology will, however, bolster community because it implies hope.

As Robert Wuthnow (1991) observes, a limited and measured approach such as this, “gives us a sense of efficacy, of being able to make a difference. It inspires confidence in the human condition and in the goodness of those people who are truly in need and deserve our help” (p. 233).

Two Types of Sociological Service

We may identify two types of sociological service that are determined by the immediacy and urgency of the problematic situation. First there is *fast sociological service*. This service is typically involved with facilitating actions that provide emergency aid, usually in cases that require immediate relief of suffering. These are matters of urgent, and perhaps at times even desperate, survival. This means that the sociology of service should be involved with disaster preparedness and relief. It requires us to be ready when calamity strikes. A portion of sociology must therefore be designated as being on standby to intervene in humanitarian crises.

In contrast, *slow sociological service* involves gathering and organizing all the facts of a problematic situation before making an assessment of the real needs and concerns of the community, and formulating a plan to meet those needs. Here the service sociologist provides the means through which the social and biographical facts of people or a community can be made available to all those interested in helping.

The Promise of Service Sociology

As noted previously, the chief task and promise of service sociology is to alleviate and ameliorate social problems by helping communities promote sustainability and by helping people to achieve self-determination in order to better cope with their own lives. I offer as a starting point towards the fulfillment of this promise the following programmatic statements.

Service sociology is about helping people help themselves. The service sociologist is to provide expertise and opportunities through which people may solve their own problems as autonomously as possible and in their own ways. All people, no matter how disadvantaged or handicapped, should take some responsibility for themselves. For the sake of their own dignity, they should be expected to do for themselves the best they can (Etzioni 1993).

Service sociology is inter- as well as intra-community oriented. Every member of a community is a stakeholder in that community. It is therefore imperative that every person, family, business, and organization has some connection and involvement with the problems afflicting their community as a whole. What is more, each community must be expected to reach out to members of other communities that are less well-endowed and thus less able to deal with their own problems (Etzioni 1993, 1996).

Whenever feasible, service sociology endeavors to first work through public benevolent institutions and charitable organizations and alongside other professionals dedicated to social welfare activities. Service sociologists should provide fast sociological service to provide immediate relief. But they should also team up with other organizations that are effective at longer-term problem alleviation.

Except in emergency cases that require fast sociological service, facilitating actions that provide momentary relief should always be eschewed in favor of those that effect a more permanent or longer-lasting cure. The idea is to focus on short-term improvements with constructive longer-term implications. Charles Henderson pointed out long ago that temporary, emergency relief is only “a preliminary step in a carefully thought out and often long-continued course of treatment” (as quoted in Kusmer 1973:661). As the emergencies recur with greater frequency and increase in scope, larger, more far-reaching strategies need to be employed.

Service sociology is proactive and preventative. As with physical maladies, prevention is the cure to all social problems. As such, service sociology engages in educating society about ways to forestall

problems: for example, through conservation, using public transportation, recycling, mediation, deterrence, and so on.

Facilitating Actions

I now briefly turn to those practices informed by sociological knowledge that are the province of service sociology and that I mentioned earlier.

Service sociology offers services that facilitate and assist recipient partners (a term I prefer to recipients or beneficiaries in referring to people in need of the services of sociology because they should be regarded as equal and fully empowered allies) and communities in solving their own problems. Here I refer to a variety of sociologically informed practices in neighborly service that I call *facilitating actions*.

These facilitating actions, or assistance activities, are best characterized as benevolent errands and deeds, and just as often as helpful words, that as such, are presented by the service sociologist to the community, not in the spirit of self-assertion, but of self-donation.

The facilitating actions of service sociology include a broad range of activities aimed at serving the needs, interests, and concerns of people in community: from providing charity to rendering solace and relief; from civic engagement and volunteerism to philanthropy. They include activism, grassroots organizing, and various forms of community service. They also involve more technical forms of intervention such as consultation, service-needs assessment, program evaluation, and grant writing. The direct facilitating actions of the sociology of service include counseling, organizing, planning, and mentoring.

Postulates

We may, at present, be a long way from formulating practical guidelines for service sociologists to employ when faced with a specific social problem. Social science does not yet have a standardized format, a handbook as it were, to instruct service sociologists. But we do have a vast body of available theory and research to at least make an initial go of it.

In the spirit of moving toward a standardized format of knowledge and practice, I offer a few postulates that can guide service sociologists in implementing facilitating actions. These precepts are not intended to be strictly instrumental, they are also meant to reflect service sociology's moral ethos.

The right way to render the facilitating actions of service sociology is with care and compassion. As a consequence of the caring and compassionate aspect of facilitating action, service sociology is empathetic to the needs of people. An illustrative example of facilitating action endowed with empathy is that of the counselor whose explicit role in the therapeutic relationship is to listen—interestedly, closely, and nonjudgmentally—but most importantly, with care and compassion.

Always perform facilitating actions with caution. Facilitating actions can harm or unsettle a recipient-partner if given or withheld without due diligence. The prudent implementation of facilitating actions typically comes from intimate knowledge of people's life situation. As a consequence of the caution aspect of facilitating action, service sociology is anticipatory. This means that it is alert to unintended and undesired consequences.⁷

The facilitating actions employed must have maximum efficiency and efficacy. It is important to recognize that a particular facilitating action that may be beneficial for one person or group is not necessarily beneficial for another person or group, or for society as a whole. The service sociologist

7. Merton's (1936) identification of those elements (viz, the type and amount of knowledge that is available, the element of error, the urgency of the need, the element of basic needs, and the problem of the self-fulfilling prophecy) that can limit the prediction of negative consequences of purposive social action, can also serve to alert the service sociologist to the undesired byproducts of facilitating action.

must be cognizant of the beneficial, neutral, and detrimental consequences of each facilitating action.⁸

Facilitating actions must be flexible and adaptable to the changing exigencies of the social situation. The social situation under consideration is complex and the service sociologist recognizes that even the most basic social problem is a complicated tangle of political, social, and historical factors (Easterly 2006). We must come up with creative responses to specific problems. The service sociologist must be flexible enough and resourceful enough to be fully effective.

The facilitating action given must be adequate and sustainable. Facilitating action must be dispensed adequately or not at all. Nothing is more demoralizing to those in need as the giving of doles or pitiunces and the distribution of aid in dribs and drabs that alleviate suffering for the moment, but leave them uncertain and insecure as regards their future prospects. It is far better to assist a few and assist adequately than to assist many and help none permanently (Ellwood 1988).

Abide by the principle of nonmaleficence. As every good medical student knows, “do good” and “do no harm” are basic principles of medical ethics. Likewise, service sociologists also have a duty to do no harm. An intelligent and responsible service sociology considers whether it is sometimes best to withhold aid rather than provide it. Indeed, intelligent giving and intelligent withholding are both equal measures of true service (Ellwood 1988).⁹

Do not implement facilitating action that is unwanted. People are free agents. Often they will vote against their own self-interest and they should be allowed to do so. While service sociology is motivated by moral conviction it is not a type of moral entrepreneurship. It involves helping people who want to be helped. This rule needs to be balanced against the fact that, in some cases, those who need help and assistance may not be able to articulate their desire for help, as in the case of minors and incapacitated victims.

Do not implement facilitating action that is unneeded. Help the people who need help. Find out what the intended recipient partners of your services actually want and need. Before facilitating action is implemented it must be “preceded by carefully ascertained facts” about the situation (Addams [1910]1961:101) and the service sociologist must have intimate and genuine knowledge of the community’s needs and desires. By conducting a service-needs assessment the sociologist can determine the type and level of service needed. At the same time, sociologists must recognize that it can be difficult for people to admit, to others and even to themselves, that they are in need of help. To be helpless and in need is not a feeling many people want to have (Coles 1993).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the service tradition in sociology has a long and continuing presence. Indeed, each year since 1920 scores of sociology students, when they are inducted into the sociology honor society, Alpha Kappa Delta, become acquainted with its motto: “To investigate humanity for the purpose of service.” But the sociology of service traces its lineage to far earlier than 1920, to the three *fin de siècle* reformist sociologies of the Progressive era. For it was at this cusp of change that an extraordinary burst of problem-solving activities occurred within sociology.

The gospel, settlement, and charity sociologies stressed, above all, dealing with the problems of communities in the spirit of neighborliness; and their contribution was to bring service work into the amelioration of social problems. And it is in this lineage that the sociology of service places itself as a sociology for helping people come up with creative solutions to

8. Merton’s (1968) codification of functional analysis is particularly instructive in assessing the outcomes of facilitating actions. Merton acknowledges that assessing the net balance of consequences presents a particularly difficult problem (given the subjective, relative, and manifest/latent nature of consequences) and that a set of guiding principles is needed for such an assessment. The development of an “organon” for this purpose is a pressing task for theoretical service sociology.

9. For this we rely on a modified version of Merton’s (1968) notion of net balance in order to determine whether the positive consequences of dispensing facilitating action outweigh those of *not* providing facilitating action.

their life problems. Additionally, service sociology is influenced by the three contemporary sociologies—the humanist/liberation, the communitarian, and the public—with their commitment to strengthening civil society and communal life. This influence makes service sociology a sociology of emancipatory politics, of a new progressivism, that works to ensure the moral imperatives of justice and equality to all citizens. The main lesson to be drawn from all of these sociologies of involvement is the need of enhanced neighborly service in meeting the basic needs—for life, health, liberty, and hope—of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

I contend that it is in the current context of the ongoing economic crisis and of contentious politics (particularly Tea Party advocacy of government shutdown during the spring of 2011 and of its no-compromise stance on federal budgetary matters), on the one hand, as well as of the culture of service and of neoprogressive sentiments (particularly with the nascent Occupy Wall Street movement concerned as it is about social and economic inequities, corporate greed, and corruption and influence over government by the financial services sector and lobbyists) on the other, that the new service sociology is emerging. Thus, I believe that the sociology of service is more relevant today than ever and that the prevailing service attitude fits precisely the experience and the need of our current social, cultural, and economic situations.

Thirty-five years ago, when Lee raised the question, “Sociology for whom?,” he stated that we should answer it in this manner: Sociology for the service of humanity. “This answer,” said Lee (1976), “refers to the need to develop knowledge of direct service to people as citizens, as consumers, and as neighbors” (p. 934). Let us, in this time of great need, take up this challenge and reach out to our fellow human beings in neighborly service.

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