

Wrong D H. The oversocialized conception of man in modern sociology.
Amer. Sociol. Rev. 26:183-93, 1961.
[Brown University, Providence, RI]

To the Hobbesian question of how humans become tractable to social controls, sociology has provided an answer that doubts the very possibility of their being anything but thoroughly socialized creatures and thus denies the reality of the question. The Freudian view of man, on the other hand, which sociologists have misrepresented, sees man as a *social* though never a fully *socialized* being. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI)[®] indicates that this paper has been cited in over 180 publications since 1966.]

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"In the early 1960s, the most admired sociologists tended to hold a view of society as a smoothly running, well-integrated machine or organism which succeeded without coercion in shaping individuals to play the parts, or 'roles,' required to keep it operating. The 'conservative' implications of this conception were already being widely criticized by my former teacher, C. Wright Mills, among others, for minimizing group conflicts and eschewing a critical, even political, challenge to existing beliefs and institutions. I had myself previously engaged in such criticism. However justified, it nevertheless seemed to me that it too assumed the extreme malleability of individuals even though it stressed their class and subgroup attachments rather than presupposing the unity of the whole society. The experience of inner psychic conflict, of the pain and sacrifice involved in conforming to social demands, of what philosophers and literary artists had called 'the tragic sense of life,' seemed to be suppressed in nearly all prevailing sociological viewpoints.

"I had earlier been exposed to studies of 'culture and personality' influenced by a neo-Freudian social psychology holding that individual personality was the product of culture and social structure in opposition to Freud's alleged biologism. In the 1950s, a number of literary and social critics, including Trilling, Riesman, Marcuse, Rieff, and Norman Brown, had made Freud more accessible, separating his ideas from therapeutic concerns. I now saw in Freud a deep awareness lacking in the neo-Freudians of how the interaction of infant experience and social life created a common human nature underlying the cultural variations of time and place.

"Curiously, 'The oversocialized conception of man in modern sociology' combined the pessimism and stoicism of the intellectual climate of the 1950s with the insistence on the costs of conformity and the justice of protests against social fate rooted in the body and sexuality which became so central a few years later to the ethos of the 'counter-culture.' The latter emphasis undoubtedly accounted for the favorable reception of the article, which is still often read as a celebration of individual creativity and rebellion against social constraints. Younger sociologists understood the article as a defense of voluntarism and 'free will' against the determinism of conventional or 'mainstream' sociology.

"Such a reading was also in line with the emergence within academic sociology of new anti-positivist perspectives that often singled out Talcott Parsons, the thinker I had most fully criticized, as their major target. Yet this reading ignored the specifically Freudian grounding of my argument. Freud was hardly a voluntarist nor a believer in the infinite variety and perfectibility of humankind. My version of the inevitable tension he saw between human nature and society gave the article a less time-bound interest and appeal.

"Two recent books have been published."^{1,2}

1. Lasch C. *Haven in a heartless world: the family besieged*. New York: Basic Books, 1977. 230 p.
2. Endleman R. *Psyche and society*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981. 465 p.