

then were starting to let the “useful tool” of statistical analysis become a fetish, Berger says. They wanted the prestige of the natural sciences—as did the government agencies and foundations that provided sociologists’ research funds. The result: “increasingly sophisticated methods to study increasingly trivial topics.”

A second, even more “severe deformation,” Berger writes, came with the cultural revolution that began in the late 1960s. “The ideologues who have been in the ascendancy for the last 30 years have deformed science into an instrument of agitation and propa-

ganda,” alienating all who do not share their beliefs and values.

There still are some sociologists doing excellent work, according to Berger. And some, such as Harvard’s Orlando Patterson, address the “big questions.” But unlike the giants of the 1950s, these sociologists have created no new schools of thought.

As the public has become aware of the devastating changes, reports Berger, sociology has lost the prestige it once enjoyed, “lost its attraction to the brightest students, and lost a lot of its funding.” Can its demise, he wonders, be far off?

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Totalitarian Puzzle

A Survey of Recent Articles

When Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in 1951, the West had only recently prevailed over Hitler’s Germany and now faced the menace of Stalin’s Soviet Union. *Origins* was the first major philosophical effort to deal with totalitarianism, and more than a half-century later it remains perhaps the most significant. But, as several of the 13 scholars who consider Arendt’s magnum opus in *Social Research* (Summer 2002) observe: *Origins* is as difficult and disjointed as it is erudite, imaginative, and provocative. The masterwork of the German émigré writer (1906–75) “defies any simple attempt to state a key thesis or argument,” notes Richard J. Bernstein, a professor of philosophy at New School University, “and it is difficult to find coherence among its various parts.” The book’s title itself is misleading, in that Arendt did not seek to uncover the immediate causes of totalitarianism. “It is even difficult to determine just what she means by totalitarianism and its distinguishing characteristics,” says Bernstein.



Hannah Arendt in 1954

The explanation for *Origins*’ confusing structure is simple, according to Roy T. Tsao, a political scientist at Georgetown University. “Arendt arrived at her basic views on totalitarianism only after she had already written nearly all” of the book’s first two parts, on anti-Semitism and imperialism. A third part was to deal with Nazism, which at the time she saw as the direct successor to imperialism. But her views changed sometime around 1947, and she came to regard Nazism and Bolshevism as species of totalitarianism. Arendt simply grafted her new theory onto the trunk of the old, revising the earlier parts only enough to avoid blatant contradictions. To further complicate matters, in later editions she added a chapter, “Ideology and Terror,” that represented a still newer phase in her thinking, “displacing without fully dislodging the arguments of the one before,” writes Tsao.

Totalitarianism, in Arendt’s philosophical appraisal, represented a new kind of government, says Jerome Kohn, director of the Hannah Arendt

Center at New School University. “The hallmark of totalitarianism, a form of rule *supported* by uprooted masses who ironically and also tragically sought a world in which they would enjoy public recognition, was the appearance of what [she] called ‘radical’ and ‘absolute’ evil.” “Difficult as it is to conceive of an absolute [radical] evil even in the face of its factual existence,” Arendt wrote, “it seems to be closely connected with the invention of a system in which all men are equally superfluous,” including even, in their own fanatical minds, the “totalitarian murderers” themselves. Carrying out their logic of total domination, they aimed to transform human nature itself.

A theme that runs through all of Arendt’s thinking, says Bernstein, is the opposition between historical necessity and political freedom: “Totalitarianism is not something that *had to happen*. She rightly abhorred any suggestion that somehow it was the *inevitable* consequence of the Enlightenment, the history of metaphysics,

the nature of Western rationalism, modern bureaucracy, or modern technology. Like any disastrous contingent political event, it might have been prevented if individuals had collectively assumed the political responsibility for combating it.”

Arendt did not imagine that the totalitarian danger would pass with the demise of the Soviet Union. “Perhaps the most grim, disturbing, but realistic sentence in the entire book,” writes Bernstein, “comes near its conclusion, when she says, ‘Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man.’”

“Anyone who has lived through the uses of terror and torture, the massacres, genocides, and ‘ethnic cleansings’ that have occurred all over the world during the past few decades,” adds Bernstein, “is painfully aware of how strong and ever present these temptations are.”

Prostitution and Freedom

“Prostitution and Sexual Autonomy: Making Sense of the Prohibition of Prostitution” by Scott A. Anderson, in *Ethics* (July 2002), Department of Philosophy, Northwestern University, 1818 Hinman Ave., Evanston, Ill. 60208–1315.

Is prostitution “just another recreation-oriented service industry?” Proponents of legalizing sex-work in the United States say it is. Working outside the law, prostitutes have few legal protections and no right to unionize. Making sex-work criminal reinforces what philosopher Martha Nussbaum, of the University of Chicago, believes to be “an unjust prejudice of the sort that once denigrated the activities of women actors, dancers, and singers.”

Allowing prostitution might even be a social good, advocates contend. The freedom to use one’s body as one wishes seems a basic right. And it gives everyone at least some fall-back employment. Prostitution might gain public esteem as what City University of New York philosopher Sybil Schwarzenbach calls “erotic therapy,” and allow the sex worker to “be respected for her

wealth of sexual and emotional knowledge.”

Three kinds of arguments are usually made against legalization. One is based on traditional morality. A second asserts that prostitution spawns crime and disease. Finally, many feminists argue that prostitution furthers the degradation and subordination of women.

Anderson, a visiting professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Albany, makes a fourth case. Sex for pay should be illegal, he asserts, because the chance to sell sex impinges on the seller’s freedom—what he calls her right to “sexual autonomy.” “If sexual autonomy means anything, it means that sex does not become a necessary means for a person to avoid violence, brute force, or severe economic or other hardships.” Recognizing sexual autonomy, in other words, requires barring any interchange between the bedroom and the