

The Example of Gibson Winter

When requested for a brief note on the relations of sociology and theology, I decided I could do no better than recall the example of Gibson Winter. For Prof. Winter has worked out, in principle, an integration of sociology and ethics.¹ It could, I believe, be prolonged into an integration of sociology, ethics, and religion. There would result something like a praktische Theologie,² that would make religious people aware of their potentialities for the renewal and redemption of human society and would direct their efforts to the crucial issues of each place and time. This, of course, would not be the sole manner in which sociology and theology could collaborate fruitfully, and so the present suggestion is not to be thought exclusive.

A key step is Max Weber's celebrated distinction between social science and social policy. A social policy implements decisions, and decisions can be motivated by values in the strict sense. But as an empirical science, sociology is concerned, not with what is right or wrong, not with what ought or ought not occur, but with what in fact is so, what in fact is possible, what in fact is probable.

A second step is the distinction of four different types or styles of social science. There is the physical style that confines social science to the methods employed in the natural sciences. There is the functional style

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On the relations of sociology and theology, I have only a suggestion to make. It seems to me that Prof. Gibson Winter¹ of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago has done a remarkable piece of interdisciplinary work in relating sociology and ethics and that by following his example theologians could relate sociology, ethics, and religion or, for that matter, psychology, ethics, and religion² or, again, economics, ethics, and religion. It will be understood that I am no more than making suggestions and that I do not wish them to be conceived as exclusive.

First, then, there is Max Weber's celebrated distinction between social science and social policy. Social policy pursues goals; and it proceeds from decisions; and the decisions are or, at least, may be motivated by values. But social science is empirical science. It is concerned, not with what is right or wrong, not with what ought or ought not to be, but with what in fact is so, what in fact is possible, what in fact is probable. Prof. Winter accepts Weber's distinction but goes beyond it. Between social science and social policy he inserts social ethics. The ethics adds the value judgements from which social science abstains^{by} and ~~as~~ which social policy should be guided.

Next, social science is not homogeneous, and Prof. Winter distinguishes four different styles which he names the physical, the functional, the voluntarist, and the intentional. The physical style considers that the methods of natural science are the only ~~methods~~ scientific methods; it is positivist, behaviorist, reductionist. The functional ~~style~~ style knows that meaning ~~a constituent~~ is constitutive of human reality

of its categories. Finally, empirical religious studies can yield information about many ~~other~~ things and, among them, about the consequences of ^{the} current policies of religious groups.

of its categories. Finally, while empirical religious studies are always a source of information,

of its categories. Finally, empirical religious studies as grounded in and criticized by a philosophy of religion and as included within the perspectives of a theology would provide the ongoing source of information on religious events and tendencies, short-comings and dangers, probabilities and potentialities.

of its categories.

Empirical religious studies, then, grounded and criticized by a philosophy of religion and inserted within the perspectives of a theology generate common policies for religious groups.

There would result a praktische Theologie³