

**QUEST FOR SCIENTIFIC IDENTITY: SUCCESSIVE PARADIGMS IN SOCIOLOGY**

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**BACKGROUND**

Through its history sociology has suffered a basic identity crisis. Its subject matter — the study of relations among people, makes it accountable to the scrutiny of scientists and lay people, as is the case with other social sciences. Sociology has striven to identify with science and to divorce itself from art. But it has been attacked: 1) for its *pre-scientific or non-scientific* methods; 2) for results seen as meddling by those whose vested interests are not served, and as inhumane by those who see objectivity as a cloak for exploitation.

Kuhn (1970 82) says that while some scientists proceed with normal science, other scientists may construct crises where anomalies are seen as more significant than the mere puzzles of normal science. Over time, more scientists attack the existing paradigm, and generate paradigmatic change. This applies to sociologists, though the model is oversimplified. But the model has support among practicing sociologists: "... barely one quarter of our sample views even the recent history of sociology as progressive and cumulative." (Jones, Kronus 1975 5) There is substantial opinion among sociologists that Kuhn's argument is relevant for sociology, contrary to Herren's argument (1971 203) that pre-paradigmatic sciences find Kuhn's formulation inadequate for their own developmental history.

Sociologists have never had a dominant paradigm or one standard against which to test alternatives. Insofar as a sense of personal identity is tied to an occupational identity, that identity for sociologists has not been established through consensual validation of a large social scientific reference group, nor by any clear establishment of sociology's position in the hierarchy of science. Because social role is tied to social position and personal identity is tied to both, the sociologist is unclear regarding his/her personal and occupational identity as a scientist.

Scientists as such, and particularly social scientists experience political and economic pressures applied by non-scientists which force awareness of political, educative, advisory, and economic roles (Blume 1974 x). For the sociologist this added burden of roles

is detrimental to the capacity for development of a scientific identity. With fewer fixed points for self-assessment, there is an expanding drift toward alienation or anomie. As satisfaction with self is tied to accomplishment of a scientific task, ambiguity regarding the nature of the task and the rules for its performance undermines capacity for self-satisfaction.

These ambiguities are articulated throughout the history of sociology in the focal issues of prevailing paradigms. We need an awareness of where sociologists are as scientists, and what brought them to a crisis in western sociology (Gouldner 1970).

**SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM**

In the early 1900's Saint-Simon led the discussion to support a socialized utilitarianism opposed to the individual utilitarianism which was entrenched in Europe's middle class. This view was taken by Comte, Durkheim and others, which broadened and extended the utilitarian premises of the middle class (Gouldner 1970 92). Sociology came to focus on the middle class as the residual element of utilitarian culture. While some sociologists retained grand illusions, sociologists generally took a more humble view of themselves, and practiced sociology in a manner neither intellectually nor professionally satisfying (Gouldner 1970 93).

Sociologists were trying to establish a social place for the discipline in a European milieu where the changing middle class was significantly altering major institutions, detaching themselves from the morality of the traditional church, altering property relations and governmental forms and challenging old belief systems with no coherent scheme to replace them. Science became attractive in part because it made possible a new belief system. But the sociologist faced an impossible task in a climate of simultaneous expectations from the lay world for an apolitical, detached view of society, and for a set of answers regarding society which would establish a viable moral order. Factional differentiation arose from the schism between the romanticism of Marxism and the "value-free" academic sociology of Comte. From this emerged an anomic,

confused sociology bereft of insights into the Hobbesian problem of order.

Early sociologists are described as a mixed bag of scholars without much institutional support, arriving at sociology via diverse routes such as political economy, philosophy, ethnology, and law. Sociological views of theory ranged from grand classificatory schemes to social problem orientations and attempts to solve five basic dilemmas in the social order:

- 1) liberty versus authority;
- 2) stability and continuity versus change;
- 3) equality and participation in the social and cultural orders and hierarchy;
- 4) tension between rationality and values; fear of extended rationality undermining non-rational value components of human life;
- 5) contradiction between people's mastery of internal and external environs, and subjugation to power centers they created. (Eisenstadt, Currelaru 1976 7)

Judgments were asked of sociologists who were imprisoned in a *positivist fallacy* on the assumption that one can test what is true and false without consulting others, thus preventing social judgment (Bronowski 1965 57). In this turbulent atmosphere regarding basic questioning of the social order and scientific endeavor, positivism was itself a house divided on issues of order, utility and humane values. In keeping with Kuhn's revolutionary perspective on scientific paradigms, Marxism arose to challenge elements of positivism. There was no unitary paradigm to assault.

### MARXISM

Marx addresses order as a dialectic, an inevitable struggle between thesis and antithesis. In rejecting Benthamite utilitarianism Marx emerges as a proponent of socialized utilitarianism, but with ambivalence, because theory included the hope of the future transcendence of utilitarianism. It was accepted as a present course by Marxist sociologists who applied utilitarian standards to daily politics and planning. The constituency of Marxism was found not in the middle class, wooed by positivists, but among marginal outsiders who were lowly, relatively powerless, and far from enjoying the benefits of the new society (Gouldner 1970 110).

In its focus on property and power relations in industrial, capitalist societies, Marxism

attacks inhumane institutionalized relations and seeks a more powerful place in society for outsiders and the oppressed. Marxists convert the rationality of capitalist societies into an irrationality for which the challenger paradigm provides a correction which will permit a truly rational order. "Comptian and academic sociology became the sociology and ideology of strata and societies that made the first and fastest breakthrough into industrialization. Marxism became the sociology adopted by underdeveloped regions and by strata least integrated into industrial societies, by classes who sought but were denied their benefits (Gouldner 1970 113)

Marxism became a romantic sociology, taking a more qualitative methodology than the empiricism espoused by positivist sociologists imitating physical science models. Positivism thus had very different scientific reference groups among non-sociologist scientists, and a lay reference group seeking stability of its emergent social order. Marxism rejected and was rejected by both the majority of academicians and the lay middle class. Its reference group was the marginal, and the alienated, which included many of the Marxist theorists.

The antithesis presented by Marxism shows few current signs of a real movement toward theoretical synthesis, whatever practical politico-economic accommodations may have occurred. Among Marxists intellectuals such as Lukacs, Marcuse, and Habermas, challenge rather than accommodation to the order of positivism continues (Young 1976 29).

Perhaps it is significant that this view is best articulated among Marxists who are attached to universities, where those supporting rational models based in capitalism still predominate, and where Hegelian philosophy is respectable. Literature from such scholars circulates more to the college educated who have been schooled in rational models, rather than to the lowly and the powerless outsiders, who are not the reference group of the university.

The Marxist paradigm emerged to compete with various elements of positivism which Marxism tried to portray as a unitary thesis from which to argue the antithesis. But positivism was not unitary, and changing directions within the paradigm were discernible.

### CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY

As institutional complexity increased with

growing industrialization and political imperialism, social changes created a need for changed explanations of social order. In this context, evolutionary explanations common to academic sociology began to give way to emerging functionalism. Much of the scholarly work was addressed to the threat of Marxism as an intellectual alternative and political tool. Sociologists became concerned by the pressures to desert objectivity for intervention, as the tenets of utilitarianism and *laissez faire* politics and economics became issues.

In this period sociologists became more determined to seek a collective sense of self through establishment of professional associations, journals, research centers and separate academic departments in universities. In the United States, sociologists found a fortuitous situation for establishing loci of operations, given the expanding system of higher education, the control of educational institutions by lay persons, and the strong support of American universities for empirical, problem-oriented research.

The institutionalized objectivity geared to problem-solving forced sociologists to further address the issue of value freedom. The component issues of value freedom have been separated into 1) objectivity, and 2) partisanship, with the argument that value freedom as a unitary construct is absurd, because it would reduce our capacity to decide the purpose and nature of sociological enterprise (Riedesel 1976). Such a position, if correct, does much to explain the inability of sociologists to communicate among themselves in a manner adequate to resolve the issue.

Via Durkheim and Weber, and in reaction to the increasing secularization of society and the Marxist threat, academic sociology of the classical period moved toward the protection of a limited residual sphere of social study which would offend few and serve many — hardly a portent of the establishment of a strong sense of identity among sociologists. The search for identity was not resolved, but was well-pursued by numerous sociologists of Parsonian functionalism — a synthesis of the variants of anthropological and sociological positivism of the classical period.

### **STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM**

Parsons combined the theoretical thrust of

functionalism which emerged from the basis of utilitarian rationalism, with voluntarism, a reflection of the importance of behavior based on individually-held values. The events of the great depression of the 1930's and World War II created greater social and individualist utilitarianism, increased the concern about communism, and the welfare state as delineated by the Roosevelt New Deal. These factors moved Parsons and his disciples toward reduced concern with moral values and motives underlying voluntarism, to a greater preoccupation with the question of social order. Although the conformity assumptions of voluntarism were still present, they took an added meaning at the macro level of the social system. It was an elaborate structure incorporating a world view of a tidy rational network of institutions and people in which small local networks fit nicely as wheels within wheels.

The Parsonian scientists exemplify their own paradigm. From a conservative anti-socialist voluntarism, Parsons moved toward accommodation with the welfare state. Parsonians found a sense of identity in alliance with the prevailing establishment, and with reference groups which offered survival and support. The concern of Parsonian functionalists with bureaucratization and professionalization does not represent pure descriptive analysis of the social realm viewed objectively by the social scientist. It is instead the occupational environment in which sociologists themselves define meaning for themselves and the discipline. That this adaptation, congenial to some sociologists, and many organization men, was not shared by all is evident in the alternative practices of those of the period who, as a diverse minority, worked toward the firmer grounding of other paradigms.

### **COUNTER PARADIGMS**

Eisenstadt and Curelaru (1976 195) identify six important counter-models which challenge the assumptions of functionalism:

- 1) The conflict model versus the consensus model; the powers and conflict model versus the value-normative model.
- 2) The individual-rational model (exchange) versus the systemic or functional model.
- 3) The group interest versus social system or division of labor model.
- 4) Symbolic interaction; individual meaning.

5) The symbolic structuralist model (Claude Levy-Strauss).

6) The historical systemic model including cybernetics seen in neo-Marxist models.

Of these the interactionist, conflict and exchange views achieved major consideration among sociologists, though there was some espousal of cybernetic and ecological models which are likely to continue in *general systems theory* perspective.

In the 1950's alternative spokesmen became vocal in suggesting the limitations of functionalism. C W Mills blended an interest in symbolic interaction with a special regard for motive. He found the conflict paradigm of Marxism to have explanatory power for social features of change poorly accounted for by status-quo orientation of functionalists. He recognized the fundamental conflict between functionalism and reform.

Homans and other exchange theorists sought answers from psychology, including Skinnerian behaviorism for the basic questions of interpersonal relations, and highlighted the importance of rewards and costs in a manner consonant with Benthamite utilitarian philosophy. Like Marxism, exchange theory places economics in the center of social dynamics. In the same decade in which Goffman produced the highly articulated dramaturgical metaphor for social life, and Garfinkel went forth to advocate a new sociological approach as ethnomethod, Homans argued for assigning an active role to men as builders and users of social structures and social orders, and not simply as their receivers and transmitters.

Coming from a perspective which makes a central concern of the bases for actions and motives, and the unit act, suggested but underdeveloped by Parsons, these sociologists may be subsumed under the heading of role theorists. While symbolic interaction with its specialized concern for the manner in which beings come to share meaning through symbols, has a central core of theoretical concerns. Role theory is more global in its concerns and more amorphous in its theoretical base. It contains not only the rational exchanges of actors seen by Homans, but also the roles played wherein feelings not necessarily attached to rational concerns, are expressed by actors. It reminds us that roles

are played in everyday life, a point argued strongly by Garfinkel. who rejects the structural concerns of the Parsonians and the group struggles which have been outlined by Marxists.

In exchange, symbolic interaction, ethnomethod and its antecedent, phenomenology theory, the social world shrinks to the more intimate relations of ordinary life. The focus shifts to increased specification of the nature of primary and secondary group association through which the self is formed. Sociologists are indeed personally involved in the social order they explore and postulating alternative paradigms has occurred to attempt explaining the great anomalies of biased objectivity and the alienation and anomie of self-other relations in an orderly society.

Just as reactions to structural functionalism sought to put people back into the study of society, so did Marxism begin to take new turns aided by the scholarship of the Frankfurt School. Work begun in the late 1920's circulated widely in the last three decades in the United States, particularly that of Adorno, Fromm and more recently, Habermas. In rejecting positivism from a critical dialectic based in hermeneutics, this critical school emphasized the possibility of both a rational and a humanist society. In his search for a "sane society" with a "humanized technology" Fromm captures the essence of the Marxist theme of alienation in technologically advanced societies. It is little wonder that attacks on the other-directed apologists for that social system were so vigorous.

It is also necessary in the attempt to humanize offensive features of dialectical materialism. Bronowski invokes a plague on both Marxism and positivism when he notes that values must both join men in society and allow individual freedom. Philosophies which do not recognize both needs cannot evolve values and cannot allow them (Bronowski 1965 55).

In the 1960's a more focused questioning of the sociologist's role was occasioned by several phenomena: 1) the blossoming of the Civil Rights movement; 2) the emergence of the New Left in a context of the politics of foreign intervention and a welfare state; 3) the sensing that the increasing other-