

EMPIRICAL IMPERATIVES OF MARXIAN SOCIOLOGY

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MARXIAN SOCIOLOGY

A striking development in sociology in recent years is the contribution of self-labeled Marxists, which range from the direct expansion of the Marxist framework in sociology to an indirect effect on theories which borrow partially from Marx's analysis such as dual labor-market theory and internal colonialism (Wright 1975, 1977; Syzmanski 1976a, 1976b). It is creditable to Mills (1956) that Marx's sociology gained entry to United States sociology. Marxist perspectives appeared first in the writings of status quo sociologists who wanted to refute Marx. Marxist-oriented articles have only recently become noticeable in main-stream sociology journals.

With growing recognition and acceptance, Marxist sociologists have expanded the amount and quality of their works. Theoretical and methodological developments have dominated these works, but a major controversy has emerged which hinges on the relevance of scientific method.

Marx has consistently stressed the idea of determinism and the notion of laws, as applied to human behavior. Behavior is caused: it is not a product of spontaneous reactions. The forces which compel humans to act are ordered. These two ideas of determinism and laws of behavior are implicit but unexpressed in the writings of social scientists. Marx, however, is quite explicit in discussing the nature of human behavior.

Marx's determinism is developed through a critique of philosophical idealism. Ideas are not the compelling force behind human behavior. Rather, the realities of the material-life processes are the forces which formulate the conditions of human action. The material world is the prime motivator of human behavior. Thus, social behavior is not oriented to ideas, but is the product of the quest for the satisfaction of material desires.

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past." (Marx 1959, 320).

The effect of these material forces is not random, according to Marx. Rather, as in

the physical sciences, the social sciences can interpret these patterns and identify established laws. The orientation of social science is to understand laws of human behavior in the social realm. Our primary concern "... is not the higher or the lower degrees of development of the social antagonism which arises out of the natural laws of capitalist production, but the laws in themselves which work out of an iron necessity toward an inevitable goal. (Marx 1974, xlix) The social sciences must do more than describe the conditions of capitalist societies. They must examine the patterns and workings of social dynamics, which included the verification of laws.

Contemporary Marxist sociologists have varied in interpreting Marx's ideas of determinism and laws, and most notably among the three most influential groups. The Frankfurt school sociologists are the oldest group, and they give only cursory attention to determinism and laws. They stress the social-psychological aspects of alienation. The second group originates from the Frankfurt school, with ties to the left-wing student movements in the United States. This group rejects positivist logic as well as traditional sociology. They do not accept Marx's ideas of determinism and laws as empirical mandates. Instead, they treat the Marxist framework as a method of social criticism. The third group of United States sociologists interpret determinism and laws as outlined by Marx as mandates for research. They try to analyze the dynamics of capitalism empirically as elements of social relations. This includes operating, quantifying, and testing aspects of Marx's sociology.

THE FRANKFORT SOCIOLOGISTS

Frankfurt-school sociologists do not see the imperatives of determinism and laws as a call to use scientific method. They reject empirical methods outright. Adorno, for example, shifted from endorsing empirical methods as practiced by German and United States sociologists to condemning such work as stupid, blind, and sterile (Lazarsfeld 1972, 173). The Frankfurt school stresses the dialectic. It is not just a way of viewing the social system in terms of opposing forces. The totality of the social situation must be understood in terms includ-

ing the potentials of social existence. As Marcuse points out, research incorporates theory, observation, and potential courses of action (1960, ix). Quantitative approaches to the study of social systems are seen as falling short of the criteria of a Marxist science of society. One must focus on the dialectic as the method for the social sciences.

Criticism of empirical sociology is developed further in the works of Marcuse and Adorno, and both think that analysis with quantitative techniques obscures social reality, and negates important aspects of the social system. The use of quantitative method becomes a fetish rather than a precise and definitive method. It "...falsifies the measures, interrogations, and calculations and, therefore, does not conflict with them and does not disturb them. They retain their exactness, and are mystifying in their very existence." (Marcuse 1964, 191). Empirical sociology based on inductive logic fails to incorporate the dialectic. Such methodology "...becomes an ideology in the strictest sense of the word, a necessary illusion." (Adorno 1976, 246). Quantitative sociology not only destroys social reality, it becomes a false ideology which tends to support the status quo. Potential elements of social change are ignored with nondialectical methods. According to the Frankfurt school, quantitative sociology provides a refracted picture of the social system and serves as an agent of conservative elements within the system.

RADICAL SOCIOLOGISTS

The radical sociologists view Marx's analysis as a springboard for social criticism (Pitch 1974). They consider determinism and laws to be established facts. Sociology's goal should not be to test theoretical issues. Instead it should provide an illustration of the conditions of capitalism. Repression and exploitation are given in the capitalist system, and there is no need to question their existence. Critical methodology should be used to show how such things as exploitation are manifested in everyday life. Conflict methodology "...should develop a set of techniques organized to obtain quality information from organizations which...stand in contrast to the interest of people generally for reflective self-control over their own social world." (Young 1976, 230). Radical sociologists completely reject quantitative

methodology.

Radical sociologists believe that quantifying the social world obscures the determinants of social behavior and the laws of the dynamics of capitalism. Quantitative sociology becomes consensus sociology which emphasizes equilibrium and control. Empirical methods are inappropriate for developing either theory or action. Some say Marx's sociology is profoundly anti-empirical (Horton 1972, 25). Others see quantitative methods as useful only to sociologists who maintain an interest in consensus and system maintenance. They provide tools for manipulating the system.

Radical sociologists argue that quantitative data that is available to the researcher only taps the periphery of the state of social relations (Lehman & Young 1974). As part of the superstructure, the data that is accessible is biased toward favoring a special sector of the social system (Young 1976). Consequently, poor-quality data fails to reveal the determinants and laws of social behavior. Quantitative sociology neutralizes any potential for social change. However, radical sociologists have reached no agreement on method.

Following the second generation of the Frankfurt school, some radical sociologists believe hermeneutics is a method to reach understanding of the determinants and laws of social behavior (Booth & Crisler 1976). Others simply label ethnomethodology and phenomenology as a new form of conservatism (McNall & Johnson 1975). Since the radical sociologists have not developed a consistent methodology, they seek a satisfactory Marxist method.

CRITIQUE OF QUANTITATIVE METHOD

The Frankfurt school and radical sociologists share three general criticisms of quantitative method. 1) Quantitative sociology uses positivist logic and neglects important components of the dialectic. They argue that positivism is insensitive to the nature of social relations which hinge on competing groups struggling to control mass production. 2) Quantitative methods are obsessed with objectivity which mutually isolates theory, research methods, and practice. Thus, empirical methods lack a theoretical focus. 3) Quantitative sociology fails to transcend capitalist ideology. It emphasizes objectivity and thus rejects any commitment to change. Quantifying becomes a tool to control the social system,

and to maintain the ideology of equilibrium. Separating theory and method is a superficial attempt to objectify an ideology of scientific control.

STRUCTURALISM & SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Some Marxist sociologists in the United States have opposed the methodological tradition of anti-empiricism, and have been affiliated with Marxist structuralism. Empirical methods are used to analyze the social structure. Through scientific method, the determinants of laws of social behavior are identified. Marx's notions of determinism and law are not established facts. Rather, the ideas of determinism and law become a mandate for using methods to test theories of social structure. These structural Marxists operationalize various aspects of the dynamics of capitalism (Szymanski 1976b, 1977; Wright 1977; Radcliff 1980). By applying the scientific method to the study of the social structure, refined theories about the dynamics of capitalism can be developed.

One structuralist argues that the goal of sociology should be the model of the hard sciences (Szymanski 1973, 26). Thus, he separates himself from both Marxist and non-Marxist critics who reject the scientific method. He speculates that this rejection is based on misuses of scientific method, and not on the merits of social scientists' research techniques. The rejection of scientific method denies the development of theory which is rigorously disciplined by constant testing and retesting.

Scientific approaches to sociology need not artificially separate theory, research, and political practice. Theories can be defined and redefined through research which provides a systematic awareness of the oppressive nature of social relations. There is nothing inherent in quantifying sociological data or in the other steps in the research design which makes these endeavors either apolitical or bourgeois. Past abuses of method do not justify a move toward subjective methods which are "...more or less speculative endeavors supplemented perhaps by trivial observation." (Szymanski 1973, 25).

MARX & SCIENTIFIC SOCIOLOGY

Szymanski contends that the base for a science of social relations is found throughout the works of Marx. The ideas of determinism and laws are mandates for the social scientist and the activist alike to

examine the social system systematically by using the logic of scientific method, with awareness of the unique character of social behavior. Most important, the scientific method can assist theory development and discover ways to implement social change. Another structuralist notes that Marx's theory is developed by successive approximation which yields abstract generalizations about the development of social relations. These abstractions are refined through specifying the empirical states in which the working ideals of these abstractions vary. While Marx's laws are seemingly impervious to empirical validation, the unfinished work of Marx mandates that theory refinement can only come from empirical observation (McQuarie 1978, 232). McQuarie's interpretation of Marx includes theory construction and testing as essentials.

This interpretation of Marx challenges traditional sociology on its own ground, because it becomes more difficult to reject Marxist sociologists simply on the basis of method. Marx's sociology is interpreted as a theoretical frame which can successfully survive the rigors of scientific testing. Knowledge generated by this interpretation of Marx can be communicated to non-Marxists, who can then address the issues he raised. Marx's sociology becomes more than radical ideology. It is a scientific model through which continued refinement can provide a better explanation of social relations.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Szymanski's studies of the nature of racial and sexual inequality illustrate the impact of his empirical interpretation of Marx. Much of the research in racism and sexism treat them as independent phenomena. Szymanski argues that this separation of the issues leads to errors in theory and method. From a Marxist framework, he shows that sexual and racial inequality are theoretically and statistically related. While the controversy stirs, his works illustrate the empirical orientation of Marxists (Riedesel 1978, 1979; Szymanski 1979; Villemez 1977). Szymanski shows that Marx is not an outmoded giant of the past, but is useful today for those doing quantitative research. It is important that Szymanski's work has attracted the response of non-Marxist sociologists, and that their response comes not on ideological grounds,

but on grounds of its theoretical and empirical challenge to traditional sociology.

The Frankfurt school and the radical sociologists fail to provide theoretical constructs which are either testable or translatable into non-Marxist terms. The Frankfurt school does little to provide a systematic evaluation of Marx's sociology. The radical sociologists' interpretation reaches only those already converted. One must assume that Marx's determinates and laws are scientifically established, as revealed in Marx's writings, before one can follow their analysis. Neither perspective is a threat to traditional sociology because both reject the logic of scientific method.

All three interpretations make a unique contribution, but the one which incorporates empirical research provides the most fruitful challenge. Marx's empirical imperatives are to study 1) the determinates, and 2) the laws of social relations. By treating these imperatives as subject to adjustment, Marx's sociology becomes a viable social theory. Subjecting Marx's sociology to theory testing specific empirical analysis puts it in a form which communicates with non-Marxist sociologists. The quantifying and hypothesis testing of Marxist theory challenges traditional sociology, just as traditional sociology challenges Marx. Such challenges need not be the sole motivators for Marxist sociologists. On the other hand, these challenges may serve as a key motivator in fulfilling Marx's empirical imperatives.

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PARTIAL ACCOMMODATION

In the more recent episodes, Archie gains some control over his own life. He has social position as co-owner of a bar, and this position allows him some freedom of choice. It is not surprising then, to find that Archie is softening on some issues. With a little power, he is able to accept a Jew as a business partner. He has now broadened his categories to *good Jews* and *bad Jews* from his previous single category of *bad* for all Jews. And he has a personal identity to put with the category, Jew. Through this he also gains a sense of security, because he now knows how to interact with a Jew. Archie still perceives himself as having the most power, and as being *better* in some ways than the Jew. This view shows how the interactions are dominated by a control of power. In our society, prejudice in the form of bigotry is a normal reaction to a deficit in power. It is a means of expressing superiority and is quite pervasive.

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