

EXPANSIONS & CONTRACTIONS: SOCIOLOGICAL LABOR PAINS

Patricia Atcheson Harvey, Colorado State University

THE SOCIOLOGY MISSION

The social role of the sociologist as interpreter, intervener and arbitrator among individuals, groups, and society has long been at issue. It was at first presumed that eventually sociology would give birth to a unitary, normal science paradigm. As Coleman points out, Comte had a motivation to influence the course of society. "He had a conception of that knowledge and the prediction it would allow as leading to a 'scientific humanism'" (Coleman 1978:678). His view was conservative and group-oriented. Social scientists were to serve as a guiding elite providing the basis for rational planning to bring about new order from what he saw as deterioration of existing social order. (Bealer 1979:87).

In the ensuing years the concern for providing guidance within a framework which makes possible "scientific humanism" rather than discerning these as irreconcilable terms has much plagued the discipline.

SOCIAL EVOLUTIONISM

Spencer's evolutionary scheme asserts social selection as concomitant with natural selection. He foresaw human perfection as inevitable. His repudiation of state interference with natural growth of society led him to oppose state aid to the poor who were unfit and should be eliminated. (Hofstadter: 41) Private charity for the poor was actually for the benefit of enhancing altruism in the superior beings rather than providing comfort for their inferiors. He saw it as the task of sociology to identify the course of evolution, not attempt to alter that course. Andrew Carnegie and other entrepreneurs embraced this happy justification for their right to proceed unimpeded by unionization or state interference toward greater business success. Indeed Spencer's criticisms of government regulation have today caused a resurgence of appeal of his philosophies. (Timasheff and Theodorson: 1976 44).

Less enthusiasm is likely to be currently mounted for Social Darwinist doctrine of Spencer and Sumner for improving the race through eliminating widows, orphans, and the old. (Martindale: 1981 167). Their "survivalist

views" were incompatible with the concept of social equality. Their view that social determinism could not be legislated throws up a stone wall against civil rights activity. Thus the "social plan" of Social Darwinism emerges as a "holy war" against reformism, protectionism, socialism, and government intervention (Hofstadter: 54).

In reaction to Social Darwinism, we see a number of emerging views: 1) in the modest incorporation of a general evolutionary trend toward progress emerging in the work of those regarded as the "classical school," 2) in the emergence of a strong Marxist perspective in the U.S., 3) in the conflict Darwinists, and 4) in the highly vocal responses of Lester Ward.

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

Ward refuted the theoretical base of Darwinist action philosophy and pressed for applied sociology. He rejected passive determinism for a body of theory suitable to the uses of reform (Hofstadter: 68). He rejected social class elitism of "social selection," advocating education as a leveler and state management as a corrective to elite social and economic abuse of lower classes. His action plan was based in "A sociocratic world [which] would distribute its favors according to merit as individuals demand, but by equalizing opportunity for all, it would eliminate advantages now possessed by those with undeserved power, accidental position or wealth, or antisocial cunning." (Hofstadter 83). In his humanistic philosophical thrust he was joined by Small, E. A. Ross, Edward Bellamy and William James who objected to Spencer's deterministic philosophy with its ulterior practical goals. The power of this point of view is shown in Dewey's 1920 *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. He urged that philosophers abandon the "sterile" study of epistemology and metaphysics for practical philosophy related to politics, education, and morals (Hofstadter: 137).

As Ward was finding recruits for his actionist campaigns, conflict Darwinists perpetuated the evolutionary thesis in a manner which pitted group against group. For Gumplowicz evolution was actually set back by the conflicts

among groups based in race hatred. Others suggested dominance of groups over others on the basis of economics (Loria) demography (Coste) and religion (Kidd). Social Darwinists became active in the eugenics movement (1894-1915). Social Darwinism became a justification for racism and imperialism. Martindale notes the intellectual debt of Nazism to conflict Darwinism by 1933.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is not surprising that Marxists began to look askance at Social Darwinism. While they were willing to accept the biological basis of class struggle and idea that societies evolve, they found the perspective's rationale for laissez-faire capitalism, business expansion, suppression of unions and anti-interventionist bias unacceptable. They challenged both the elitism of Social Darwinism and the sterile "objectivity" of science without humanism found in Social Darwinism and Positivism. Marxists found Ward's interventionist advocacy more to their liking, although he did not reciprocate by embracing socialism, favoring his own sociocracy instead. For the Marxists social injustice must be righted, social class abolished and the state made the servant of the people to create the better world. Letting the end justify the means, often directed the action arm of this sociopolitical framework. Marxism has from early on held a dual existence as a theory of society embedded in the intellectual and scientific life and institutions of modern societies and as the doctrine of a social movement. The refinements of Marxism encouraged by the "critical" Frankfurt group (c. 1920) will be noted later as the fruits of their criticism have only recently impacted on social action in American Sociology. So also have the concerns of dialectical sociology (c. 1955) in the work of Gurvitz, Gross and Dahrendorf and particularly in the actionist framework of radical sociology.

CLASSICAL SCHOLARS

The classic scholars are represented by Weber (1864-1920) and Durkheim (1858-1917). Weber thought that positivistic objectivity and humanistic German idealism could contribute to social understanding. Unlike the evolutionists who saw their task as arranging historical materials to "chart" evolutionary

progress to their own "advanced" societies, Weber used comparative historical data in the construction of ideal types to further empirical comparison of social groups by scientists. In his view the establishment of patterns would enhance objective science, but to this must be added the researcher's awareness of the social actors subjective views of their situation. His concept of "subjective understanding" restores the humanity of actors to the objective setting.

For the scientist Weber distinguished between the study of values and the affirmation of values. Unlike the Marxists, Darwinists, Postivists and followers of Ward, he saw the sociologist in two roles — as objective scientist and when "off duty" as a value-committed citizen. His social action view as a sociologist was to make historical and sociological sense of cultural development in order to delineate and solve problems by arrival at causal knowledge. He believed sociologists must be capable of separating cause-finder and cause-supporter in their roles as scientist and citizen, but had the right the expression of both.

The Durkheim view found room for evolutionary principles. He accepted Spencer's types or species as steps in an evolutionary process of compounding (Bock 1978). He feared the brash path trod by Marxists into new frontiers of human society. Essentially, Durkheim became the major articulator of a synthesis of positivism, a rational-empirical approach, and conservatism as a set of fundamental assumptions about man and society anchored in tradition. Early in his career Durkheim believed sociology must be free of philosophy. After twenty years he believed sociology had become mature enough to serve as "tool and complement for the solution of the great social and philosophical problems of humanity" (DeCoppens 1976:56). From a naturalistic positive science, sociology would essentially become science of morality. In his discussions of *homo duplex*, a biological and social compound creature, his conservatism shows. The ideal person uses rational and manageable means to realize and objectify the collective ideals of society, limiting and containing his own desires and hopes. In his treatment of religion and the state the primacy of these agents over individuals was obvious. Durkheim did not foresee, and would have been horrified at

such forms as Nazism that the deification of society could take.

While both Durkheim's analyses and those of Weber serve as precursors of functionalism, a perspective charged with conservatism, the Weberian view also suggested an attention to understanding the individual, providing an emphasis on psychological sociology, as exemplified by the Chicago school and later by the emergency of symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, phenomenology, and to some degree, by the new-Marxist critical school.

The Durkheimian view looks both backward upon Social Darwinism and forward to functionalism suggesting the subservience of individual rights to larger social designs, to societal equilibrium and justification of existing "functional" forms.

CROSSFIRE AND CONFUSION

Early sociology felt many competing pressures from business, political and religious groups. As Wiley observed "...To achieve autonomy and self-direction the early sociologists had to devise a formula of objective science and ethical-political neutrality...the early sociologists eventually put together a field which was mildly reformist, without being too close to either socialism or business-directed conservatism" (Wiley 1979:53). Such was the path chosen by the Chicago school, whose influence dates roughly to the period between World Wars I and II. Using an ecological motif, Park, Burgess and others used the city as a social laboratory to develop theories of process based on competition of groups for space and resources. They looked at demographic variables and at the use of symbols by people. The school, buttressed by philosophers G. H. Mead and William James became known on two fronts for the ecological perspective of Park and W. I. Thomas and the interactionist focus of G. H. Mead. While Mead's view suggested evolutionary progress toward a humane society, especially through progressive education, the direction taken by Thomas suggests that while the situation is defined by individuals who come to share meanings, larger units of social organization such as laws and social institutions are formed from these social norms. For Thomas sociology is a science of institutions, to be supplemented by social psychology based on the logic of the

natural sciences. The interface of personality and culture was to be used for understanding of larger social processes. His colleague, Park, has limited optimism for directed social change. Park saw endless competition, continuous conflicts and accommodations resulting in orders which were not necessarily progressive, unless based in greater rationality. Thomas saw "creative man" as using sociological and psychological knowledge to free people from limiting institutional constraints as a basis for social reform. For Park, hope lay in democratic frameworks. In later years Blumer, Janowitz and others would take this message to their action schemes: Reform toward a better society requires democratic community and increasing knowledge. This theme subsequently appears in the dramaturgical model of Goffman.

THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

The Park-Thomas Chicago school, particularly at the time of Howard S. Becker who tried to expose the power of "moral entrepreneurs" to disadvantage others, came under criticism for having the effect of justifying increasing federal bureaucracy and providing "cool dispassionate sympathy convenient to those in power and comforting to guilt-ridden liberal academics" (Fischer & Strauss 1978:482).

Less influential with regard to actionist orientation, but available to interactionist sociologists were the works of Mead who offered optimistic declarations on evolutionary social progress toward a humane society through shared meanings while arguing against the biological, psychological, and structural determinist arguments. He coupled progressive education and a democratic society based on moral principles as means of achieving social progress.

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

As interactionism was emerging in sociology, so, too, was functionalism proceeding rapidly down the Durkheimian path. The idea of society as made up of interdependent parts expressed by Comte and later in Spencer's organicism moved through a Durkheimian justification into an anti-psychological mode. In his works, Talcott Parsons popularized the perspective at a time when fears generated by the Great Depression made its affirmation of firmly

established functional structures serving the needs of the people very appealing. Systems survive; so do the people. As Poloma notes, "[The] fact is that structural functionalism has tended to be a conservative social theory. Using its descriptive powers, it has focused on the structure of the society, emphasizing the status quo ... not only does structural functionalism rest upon certain assumptions about an orderly society, but it also reflects certain assumptions about the nature of people. In functionalism, human beings are treated as abstractions that occupy status or roles that form institutions or social structures...The person presented by functionalism is determined by social constraints or norms with little room for creativity and choice" (Poloma 1979:27).

In the work of its towering spokesman, Talcott Parsons, the challenge that functionalism focused on stability and could not explain change was met by a change theory focusing upon a neoevolutionary. This view was expressed over a hundred years after the emergence of Social Darwinism. Although Parsons' functional analysis owes some intellectual debt to Weber, and, Freud, the moral conservatism based in value consensus comes from Durkheim. Parsons attracted wrath upon his perspective from left and right.

NEOPOSITIVISM

For the humanistic sociologists, the suggestion that functionalism was warmed-over positivism could hardly bode well for its acceptance. The neopositivists, especially under the influence of Lundberg in the 1950s pursued the models of physics, denying introspection as a source of knowledge, asserting sociology should study what could be quantitatively measured, simultaneously asserting sociology could not formulate moral judgments and yet could discover the best values and implement them. Massarite and others have deplored the "dehumanization" of people by reducing them to numbers.

Attacks upon the positivist and functionalist views were launched from phenomenologists from Schutz in the 1920s through more recent work by Berger and Luckman. For Berger and Luckman, theories of reality can legitimate social institutions and experts in legitimation may operate as theoretical justifiers thereof, but

legitimation experts may also surface as revolutionary ideologists. All institutions and legitimations are human products not external to individuals.

CRITICAL THEORY: FRANKFURTERS

Critical theory traces its origins to the emergence of the Frankfurt School in 1922. Under the influence of Weil, Horkheimer and others they developed a critique of Marxism and Hegelianism which had interpretive consequences for positivism and functionalism. The move of the institute to Columbia University in 1934 because of the war infused American sociological thought with revisionist ideas. Horkheimer and others saw as myth the notion that science is the major instrument for realizing a just society and that positivism which treats social phenomena as things can solve social problems. Horkheimer believed philosophy must be rehabilitated, art must be recognized as knowledge if humans are to produce just societies which encourage human potential. Critical theorists studied authoritarianism, prejudice, mass deception and other enemies to the just society. They looked into relationships among economics, ideals and social character. They sought to restore the Hegelian "mind" to the theory informed by Marxist materialism. They internally tangled over quantitative versus qualitative methodologies. The perspective has more recently been popularized in the new leftist writings of Marcuse which stimulated student protest movements in the U. S. in the 1960s and by Habermas whose studies in production of knowledge currently influence an emerging political arm of critical theory as exemplified in the critical methodology espoused by T. R. Young and others. They seek to force disclosures of information by power centers and decision makers through lawsuits, internal penetration of organizations and other interventionist tactics. This critical dialectic based in hermeneutics is now moving to confrontational interventionist methods to force accountability from the guardians of institutions so that human spirits can create both rational and humanistic societies (Harvey 1978:83).

Martindale regards Gouldner's concept of a reflexive sociology as an extension of the critical school (Martindale 1981:534-7). He regards as Hegelian Gouldner's view that nor-

mal sociology cannot liberate because it lacks reflexivity and avoids activism. Gouldner's by-passes interactionism, perhaps because it has not been accorded status as "normal" sociology by functionalists and positivists who dominated the discipline for much of this century. Perhaps it is also because the interactionists have historically been on the side of the humanistic facet of Gouldner's reflexivity. They did not, push for an ideological core to sociology as does Gouldner (1970).

Although Habermas and Gouldner enjoy a current vogue based on critical theory, we must not lose sight of two other perspectives posed against the positivist-functionalist frameworks. The late 1950s saw the articulation of dialectical sociology as exemplified in the work of Gurvitz which rejects causal, evolutionary or functional laws, accepting only probability statements, covariations, uniform tendencies and integration of parts into wholes. Societies are always on the move and no universal principles of integration exist. Gross continues this line in his view of a neo-dialectic framework, a methodology which formulates the countervailing principles in society, comparing and contrasting these formulations. Unlike Gurvitz he dislikes empiricism seeing it as false objectivity resting on a subjectivity which must be understood and explored.

Dahrendorf accepts the idea of a true reality posited by functionalism but sees the perspective as limited in its inability to deal with coercion and conflict; he applies a neo Marxist corrective in his concern with authority structures rather than relationship to instruments of production as central variable. He differs from the functionalists, however, in his rejection of a value-free sociology, insisting that where scientific inquiry has finished, examination of political and moral consequences of the scholarly activity should begin. The sociologist should take part in the business of changing reality.

DIALECTICAL SOCIOLOGISTS

The dialectical sociologists previously discussed were a mild-mannered bunch compared to the radicals. Timasheff and Theodorson regard Gouldner and the critical school as part of this group. I see them more as sympathetic allies. The dominant force behind the

emergence of radical sociology was C. Wright Mills, a man who had previously studied empiricism, pragmatist philosophy, Weber, and symbolic interactionism. With his *Power Elite* in 1956 he served notice that sociologists could and would take on critical analysis of power centers. In other works he deplored abstracted empiricism which provided no answers to social problems and grand theory which he viewed as an elaborate game of withdrawal from the problems at hand. He challenged us to the emergency of a sociological imagination to liberate thought and method, to become intellectual craftsmen to solve the important social issues, to discern the public issues beyond the private troubles. His work blends liberalism, Marxism and a return to Weberian *verstehen*. Mills urges upon us the challenge of critical thought, the rejection of a function of sociologists as conservers of norms.

Irving Horowitz is concerned with the worth and priority of the applications to be made. He acknowledges his intellectual debt to Mills "as a man who uniquely stressed moral purpose in sociology. It was a moral purpose which somehow managed not to intrude on scientific canons but rather underscored the scientific enterprise ... Science is a struggle no less than a tradition (Horowitz 1969:56). From training which reflected classical sociology, pragmatism, empiricism, and Marxism, Mills asked the large question of whether it is possible to reconstruct science to serve humanism as well. His answer is a resounding yes and a major challenge to scientific imagination.

EXPECTATIONS

Beyond Mills' work, Gouldner has urged our reflexive self-study as sociologists, our accountability for what we do. John Seeley has averred social science *is* action, but the research act alters the nature of social reality. From interactionists, Marxism, and the dialectical, radical, and critical practitioners the movement is clear — to attempt to restore the prophetic, reformist, informed humanism necessary to attest the worth of science and those who do it. We can retain a science which stabilizes power relationships and justifies the place of those who have vis-a-vis those who have not. We can overcompensate with an underdog reformist sociology to simply turn

power relationships on their heads. Or we can create a science driven by informed humanism. We have thus far seen the conservative and actionist sociologists make intradisciplinary war upon each other. We have thus avoided allowing either group to dominate this discipline so as to create a major impact on policy for the long-run future, although we have seen some limited consequences of overdog and underdog sociology. We have not yet birthed monsters. Before we lose all credibility with a stillbirth, it is time to put together a viable sociological offspring to face the future as an informed scientific humanist.

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