

**INTRODUCTION  
TO  
CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY**

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*This book is dedicated to  
the sociological imagination.*

## PREFACE

It has long been thought that critical sociology is entirely a European phenomenon, one which has been effectively blockaded from American shores by the power of positive thinking and the ethos of individualism. Americans have been conditioned to distrust philosophical speculation and social theory at the same time that the mythology of Horatio Alger and the ideology of the free individual have permeated our conceptions of self. For too long, the mainstream of American social science judged itself to be “free” of values. For many people our uncensored mass media are proof of the “freedom” of the press, and our national wealth is considered a just reward for free people. Under these conditions, what need is there for negative thinking, for thought that might question the nature of our freedom?

Only in the aftermath of the 1960s, a decade of social awakening and rapid change, did critical schools of thought develop in a wide variety of academic disciplines. Whether in literature or economics, psychology or sociology, traditional academic paradigms soon discovered a newcomer in their midst. In the 1970s, the rapid growth of critical theory within American universities proceeded so quickly that it is possible today for many divergent schools of thought to be considered “critical.”

Our work emerges from several backgrounds and experiences. First, our intellectual interests grew out of our involvement in the anti-war and feminist movements. Well over a decade has passed since we first became participants in these movements and, as researchers and teachers, we continue to be concerned with social relations – the face-to-face interaction of individuals in everyday life as conditioned by forces of economics, culture and politics which form their context. We have been strongly influenced by the Frankfurt School in our intellectual development, and we hope that this book helps build a bridge to their work and renews their project of critical thinking.

By critical thinking we mean the questioning of the rationality of modern social relations and the interests that guide analysis of those relations. We do not pretend to be neutral or value-free scientists. In fact, the illusion of objectivity in traditional sociology is one of its aspects we critique. Our sociology is explicitly political, but we do not think that only critical sociology is political: one of the major points we make is that *all* sociology is political. Whether positivistic or interpretive, quantitative or qualitative, all sociology makes assumptions and follows methods that serve some kind of real-world interests. We hope to show the importance of recognizing the values that various forms of knowledge promote by evaluating sociology and by conducting our own analysis with some reflexivity concerning our values.

Critical sociology differs from traditional sociology in two ways. Traditional theory confines itself to the generation of facts through scientific methodologies. In contrast, critical sociology traces the construction of facts in relation to history. Through reflection on its own development, critical thought becomes more than observation or description: it becomes thought to the second power. More importantly, critical theory questions the social goals served by the ways in which facts are asserted as being truthful. By uncovering the interests served by particular forms of truth, critical theory aims at achieving an explanation of social facts which embraces the relationship between the enunciations of theory and its practical repercussions. In questioning both the historical development and the interests served by thought, critical theory orients itself to the process of human emancipation and enlightenment.

In this book we seek to synthesize European social theory and Anglo-American empiricism through a critical analysis of the theory and practice of modern society. We begin with a critique of positivism and interpretive sociology, introduce the reader to critical theory, and then discuss the usefulness and insights of each paradigm as we analyze the forms of family structures, economic organization, power and stratification engendered within the system we call capitalist patriarchy. Our hope is to be both comprehensive enough to uncover the dynamics of the system *as a whole* and specific enough to root out analysis in the common-sense understanding of everyday experiences, thereby providing the student of sociology (among others) with an introduction to critical thinking which draws on their own resources. Our social analysis concentrates on obvious social relations – race, gender, age, labor, power – and seeks to explain each of these in relation to the whole of

society. We take up topics treated by both traditional and critical sociology, mixing analysis of concrete social relations with discussion of the theories that help explain these relations. We include a discussion of social movements because these are forces which can transform our understanding of social relations. In the cases of the New Left and the women's liberation movement, social movements have generated new ways of analyzing taken-for-granted patterns of social interaction. Finally, the book ends with a critique of the myths of humanism and technocracy that inform modern understanding of society.

Although we present an introduction to critical theory, we caution the reader that critical thinking continually demands going beyond frozen concepts and outmoded analysis. Nothing would be less critical than the standardization of a way of thinking which refuses to be dogmatically formulated. The contradiction between systematically presenting critical theory and its critique of all systems might account for part of the reason that an introduction for the American reader has been long overdue.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, more than most, is a collective product, and the diversity of opinion among the authors is expressed in the text. George Katsiaficas and R. George Kirkpatrick coauthored Part I (*Theories of Society*). Mary Lou Emery is the sole author of Part II (*The Family*). The first two chapters of Part III (*Social and Economic Organization*) and the first chapter of Part IV (*Social Stratification*) were coauthored by Katsiaficas and Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick wrote the chapter on class, all of Part V (*Power and Ideology*), and the chapter on collective behavior in Part VI (*Social Change*). Besides editing the text for continuity and clarity, Katsiaficas is sole author of the chapters on race, age, socialism, social movements and humanism and technocracy. The book was first conceived at the University of Oklahoma by Kirkpatrick, Emery and Dan Boord and began there in 1974. The project moved to San Diego where Herbert Marcuse was teaching critical theory at the University of California. Katsiaficas, a student of Marcuse, joined the project in San Diego in 1976. We wish to gratefully acknowledge the help of Dan Boord and Ron Phelps in the early stages of the book's development. For their helpful comments and support, we also wish to thank Jody Bateman, Peter Bohmer, Robert Buck, Jon Christensen, Aaron Cicourel, Randall Collins, Andrew Feenberg, Gwen Sayres-Gardner, Joseph Gusfield, Kathy Hanna, John Hardesty, Kenji Ima, Katy Marsh, Herbert Marcuse, Lise Rasmussen, Curtis Richardson, Ann Roth, Cathy Ryan, Dennis Scheck, Janet Schmidt, Howard Sherman, Cheryl Ware, John Weeks, Renata Wolf, Jim Wood, and T.R. Young. The manuscript was typeset and proofed by the WordGraphics department at San Diego State University with support from the San Diego State Foundation and the College of Arts and Letters. Photographs of San Francisco and Berkeley murals by Ron Birkelbach.

## CONTENTS

PREFACE	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
<b>PART I. THEORIES OF SOCIETY</b>	
<b>Chapter One – Sociological Positivism: The Definition of Social Reality</b>	2
Macrosociology and Microsociology	2
Sociological Positivism and the Origins of Sociology – Auguste Comte	4
Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)	7
“Social Facts Are Things”	7
Suicide	8
A Critique of Sociological Positivism	10
The Practice of Positivism	13
What Is A Fact?	15
Notes	17
<b>Chapter Two – Subjective Sociology: The Interpretation of Social Reality</b>	20
Max Weber	20
Economic Sociology and Religious Ideologies	20
“Value-Free” Social Science	23
Alfred Schutz – Phenomenological Sociology	23
Symbolic Interactionism	24
Ethnomethodology	25
Existentialism	27
Notes	32
<b>Chapter Three – Critical Sociology: The Transformation of Social Reality</b>	37
What is Critical Theory?	37
Historical Emergence of Critical Theory	39
The Origins of Critical Sociology – Karl Marx	41
The Re-Discovery of Critical Theory	43
A Critical Interpretation of Marx and Marxism	45
Philosophical Foundations	46
The Ideology of Althusser's Marxism	51
Notes	57

<b>PART II. THE FAMILY</b>			
<b>Chapter Four – Patriarchy and Capitalism</b>	66		
I. Early Forms of Class and Sexual Organization – The Evolutionary Model	67		
II. Questioning the Origins of Sexual Domination – The Structural Model	71		
Notes	78		
<b>Chapter Five – The Contemporary Family: Gender and Work</b>	81		
I. Housework and the Reproduction of Labor Power	82		
II. Child Care in the Nuclear Family	86		
III. Consumption Work	89		
IV. “Women’s Work” at Home and On the Job	90		
Notes	96		
<b>Chapter Six – Socialization, Gender, and Changes in the Family</b>	99		
<b>Socialization and Gender</b>	99		
I. Capitalism, Family Size, and Socialization	99		
II. Gender, Authority, and the Masculine Ideal	102		
III. Femininity and Sexual Commodification	106		
IV. Motherhood	108		
<b>The Family – Changes and Alternatives</b>	112		
I. Sexual Relations and Friendships Among Adults	114		
II. Communal Living Among Adults	115		
III. Adults and Children – Communes and Kin Networks	120		
IV. Child Care and Children’s Centers	123		
V. Possibilities in the Present, For the Future	124		
Notes	127		
<b>PART III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION</b>			
<b>Chapter Seven – The Development of Capitalism</b>	132		
Historical Materialism	132		
Historical Idealism	134		
A Theory of Capitalism: An Outline of Marx’s Analysis of Capitalism	136		
The Commodity Form	136		
The Labor Theory of Value	137		
Money	138		
Wages	138		
Surplus Value	138		
The Accumulation of Capital	140		
Class Struggle	141		
The Third World: Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin	141		
Proletariat and Revolutionary Subject	145		
Species-Being	147		
Notes	150		
<b>Chapter Eight – Modern Corporate Capitalism</b>	155		
Monopoly Production	155		
Uncle Sam and Monopoly: The Rise of Militarism	157		
The C.I.A.	161		
		Bureaucracy, Power Elite, and Monopoly	164
		The Cultural Poverty of One-Dimensional Society	168
		Consumerism: The Colonization of Leisure	170
		Alienation	172
		Multinational Corporations	173
		Multinational Production	175
		Class Structure and Multinational Corporations	177
		Uncle Sam and Multinational Corporations	178
		Notes	181
		<b>Chapter Nine – Socialism</b>	185
		The Preconditions for Socialism	187
		The Soviet Union	189
		China	196
		Socialism in the United States	201
		Cultural Revolution	203
		Socialism Worthy of Its Name	204
		Notes	206
		<b>PART IV. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION</b>	
		<b>Chapter Ten – Theories of Racism</b>	212
		Biological Theories of Racism	214
		Victim-Blaming	218
		Functionalist Theories of Stratification	220
		Materialist Theories of Racism	223
		Racism and Racial Genocide	228
		Notes	231
		<b>Chapter Eleven – Theories of Class</b>	234
		Marxist Theory of Class	234
		The Functionalist Analysis of Social Class	237
		A Functionalist Critique of Marx	240
		The Ruling Class	242
		Class, Status, and Party: The Weberian Approach to Social Stratification	245
		Marxist Models of Class Today: The Structuralist View of Class	248
		Critical Theory and Class	251
		Notes	253
		<b>Chapter Twelve – Ageism and the Status of Youth</b>	261
		A Myth About Youth	262
		The Historical Development of the Concept of Youth	263
		Youth and the Family	267
		Youth, Sexuality, and Character Structure	269
		Youth As A Class	271
		The Structure and Functions of Education	273
		The Authoritarian Classroom	276
		Youth Resistance	277
		Notes	282

## PART V. POWER AND IDEOLOGY

<b>Chapter Thirteen – Sociology of the State</b>	288
Origin and Definition of the State	288
Legitimacy, Hegemony, Obedience and Conformity	289
Classical Theories of the State: Marxist Theory of the State	290
Vilfredo Pareto	293
Pareto and Marx	296
Max Weber	299
Weber's Concept of Authority	300
Weber on Conflict and Power	301
Durkheim's Theory of Law	302
Lenin	303
Bakunin and the Anarchist Theory of the State	305
Contemporary Sociological Theories of the State	307
C. Wright Mills	308
Ralph Miliband	309
Nicos Poulantzas	310
Norman Birnbaum	311
Notes	312
<b>Chapter Fourteen – Sociology of Crime</b>	318
Classical Social Theories About Crime, Law and Social Order:	
Rousseau and the Foundation of Bourgeois Law	319
The Deterrence Theory	320
Equality Before the Law	320
Emile Durkheim – Ritualistic Reaffirmation of Social Values: The	
Division of Labor	321
Mechanical and Organic Solidarity	322
Anomie and Social Disorganization	323
Karl Marx and the Beginnings of a Critique of "Law and Order"	324
The Exchange Value of Crime – Crime as a Business	324
The Lumpenproletariat	325
Contemporary Social Thought About Crime: Biological Determinism	
as an Imperialist Reaction	326
The American Socialist Critique	326
Crimes Against the Working Class	328
The Chicago School – A Reformist Analysis of Crime	329
American Functionalist Theories of Crime	330
A Sociology of Knowledge Critique of American Theories of	
Deviance	331
Notes	334

## PART VI. SOCIAL CHANGE

<b>Chapter Fifteen – Collective Behavior and Collective Praxis</b>	338
Descriptive and Ideological Aspects of the Concept "Collective Behavior"	338
The Positivist Problematic	339
The Empiricist Theory of Knowledge	341
Theories of Collective Behavior – Gustave Lebon: <i>The Crowd</i>	342
Freud: Group Psychology and on Analysis of the Ego	345
Smelser's Analytical Scheme	347
Jean Paul Sartre's Theory of Praxis	349
Notes	354
<b>Chapter Sixteen – Social Movements</b>	359
The Study of Social Movements: From Natural History to Social Action	359
Current Research on Social Movements	365
The Fragmentation of the Object	369
The Isolation of the Subject	373
Notes	376
<b>Chapter Seventeen – The Unity of Scientism and Humanism</b>	380
The Origins and Promise of Sociology	380
Scientific and Humanistic Paradigms	384
The Unity of Humans and Nature	387
Fact and Value	390
Notes	397

## INDEX

Part I

THEORIES OF  
SOCIETY

## CHAPTER ONE

### Sociological Positivism: The Definition of Social Reality

#### MACROSOCIOLOGY AND MICROSOCIOLOGY

Social scientists approach the study of society from several theoretical perspectives. Over the almost two centuries in which sociology has existed as a formal discipline, its theory has become standardized. Auguste Comte (1789-1857), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920) are four of the influential theorists whose ideas continue to form broad lines along which the discipline of sociology in the United States today is organized. In the next three chapters, we introduce the reader to the ideas of these men and critically examine them in terms of their scientific rigor and practical effects.

Broadly speaking, sociological theorists have conceptualized reality either from the perspective of individual and group beliefs (subjectively) or from an analysis of the institutional and "material" forces at work in the society (objectively). On another level, some have approached a study of society *microsociologically* (looking at small parts carefully much like using a microscope to study natural reality) or *macrosociologically* (looking at the tapestry of social life in its broad outlines). Dialectical social theory synthesizes the dichotomy between micro/macro and objective/subjective by refusing to reduce the whole of social reality to one fragment. A dialectical approach to social reality recognizes the reciprocal relations of knowledge and social action in the concrete reality of everyday life.

Neither micro- or macrosociology alone is able to grasp all of social reality. Social reality consists of *both* the immediate experiences of each of its unique individuals with others in face-to-face interaction *as well as* larger social forces which affect us as individuals, often anonymously. To have a comprehensive scientific understanding of social reality, both micro- and macrosocial research are necessary.

Microsocial research, by studying relatively few people in depth, generally provides sociology with an understanding of the interactive, subjective, human construction of social reality, an aspect often overlooked by macrosociology. Comprehending the active character of human beings is perhaps the major strength of informed microsocial research. Another strength of microsocial research has been to extend the purview of scientific inquiry to encompass the everyday lives of the individuals in society. The routines we adopt, the "games" we play, the folk or common-sense conceptions of reality, can be transformed from an assumed pattern of existence into a self-conscious choice of life. The routines of daily life may obscure aspects of social reality, but by questioning assumptions about how we live, microsocial research can provide us with a theoretical and practical guide toward a better understanding of human behavior.

When taken to an extreme, however, isolated interpersonal realities can result in a myopia of their own: reality for the individual can be "bracketed" from the remainder of social reality, reducing the problem of understanding society—our institutions and ourselves—to the partial study of individuals. One's analysis and action can become totally subjective insofar as the point of view of the isolated individual is not linked with the social reality. Inasmuch as microsocial research deals with everyday life and the "subjective" aspects of social reality, it may fail to comprehend objective meaning located in the temporal and spatial dimensions of reality. A purely microsocial view can be useful in understanding crucial aspects of problems such as psychology, "deviance," motivation, and interaction, but it generally fails to provide understanding of such areas as history, social structures, and social change. For example, a microsocial analysis could be instrumental in comprehending the psychology of diplomats like Henry Kissinger or Le Duc Tho, but such an analysis could not comprehend why the U.S. and Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973. A macrosocial analysis which studied the various causes and costs of the war in Vietnam could provide an understanding of why the agreement was signed. Any analysis of the transcript of the discussions between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho which ignored the historical context would not be of much scientific value in understanding war and peace.

Macrosocial research provides us with the ability to measure and comprehend the general reality of society: those structures of social reality shared by all. These structures, taken as a whole, help to mold the individuals in society. Historical categories can be a way of classifying



the stages of human reality and help to better understand the development of our species. At the same time, macroresearch lays the basis for the use of statistical measures of social reality, bringing social science into a parallel position with the natural sciences. Inasmuch as biologically sound humans actively interpret, evaluate and act to change our given reality, however, the basis for a qualitative difference between social and natural science exists. By attempting to reduce social reality to a level where the quantitative methodology of the natural sciences can be applied to it, an extreme positivism misses the essential dynamism and complexity of human reality.

Neither microsocial nor macrosocial research, by itself, is able to comprehend the relationship between human individuals and the social world. The microsocial world is enveloped by the macrosocial. Conversely, the macrosocial world has little meaning for us unless it is represented in the terms of the human reality of everyday life. Both the macro and micro spheres are continually interpenetrating each other. Both are essential to scientific understanding of human reality since each depends on the other for its meaning.

#### **SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM AND THE ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGY — Auguste Comte**

Traditional sociology had its beginnings after the French Revolution of 1789, when human beings were able to see their society as something they were a part of and could have influence over, rather than something ordained by God which would always stay the same. This was a very important step in human self-reflection. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, were humanists. They believed that human beings were capable of reason and that they could create a reasonable society which would better serve their interests. They believed that human interests and well-being were more important than the superstitions and religious dogma of the Middle Ages. These ideas greatly influenced the revolutionaries of 1789, and as the revolution was initially successful in overthrowing the corrupt and decadent aristocracy and establishing a new social order, it became apparent that if societies could be changed by the people in them, then they could be studied, analyzed, and understood by the people in them.

Auguste Comte is generally considered to be the first sociologist; it was Comte who gave sociology its name. *Sociology*, derived from the Greek and Latin, means "the abstract and generalizing study of society."

Comte was a French social philosopher born just after the French Revolution who lived and worked during the period of the restoration of the monarchy and the rise and the fall of seven different political regimes. This was a period of conservatism, a reaction to the "terror" of the revolution. Comte's thought reflected both the new radical humanistic ideas about human beings and society and the more conservative influence of his immediate time.

For Comte, social development and history are a unity, a single entity. He began by analyzing his own society and found it to be in a state of crisis, of change from one type of social order to another. He characterized the old and dying order as military and theological; the new, rising order as scientific and industrial. Since science and industry were the dominant forces, Comte felt that the way to solve the crisis of change was to formulate a social science, a "positive" science based on the scientific principles of fact-finding and the discovery of universal laws. His belief in the unity of history and his faith in science led him to formulate a *synthetic* social science, one which intended to discover and articulate the overall laws of human and social development in order to utilize them in the interests of scientific progress. He called this condition "a modifiable fatality."

Comte elaborated a comprehensive view of human nature, human thought, and human history. Each society was seen as an element in a grand and interconnected universal order; each element of society could only be understood in relation to the whole.<sup>1</sup> In light of such an understanding, Comte originated sociological concepts which are still widely utilized by sociologists today, such as "social organization," "social system," "social forces," "social organism," "social dynamics," and "social statics." Comte was also the first sociological functionalist. He viewed society as an organism, like a body, with families, classes, and cities which corresponded to tissues and organs in the human body. He was the first to firmly establish the study of modern societal institutions: the family, the state, the social classes, law, military, the economy, as a coherent synthetic discipline. In accordance with his idea that societies were united according to their shared way of thinking, Comte devised a three-stage scheme of history corresponding to stages of human thought.<sup>2</sup> He gave the type of knowledge dominant in a society at a given point in time primacy as the motive force of history.

Comte, like other nineteenth-century thinkers, recognized that modern industry was bringing basic and fundamental changes to the social system. He saw industry as allowing scientific management of an

economy which previously operated according to custom and prejudice. This new and efficient management would enable societies to develop their resources at a much faster rate. He felt that class conflict would inevitably develop when the new wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few but hoped such conflicts would be mediated by the force of moral and spiritual values. These would be values which judged a person not by his or her social position, but by moral or spiritual merit. In this way, Comte justified the rule of industrialists and the oppression of workers. Although greatly influenced by utopian socialists such as Saint-Simon, Comte firmly believed in private ownership of wealth, even very concentrated wealth.<sup>3</sup>

For Comte, along with the universalization of industry would develop the universalization of scientific thinking. The laws of mathematics and physics would be extended to the study of society, religion, and politics. Sciences evolved according to stages, and sociology was the highest science, the “social physics,” which would reveal the greatest and most universal truths.

Comte’s *System of Positive Polity*<sup>4</sup> can be criticized in several ways. First, although he believed in the scientific methods of empirical study and observation, his own work was highly speculative, and much of it developed straight out of his own thinking. Second, given the rise of the middle class controlling most of the wealth produced by the working classes, Comte legitimated a new form of exploitation and oppression. His fear of revolutionary change led him to justify and support the status quo in the name of science. Third, the emphasis on science and desire for management of society by scientists could be seen as a legitimation for the kind of technocratic control in today’s society, where people can feel like robots or computer numbers rather than like human beings.

Of course, it is unfair to hold Comte responsible for all the misdeeds of technology and capitalism. As we mentioned before, his thought has both a conservative and progressive character to it. A humanistic aspect of his thought emphasizes the common features of human development and contrasts favorably with previous views of societies bound by their various national identities.

It has been pointed out by some critics of Comte<sup>5</sup> that as historical events occurred (such as the Paris insurrection of 1848), Comte’s usage of the Enlightenment concept of reason became a rationale for the restoration of order. His approval of the repression and murder of the working class revolutionaries showed in a practical political context his love of authority, tradition, and order. The social cohesion which he

thought was necessary for social progress could only result, he felt, not from democracy and participation by all members of society, but from respect for property, the family, and authority. In this sense, the radical humanist ideas of the Enlightenment were distorted to serve the interests of the new ruling class.

### EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)

Durkheim was a follower of Comte who felt that philosophy should be replaced by science–positivist philosophy–the task of which was simply to codify and elaborate a methodology for the various sciences.<sup>6</sup> Philosophy in the Western tradition of reason, ethics, epistemology, logic, ontology and the philosophy of history were all to be abandoned as “pre-scientific ideologies.” (Of course, philosophy in the Eastern tradition of a way of life or a path to enlightenment was not even an issue for the positivists.) Positivist philosophy was for Durkheim (as for Comte) a philosophy of history which justified the cognitive hegemony of the scientific-technical world view.<sup>7</sup> To make sure that the reader is clear that we are not exaggerating Durkheim’s position, we quote:

Philosophy, instead of seeking to go beyond the sciences, must assume the task of organizing them, and must organize them in accordance with their own method–by making itself positive.<sup>8</sup>

After the reduction of philosophical reflection to scientific ideology, Durkheim’s second task was “the integration of social science into the circle of the natural sciences.”<sup>9</sup> The abolition of philosophy was popular in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century (when the French dominated world scientific thought<sup>10</sup>) but the idea of sharing this scientific glory with upstart “unscientific” disciplines like sociology was another question altogether. First Durkheim had to battle with psychologists and other “hard scientists” who did not like sociology and demonstrate that a concrete object of sociological analysis–society–was indeed a material reality and not just an idea structure existing in the minds of human beings.

### “SOCIAL FACTS ARE THINGS”

Durkheim’s polemic against psychologists led him to argue that religious ideologies and beliefs (collective representations) and forms of social organization (the division of labor, economic structures, and structures of social solidarity and cohesion) were material realities–things *sui generis*

which had at least as much "reality" as did the biological body of the human beings in an interaction structure. Durkheim was here forced to argue for the very existence of social science—for sociology, political economy, history and anthropology—inasmuch as they study social structures rather than individual people. And this polemic with the psychological reductionism (which was very popular with the positivist philosophers whom Durkheim otherwise agreed with) was to characterize his whole intellectual production. His Latin thesis at the Sorbonne later published and used widely by professional sociologists today—*The Rules of the Sociological Method*<sup>11</sup>—was an attempt to demonstrate that social facts and social structures exist.

His first major substantive work which incorporates his philosophy of history was called *The Division of Labor in Society*<sup>12</sup>. In this work, Durkheim introduced his famous distinction between *mechanical solidarity* (the cohesion based on the homogeneous cultural experience characteristic of "primitive societies" and tribal structures) and *organic solidarity* (the type of cohesion based on the interdependence of occupational groups within an industrial society engendered by the division of labor).

## SUICIDE

In another attempt to establish the reality of society—the object of sociological analysis—Durkheim wrote one of the all-time sociological classics, *Suicide*, perhaps the best work ever done on the topic.<sup>13</sup> Durkheim chose what most people will quickly agree is the most individualistic act of all—the taking of one's own life—and proceeded to show that it is determined by social forces—social solidarity—a characteristic of social structures, not of individual consciousness. There are some tricky questions involved here, because ultimately Durkheim did not explain individual suicides, but different suicide rates of groups with different degrees of social solidarity.<sup>14</sup> Durkheim reported his data as if the study was purely inductive, but we know it probably was not purely inductive, because of his earlier interest in social solidarity and his polemics with the psychological reductionists.<sup>15</sup>

First Durkheim delivered some statistics. He found, for example, that suicide rates are lower for married people than for single, lower for Catholics than for Protestants, and lower for civilians than for soldiers. Suicides are higher during times of economic instability than stability, higher in summer than in winter, and higher for men just married than for single men. From these and other data, Durkheim concluded that suicide

is a function of the social solidarity of groups, groups with high solidarity having lower rates of suicide.<sup>16</sup>

He then generated a series of types of suicide: egoistic suicide results from inadequate integration of the individual into the group—the suicide of the Protestant and the divorced. Anomic suicide results from the instability of normative regulation—the suicide of the rich who lose their money. Altruistic suicide is the suicide of the soldier who dies for his comrades. Finally, and this type is just barely mentioned by Durkheim, fatalistic suicide results from too strong normative regulation—the suicide of the newlywed man.<sup>17</sup>

Durkheim's last significant work, one which represents a major re-orientation of his thought, is his work on religion. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, which is really a book of anthropology, he presents possibly the best sociological theory of religion yet developed. Durkheim felt that religion typified the ideal norms of a society. Societies create gods in their own image, and social solidarity is produced by ritual interdictions which separate the sacred and secular.

Besides the obvious problems with Durkheim's positivism and professionalistic defense of sociology as a unique set of "facts," there are some severe problems with his approach. Durkheim's positivism demands that social science be limited to the "facticity of the given" or the facts of the given reality. There is no room at all to examine the factors that produce the facts. This is true despite the laborious attempts at causal explanation in both *Suicide* and the *Division of Labor*, studies which result in little more than typologies. No deep structures or historical configurations which produce the "social facts as things" are uncovered. Social solidarity is not a deep structure of modern capitalist society which gives us insight comparable to, for example, "class struggle." (The division of labor may be such a variable, however.) In much of Durkheim's work, the focus is ultimately on the normative order of society and finally on law. For Durkheim, society is a symbolic moral order and cannot be finally reduced to rational choices, social contracts or social conflicts.

Though much of Durkheim's sociology is descriptive of existing reality, it is hardly critical. The exceptions may be his theory of anomie and social disorganization and the critique of bureaucracy and mass society implied in his proposed solution to the problems of the division of labor. Durkheim proposed that the solution to the problems of decadence, corruption, and conflict which are so characteristic of industrial society was to strengthen the mediating structures between the isolated

“anomic” individual and the state. He placed his hope in professional organizations to play a role similar to the roles the guilds played in the medieval social structure.

An optimist, he vastly underrated the pervasiveness of both bureaucratic domination and capitalist exploitation. Durkheim was essentially a pluralist and a democrat, but his notion of corporate professional guilds as associations to combat alienation and bureaucracy lends itself to even fascist interpretations. As George Simpson, Durkheim’s foremost translator into English puts it, “Durkheim would have been saddened, one imagines, if he had lived to see the ‘corporate state’ fashioned on the basis of political representation by occupational or professional groups that was set up by Mussolini in Italy as Fascism’s contribution to political reform.”<sup>18</sup>

### A CRITIQUE OF SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM

Sociological positivism was originally systematized by Auguste Comte in reaction to the French Revolution of 1789 as an alternative to the “anarchic force of purely revolutionary principles.”<sup>19</sup> By renouncing the legacy of transcendental philosophy and subordinating the imagination to observation, Comte’s positive philosophy hoped to concern itself with “facts,” not speculation; with scientific laws, not fanciful contemplation; “with organization and order instead of negation and destruction.”

Positivism attempts to equate the understanding of social reality with the scientific explanation, prediction, and control of natural reality as practiced by the “hard” sciences of physics, physiology, chemistry, and biology. Using the methods of natural science to study social relationships and human beings, however, requires that one reify (or make abstract and static) living human beings, necessarily distorting us from the outset. Although the scientific method is successful in manipulating and controlling natural reality, natural reality is also constantly changing, so the positivist conception of the natural universe is also likely to be reified and static when compared to the underlying natural “reality” out of which the positivist constructs his models.

Social and natural reality are conceived by the positivist as “objectively” quantifiable and measurable. What appears on the surface is conceived as the full extent of reality, in opposition to a critical conception of essence and appearance which understands the possibility (necessity!) of qualitatively new forms of being continually coming to exist.

Furthermore, there is one key difference between Nature and History: Human beings have created one, but not the other. That which humans have the power to make, they have the power to change. These are key insights into the nature of society which first became widespread in Western Europe during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789, a revolution in social thought as well as political power. This important insight, however, was cut short by the sociological positivism of Comte and his followers, perhaps best exemplified today by Hubert M. Blalock’s sociological methodology<sup>20</sup>, or by the standard “high science” or mathematical sociology which is characteristic of the majority of the articles in the *American Sociological Review*, the official sociological journal in North America. Positivism has today been reduced to the gathering of statistical information about fragmentary aspects of social reality by using the precise procedures of natural science. The modern neo-positivists argue for the necessity of gathering “facts” to either construct<sup>21</sup> or to test<sup>22</sup> “sociological theories” without allowing a reflection on or examination of the social theory which defined and constituted the “facts” in the first place.

Sociological positivism negates the basis upon which the human production and transformation of societies might be understood. By postulating the prior existence of “facts” out there in the world, prior even to the human action of thinking about or conceptualizing the world, positive thought fails to comprehend how even the formation of those “facts” is an act of the human mind. In short, within the positivist world view, the facticity of the world of immediate appearances is an *a priori* assumption. Subjectivity is abolished and society engulfs the individual. Yet at the same time, the facts assumed to be “real,” “objective” and manipulated with mathematical precision, are facts concerning, in the majority of cases of sociological positivism, subjective states within individuals. So sociological positivism abolishes the subject as an active creative human mind, and in many cases abolishes objective reality by reducing it to subjective status quantitatively measured and manipulated.

Positivism concentrates on the objective of knowledge, abolishing the human actor doing the knowing, thereby obscuring the “subject” of knowledge from critical examination. Knowledge is presented by the positivist as a thing. The human being who created the “knowledge” is not recognized as being part of the society which is being studied. There are at least two problems which positivism encounters at this point: one of methodology and, more importantly, an ethical problem.

On the level of method, Aaron Cicourel and others have pointed out that the human beings who label social reality with numbers are themselves making judgments about the reality they quantify. In *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, Cicourel develops a critique of Ithiel De Sola Pool's reliance on the common sense of the coder (the technician who gives numbers to human relationships):

And if we must rely on human judges, then we should know as much as possible, to paraphrase Pool, about how the 'human computer' goes about encoding and decoding messages . . . Instead it is often assumed that such meanings are self-evident, that native-speakers of a language are more or less interchangeable, that the manifest content is sufficient for study, or that judges are interchangeable. The structure of common-sense knowledge remains a barely recognizable problem for sociological investigation.<sup>23</sup>

Pool's reliance on the "human computers" to put his data together and analyze it has built-in methodological problems. His ethical problem becomes clear when the nature of what he studies is looked at. During the Vietnam war, for example, Pool analyzed the results of numerous interrogation sessions of "suspected Viet Cong." Along with Samuel Huntington, he helped design the "forced urbanization" strategy in Indochina—the saturation bombing of the rural areas which forced millions of peasants to leave their ancestral homes and move to the cities.

The refusal of the positivists to comprehend themselves and their work as subject to examination helps shield them from ethical considerations. Their attitude may keep the positivist from getting into trouble with authoritarian governments or moral codes for what he/she says, but their facts do not explain the changing nature of society as a whole, as sociology was originally intended. An "objective" social "scientist" can take a grant from the U.S. State Department to do an "objective" study of class consciousness among lower class workers in slums in Chile, indirectly give the results of the study to the CIA through professional publications (which are also "objective and value-free"), and ultimately see no relationship between herself or himself and the murder and torture of people under the fascist dictatorship which overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Chile in 1973. Hundreds of social scientists were involved in Project Camelot,<sup>24</sup> gathering data about numerous underdeveloped countries and putting their findings in

huge computers. The theory of positivism contains within it practical repercussions which merit further examination.

## THE PRACTICE OF POSITIVISM

The relationship between positivists and the social world they study has been termed a "contemplative stance." The only role that is acceptable for the positivists to play is one of contemplating the world they study. The information can be given or sold to the powers that be and used for administration of anything from "welfare" to "criminal justice," but the role of sociologist must be only that of observer of the given reality. Positivist thought is called "one dimensional" by Herbert Marcuse because positivist sociology is reduced to the contemplative observation of what is, and the ethical impulse to judge the social world and transform it into something better is suppressed by the positivist concept of knowledge.

Positivist sociology is a reified sociology. The term reification literally means "thingification." It means that positivists treat the concrete flux of social experience as if it were reducible to their abstract models. Empirical experience can become little more than a way to "test" an abstraction, or to use a sophisticated mathematical model such as "path analysis" or the various types of "systems analysis." Systems analysis and statistical sociology operate on the assumption that what appears to exist is the extent of reality. The model of the systems analyst has no room for "new variables" and conceptualizes reality from the point of view of the status quo. The very categories of analysis are developed under the assumption of the existence of reality as it is, not as it could or should be. This is a built-in bias to systems analysis which the technicians and theorists<sup>25</sup> alike do not question.

Is positivism merely an ideology designed to justify the status quo or does the "knowledge" of the positivist really have a "use value" in the technology of social control? Both liberal positivists like Blalock and "scientific" Marxists like Louis Althusser are contained within this "scientific" framework. Both the liberal positivist professor and the Communist party intellectual may be free to pursue knowledge in the university or in the Party, but the direction of society and social life is left to the leadership of the "democratic" or "communist" government. Such governments legitimize themselves to the general population through symbolic plebiscites (elections) and social welfare programs (socialized medicine, food stamps, etc.), all administered by a technoc-

atic elite. The meaningful participation of intellectuals, to say nothing of *popular participation*, is eliminated from social reality in both theory and practice by the “scientific” methodology.

Although the positivists set out to study the social world, they end up providing needed information to the people who control the social wealth and the social relations of production—the Rockefellers, Morgans, DuPonts and the rest of the monopoly capitalist class,<sup>26</sup> with a little help from their friends at the Pentagon and in the White House—the power elite.<sup>27</sup> The positivists aspire to the role of technocratic high priest of scientific knowledge, but they end up as tools of the power elite.

If a critical sociologist were to raise the issue of the illusory nature of value neutrality to a sociological positivist, to point out that objective value-free knowledge is being used by the CIA and the State Department to help suppress popular democratic governments in Latin America, the sociological positivist might declare that such a question itself is “political” and not “sociological.” Sociology from the positivist viewpoint treats only scientific questions which can either be verified or disproven by operationalized measures. There is no room for ethical statements about the propriety of democracy, exploitation, hunger or torture. A critical sociologist might suggest that the ties of the sociologists in Latin America to American political domination and economic hegemony can indeed be empirically demonstrated, measured, and quantified, thereby making it clear that “value-free” science can be a mask for complicity with the power that be, that “value-free” science is a value-laden operation. The bias of positivist methodology and its lack of justification as “objective, value-free science” should be painfully clear. Sometimes it seems that only a fine line can be drawn between sociological positivism and counter-insurgent espionage posing as “value-free science.” These sorts of “fine lines” occur from within a methodology which refuses to reflect on the social position of the agents that employ it, focusing solely on the “rules of procedure” for attaining “truth” and “knowledge.” It is a sad commentary on the “science of society” that once successfully challenged the feudal social order that it has become a mere appendage of the capitalist state. It has given up its birthright by giving up the attempt to explain *and change* the structure of whole societies and the course of human history.

## WHAT IS A FACT?

Facts do not fall to us from heaven. They are a constructed part of the society and the intellectual context within which we live and work. For the positivist, some fragments of reality are “facts,” others are “values.” Who decides what is what? This *problematic* of sociological positivism, that is the collection of assumptions, things taken for granted, and things left out (or critical silences), is seldom if ever examined by the positivists themselves. The implicit social theory lurking in the shadows behind the facade of “high science” is the claim of the scientific method to a monopoly on truth.<sup>29</sup> This is an essentially religious or dogmatic claim of truth. The claim to be “value-free” is one of the more value-laden statements that positivist sociologists inevitably throw at those social scientists who question the fundamental rationality of existing social structures. Especially in an era when many of the sociology Ph.D.s work for the federal government, it is ludicrous to even discuss the idea of a value-free science of society in practice, much less in theory.

One of the things that unites all of the various types of positivists in both the social and natural sciences is the taken-for-granted intersubjective agreement on the “factual” nature of reality. This assumption is what Horkheimer called “traditional theory.”

In traditional theoretical thinking, the genesis of particular objective facts, the practical application of the conceptual systems by which it grasps the facts, and the role of such systems in action, are all taken to be external to the theoretical thinking itself. This alienation, which finds expression in philosophical terminology as the separation of value and research, knowledge and action, and other polarities, protects the savant from the tensions we have indicated and provides an assured framework for his activity.<sup>30</sup>

The separation of value and fact, made possible by the sociological positivist ignoring the origin of facts, the consequences of theory, and the context of sociology in society, serves to protect university professors by getting them a safe zone in which to practice their narrow speciality, “free” from ethical questions and social struggles. The very organization of sociology reflects the organization of the monopoly capitalist division of labor of which it is a part. Horkheimer suggests this:

The assiduous collecting of facts in all the disciplines dealing with social life, the gathering of great masses of detail in

connection with problems, the empirical inquiries, through careful questionnaires and other means, which are a major part of scholarly activity, especially in the Anglo-Saxon universities since Spencer's time—all this adds up to a pattern which is, outwardly, much like the rest of life in a society dominated by industrial production techniques.<sup>31</sup>

There are many disagreements among traditional sociological theorists. For example, there are disagreements about the best way to gather facts—the experimental method<sup>32</sup> versus the phenomenological.<sup>33</sup> There are general disagreements between the positivists who consider themselves primarily “empiricists”<sup>34</sup> and those that consider themselves primarily “theorists.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, there are disagreements between “grand” theorists<sup>36</sup> and “middle-range” theorists.<sup>37</sup> Such disagreements concern inductive versus deductive methods, quantitative versus qualitative, micro versus macro, and questions of scope and range, but there is essential implicit agreement on the “factual,” empirical and verificational nature of theory itself. According to Horkheimer, traditional theory is anchored in the view that theory is the conglomeration of propositions and “facts” about an object ordered in a form such that all facts may be deduced from a few basic postulates.

No matter which system of traditional theory we may consider, their common belief in the systemization of “facts” belies a fundamental idealism. As T.W. Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*:

The system, the form of presenting a totality to which nothing remains extraneous, absolutizes the thought against each of its contents and evaporates the content in thoughts. It proceeds idealistically before advancing any arguments for idealism.<sup>38</sup>

As a systemization of the “facts,” traditional theory relies, as Marcuse points out, on the “facticity of the given.”<sup>39</sup> The main problem with this formulation from a sociological point of view is that it assumes that the social world is given as a fact of Nature, just like mountains or the ocean, and ignores the “historical” character of the social world which is created by human actors in social interaction with cultural symbols.

The social world is the historical product of human beings and should be understood in its historical and cultural context, not simply described in a “factual” manner. The most obvious flaw of traditional theory is that it is ahistorical. The objects we find in our social environment—cities, towns, fields and factories—are not simply given to us by

Nature; they are historical products of human labor as is the way in which we perceive reality.<sup>40</sup>

In many ways, being able to define the “facts” is a precondition for power over reality. There are distinct differences as to what a fact is: positivism describes the “facts” of the given reality in order to “explain” and maintain it; critical sociology understands “facts” and reality as historical products of human beings in the hope that the species might become conscious of its social products and use them more humanely. In an era in which the development of science and technology has given the human species powers to dominate and destroy natural and social reality on a level far beyond any previous historical era, a critique of the limits and distortions of science has been developed by critical sociology.

## NOTES

1. See Raymond Aron, *Main Currents of Sociological Thought* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1968) Vol. 1.
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3. Raymond Aron, op. cit.
4. Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity* (New York: B. Franklin, 1966) Four Volumes.
5. Herman and Julia Schwendinger, *The Sociologists of the Chair* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
6. Emile Durkheim, *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, pp. 104-108 (Antioch: Yellow Square, 1958).
7. See Herbert Marcuse, “The Foundations of Positivism and the Rise of Sociology” in *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 323-389 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). See also Jürgen Habermas, “Comte and Mach” in *Knowledge and Human Interest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). For an excellent critique of Durkheim, see Lucien Goldmann, *Human Sciences and Philosophy* (London: Grossman, Cape Editions, 1960).
8. Durkheim, op. cit., p. 104.
9. Ibid., p. 108.

10. For a good summary of the flourishing French sciences during this period, see Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1976), particularly the chapter on Comte which sets the stage for French positivism.
11. Emile Durkheim, *Rules of the Sociological Method* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1938).
12. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1933). Translated by George Simpson.
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15. For a good summary of *Suicide* see John Madge, *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).
16. Ibid.
17. For an extension of Durkheim's theory of suicide to cover both suicide and homicide, see Andrew F. Henry and James F. Short Jr., *Suicide and Homicide* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954).
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19. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* op. cit. p. 345.
20. J.S. Chavitz, *A Primer on the Construction and Testing of Theory in Sociological* (Itaska, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Pub., 1978).
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23. Aaron Cicourel, *Method and Measurement in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1964) p. 153.
24. Irving Louis Horowitz, *The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1972).
25. Jay Forrester, *Industrial Dynamics* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1961).
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27. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).
28. An example of critical sociology using positivist methods can be found in T.W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969).
29. Jürgen Habermas, "Auguste Comte" in *Knowledge and Human Interest* op. cit.
30. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974) p. 208.
31. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (Herder & Herder, 1972) p. 191.
32. Ernest Greenwood, *Experimental Sociology* (New York: King's Crownliess, 1948).
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35. Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1951).
36. P.A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminister, 1962).
37. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1949).
38. T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury, 1973).
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40. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, op. cit., p. 200.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Subjective Sociology: The Interpretation of Social Reality

#### MAX WEBER (1864-1920)

Max Weber (pronounced Vay-ber) was one of the most influential twentieth-century sociologists. He was a broad ranging intellectual—historian, jurist, political theorist, public administrator, economist, social psychologist, and theorist of music. He had his own methodology,<sup>1</sup> his own conception of what sociology is, and he acted upon and followed to completion that conception.

Weber was one of the first sociologists to break with the positivism of nineteenth-century sociology. He formalized a method called the ideal type<sup>2</sup> which is a recognition that our sociological models are human constructions—that they are part of knowledge and not the realities they portray. In this book, for example, we analyze the tendencies of capitalist patriarchy (based on the modern United States) as if it were a pure form, although of course, we know that in the real world of life it is not.

Perhaps the weakest link in Weber's chain of sociological analysis was his lack of philosophical justification for the idealization strategy. Alfred Schutz, an Austrian-American sociologist and social philosopher, however, did it for him.<sup>3</sup> Schutz demonstrated through philosophical analysis called phenomenology that the ideal type is nothing more than what goes on in everyday life—a typification process in which abstracted types are created by human consciousness out of the constant flux of social experience.

#### ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES

Weber was the first sociologist since Karl Marx to seriously attempt to bridge the gap between economics and sociology and to unify the two into a vast conceptual system for understanding social and economic organization,<sup>4</sup> or economy and society.<sup>5</sup> Marx linked economics to

sociology by demonstrating that economic relationships and the concepts of political economy such as value, price, exchange, commodity and money are social relationships between human beings and members of different social classes—wage workers and capitalist.<sup>6</sup> Weber saw economics and sociology as separate yet interconnected spheres, at least within the Western industrial bureaucratic societies, spheres which are autonomous but interdependent. Weber's famous distinction between class, status, and party<sup>7</sup> was really a distinguishing of the economic order and the social order—the organization of rank and power and the bases of social interaction. Even in feudal societies like ancient India and China, the social, political and economic spheres were autonomous but interdependent. The Hindu caste system, an example of a status order of commensal (sharing of food) and connubial (intermarriage) association, is linked by Weber to the lack of development of the range of social interaction allowed by the Christian communion in the West (another status order) which served to restrain in India and encourage in Europe the development of the economic relationships of capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Weber goes even deeper into the internal psychology and consciousness of economic systems of motivation. In China, the Confucian ethic motivated the Confucian to save and use his/her savings to get an education and be trained for the exams, while in the typical Puritan family, money was earned and reinvested as capital in a rational capitalist enterprise out of an asceticist compulsion to save.<sup>9</sup> Differences in economic systems for Weber are ultimately linked to different ideologies and systems of motivation—usually in a religious form—Puritanism, Confucianism, Hinduism, etc.

Weber's economic sociology, also like that of Marx, is linked to a sociological theory of social change. Weber felt that industrialization was a world-wide trend, and that particularly in the West, this meant that "rational" bureaucracy, profit, and total administration were our "fate." Nothing could alter this basic tendency of development of human civilization and social organization in the West. Since it is the foundation of his theory of social change and much of his sociology, it is worthwhile quoting Weber on this point:

Everywhere we find the same thing: the tools within the factory, the state administration, the army and the university faculties are concentrated by means of a bureaucratically constructed human machine in the hands of him who controls this machine . . . The basic state of affairs is unaltered when the

person of the head of this machine changes, when say, a state president or minister controls it instead of a private industrialist . . . As long as there are mines, furnaces, railways, factories and machines, there will never be the property of an individual or of several individual workers in the sense in which the materials of a medieval craft were the property of one guildmaster or of a local trade association or guild.<sup>10</sup>

So socialism, or the absence of domination of humans, at least for Weber, is impossible as long as there is any industrialization at all. The price we must pay for material comfort and progress is endless submission to bureaucratic domination.<sup>11</sup> This twentieth-century pessimism is quite a contrast to Marx's nineteenth-century optimism. Marx believed that industry (when freed from the domination of private profit) could lead to a utopia of creative work, leisure, and self-actualization. Weber's analysis of bureaucratic domination and total administration was one of the first and most coherent ones, along those of Rosa Luxemburg and Robert Michels,<sup>12</sup> to attempt to understand the bureaucratic degeneration of both types of socialist experiments in the twentieth century in Europe—evolutionary social democracy and the Stalinist state bureaucracy.<sup>13</sup> However, his fatalism made him capitulate to the very forces he attempted to criticize. In the last analysis, Weber's sociology, though brilliant, is not critical and succumbs to the description of "what is." His fatalistic reification of the social world is presented as if historical alternatives to the existing social system are impossible, utopian, and foolish.

To argue that Weber took that intellectual position because it fit well with his political position (which was in support of the German nationalist state and German imperialism) would be to underestimate both Weber's scholarly honesty and his sincere desire—later developed as "value-free sociology"<sup>14</sup>—to separate his politics from his sociology. There is much in Weber that is useful to critical sociologists, even if he himself was ultimately an empiricist who described "what is" as "fate" without reference to what might have been or might be different. Weber was born into a family of prosperous German industrialists and was a liberal during a time when the Junker aristocrats controlled the government. The liberals ended up supporting the state bureaucracy, since the aristocrats opposed democracy and the socialists advocated revolution.<sup>15</sup>

## "VALUE-FREE" SOCIAL SCIENCE

Unlike the earlier positivism of Comte and Durkheim, Weber's empiricism did not assume that "facts" were unambiguously "given" in the common sense structure of everyday life. The *a priori* assumption of a world of given facts about which a community of scholars agreed did not survive the nineteenth-century beliefs in science and progress as the "hope" of humanity. Weber understood that "facts" and reality itself were objects of social struggle and that politics and epistemology were not totally separate spheres of inquiry. The question "what is truth or knowledge" could not be separated from the world view (or *Weltanschauung*) of the scholar nor from the cultural values and ethical standards implied by a world view. Thus Weber used the term "cultural sciences" and clearly understood that one's values and world view determined one's scientific path, particularly the selection of topics worthy of study. Since Weber is usually quoted in support of a simplistic abstracted empiricism (misnamed "value-free sociology") and the subtlety of his position is largely missed,<sup>16</sup> especially by sociologists in the English-speaking world with its Anglo-Saxon empiricist culture, we quote him briefly here:

There is no absolutely "objective" scientific analysis of culture—or perhaps more narrowly but certainly not essentially differently for our purposes of "social phenomena" independent of special and one-sided viewpoints according to which expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously—they are selected, analyzed and organized for expository purposes.<sup>17</sup>

Our differences with the Weberian position emerge in conjunction with the lack of an alternative vision of historical possibilities which leads Weber to a position of fatalistic pessimism about the inevitability of bureaucratic domination. Furthermore, instead of a narrow empirical social science that would strive to be objective whether within or in spite of the effect of the "one-sided viewpoints" mentioned by Weber, we would strive for an openly critical sociology which is conscious of the presuppositions of social experience in everyday life which create the "facts" in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

## ALFRED SCHUTZ – PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

Alfred Schutz, an Austrian sociologist who came to the United States to escape German fascism, is the founder of the phenomenological school of

sociology. Schutz takes as his starting point the interpretive sociology of Max Weber, which he criticizes as being without methodological justification, particularly with regard to the Ideal Type. Through a complicated process of philosophical analysis, using the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl,<sup>19</sup> Schutz demonstrates (through transcendental reflection on the presuppositions of consciousness and social interaction) that a typification process is what occurs, not only in social science research, but also in everyday life.

Human beings interact in two basic ways. First, there is face-to-face interaction of contemporaries in the "here-and-now." Second, there are long-term relationships which exist other than in the here-and-now or in simultaneous interaction ("simultaneity"). The latter are inevitably based on ideal types that humans construct of their friends, family, bosses, neighbors and co-workers. When we think about one of our friends when we are not with them, we construct an ideal type of that person. In fact, when we think of our own biography we do the same thing: construct an ideal type of who we are based on a construction of past "lived experience." Our lived experience while we live it is our phenomenological reality or "life-world," out of which we construct ideal types of personalities. When we share lived experience in the here-and-now with someone else, we experience true "intersubjectivity." Otherwise, we are using ideal types in our everyday life.<sup>20</sup>

The difference between the use of ideal types in our everyday life and in sociology is that in sociology we are trying to be more systematic and reflexive about it—more precise and "scientific." The case of history is even more complex. In history, we are dealing with our predecessors, rather than with our contemporaries, and we must construct ideal types of persons with whom direct, face-to-face interaction in the here-and-now is not possible. The meaningful explanation or interpretation of history was the major focus of Weber's sociology of social class, sociology of religion, and economic sociology. Schutz's grounding of Weber's interpretive sociology in the categories of phenomenological reflection was a very important step forward in the development of a sociology of both face-to-face interaction and historical sociology.

## SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

A North American version of subjectivist sociology has developed along with the European (German) versions of Weber and Schutz. Based on the

philosophical work of George Herbert Mead<sup>21</sup> at the University of Chicago, it developed into the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism, most notably in the work of Herbert Blumer.<sup>22</sup> The fundamental postulate of symbolic interactionist theory is that social reality is to be understood *only* subjectively from the point of view of the "actors" and in the here-and-now process of social interaction. A great deal of focus was placed on language and gesture as symbolic reference in the interaction process. A social psychology of the self developed out of this tradition which, at least in North America, was to rival Freud as a theory of socialization and personality. Concepts like the "I" and the "me" were developed as components of the personality structure. The conscience or internalized superego was rendered in the concept of the "generalized other," the cultural or group object reference in the social interaction process. The self was seen as formed in the social interaction process—what Goffman, one of the leading symbolic interactionists, was to call the "presentation of self in everyday life."<sup>23</sup>

The symbolic interactionists, especially Goffman, have given us some valuable insights into the structure of social institutions and the structure of everyday life—particularly of "total institutions" like prisons and mental hospitals and of behavior in public places such as restaurants and interaction rituals in general.<sup>25</sup> A progressive tendency in North American sociology, symbolic interaction places emphasis upon internal consciousness and self-determined interpersonal behavior, and it does not reduce sociology to a mathematical elaboration of the facticity of the given reality or the superficial appearances of society based on reified "data." However, there is a tendency for symbolic interaction theory to be somewhat ethnocentric from the point of view of professional sociology<sup>26</sup> and middle-class culture.

## ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Considered by some as a variant of Symbolic Interaction theory, the ethnomethodology of Southern California sociologists like Aaron Cicourel<sup>27</sup> and Harold Garfinkle<sup>28</sup> actually has its philosophical roots in European social theory from Husserl, Weber, and Schutz. Ethnomethodology generates itself as a critique of the validity of sociological data from Durkheim to present day neo-positivism. The primary argument of this school of sociologists is that sociology has not been sociological enough when it accepts the common-sense everyday-life definitions of "what is a fact" as taken-for-granted.

Ethnomethodologists argue that what sociologists should study are the social processes behind the common facts of everyday life, particularly the linguistic determinants of the constitution of facts and data in the first place. One only wishes that this powerful tendency in North American sociology had carried out its promise and developed a truly reflexive sociology of knowledge out of the given world of lived experience of everyday life.

In short, ethnomethodology goes to one metalevel in its critique of classical sociological positivism and suggests that the secrets of social reality may lie in the communication process by which "facts" and reality are constituted. One problem with this approach, common to both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, is the inability of these frames of reference to explain important social processes like power and the economic organization of society, phenomena best explained by the classical sociology of Marx or the interpretive sociology of Weber.<sup>29</sup>

Jürgen Habermas seems to have combined the insights of both the subjectivistic and linguistically oriented sociologies like phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology with the critical theory of Hegel and Marx,<sup>30</sup> even dealing with the economic questions<sup>31</sup> usually left to orthodox Marxists and neo-Ricardian neo-classical economists. Habermas uses the concept of "distorted communication" to understand power within a linguistic-phenomenological framework. He goes beyond our common understanding of questions of political economy by directing our attention to the processes of legitimation of late capitalism, and he develops the critical theory of society from a critique of contemporary practices in social science, as well as from its historical and ideational roots.<sup>32</sup> Habermas distinguishes three basic types of social science which he thinks exhausts the existing varieties. The three types of social science which Habermas sets forth are: Positive science, Hermeneutic science, and Critical science. He develops critical science from a critique of positive and hermeneutic science. For Habermas, positive science refers to modern neopositivism or empirical analytic sociology.<sup>33</sup> Hermeneutic science refers to (the historical) interpretive sociology, which is subjectivistic and tries to understand social reality from the point of view of the actor.<sup>34</sup> Its goal is the understanding of human *understanding*, in contrast to the stated goal of positivism, which is to *control* human behavior. Critical theory by way of contrast has as its goal the comprehension and transformation of existing social relationships.

Based on the model of religious studies, the aim of hermeneutics was to understand the original intention of a religious tract or testament for the

person who wrote in that historical context. The interest of the hermeneutic method was to extend human communication and understanding across all cultures and throughout all historical times. Hermeneutic sociology, like symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, wants to describe social reality as it is symbolically meaningful to the direct participants in a social group. Both of these approaches resist "conceptualization" and want to let the data "speak for itself," rather than to impose rigid definitions upon it. While ethnomethodology and phenomenology are more contemporary than symbolic interactionism, they are united within a subjectivistic theoretical paradigm. The focus of their study is on the internal processes of human thought and communication, yet the method used to study these processes often has the same basic form as the method of the positivists. They try to study the subjective human world without presuppositions, but they harbor the assumption that this work is governed by laws of communication and interaction.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is a perspective or world view which has been expressed in the works of various philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger and writers like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. These and other thinkers have developed existentialist ideas in different ways so that existentialism might be considered a metaphysics, an ethics, or a psychology.<sup>35</sup> Existentialist precepts underlie modern art, music and literature—as expressions of a consciousness unique to the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Both sociology and psychology have been influenced by or have contributed to existentialist thought—in the work of Max Weber in the nineteenth century, for instance, and in that of R.D. Laing and David Cooper in recent years. As a comprehensive social theory, existentialism has been best developed through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre, a French philosopher, was known in the 1940's and 1950's for his plays and novels which expressed a humanistic philosophy of existentialism that, largely through his efforts, became widely appreciated during those decades.<sup>37</sup> These plays and novels focused on ethical and moral questions facing the individual in certain situations.<sup>38</sup> His long treatise *Being and Nothingness* developed these ideas as a philosophy. In the 1960's and 1970's Sartre turned to a sociology and social anthropology based on the young Marx's writings in an attempt to

develop a social theory which considered groups of individuals, collectives, history, and revolutions.<sup>39</sup> He seems to be following the direction of a critical theory which aims toward a philosophy that becomes social theory and a social theory that becomes revolutionary. To understand Sartre's contribution to critical sociology, it is important to first understand something of his formulation of existentialism.<sup>40</sup>

Existentialism is a term for the philosophy of existence; that is, what it means to *be* or to exist. For Sartre, human existence is different from the existence of objects in that human beings are conscious that they exist, while objects such as rocks, trees, or houses have no self-consciousness. This places all human beings in the common situation of existing as "beings whose being is perpetually in question." For even though we are conscious of our existence, we do not know why we exist or even how we exist. Paradoxically, it is human consciousness which is the only thing that gives meaning to the world.

Using Hegelian categories, Sartre calls human existence "being-for-itself" as opposed to the "being-in-itself" of nonhuman matter. As a being-for-itself, the human being exists in a condition of freedom, of always having to make choices. This freedom is, of course, limited in various degrees, according to the given conditions of a person's life or, as Sartre puts it, the situation. It is the situation which presents certain choices to the individual, but it is the individual who must make those choices. and aside from any social conventions about what a person should do with his or her life, it is still ultimately up to that individual. Sartre views the person who abdicates her or his responsibility to make choices as a person acting in "bad faith."

Existentialism, then, is both a philosophy of existence and, for Sartre, an ethics in which people are responsible for their own lives, their own choices and their own situation. We can see the seeds of a critical theory, since in order to be responsible for one's situation, it must be true that the situation can be changed and that human action can change it. Sartre's philosophy also implies a critique of social norms and conventions, and requires individuals to rethink for themselves the attitudes and behaviors which they adopt.

Sartre views each individual as creating his or her life through the choices which he or she makes. This creative process is termed the *project*. It is the means by which a person goes beyond her or his immediate situation and transforms it through choice into a future situation. Only by asserting oneself freely in every situation can the individual live authentically, without deceiving him or herself, without acting "in

bad faith." The project is motivated by a need to create a self, to discover one's being, since the being-for-itself is always searching for itself. This is the philosophical explanation for the persistence of the simple question, "Who am I?"

But part of human existence as being-for-itself is that everyone is involved in his or her own particular project. And, in the attempt to create and define oneself, one must prevent others from doing it first. If, by a glance or a word, the *Other* (as Sartre terms it) manages to tell you who you are, then there is a theft of your freedom, of your self-creation. Thus the self and the Other are always in competition due to their common need to create and define their own being. The realm of interpersonal relations must always be a source of frustration and conflict.

Sartre was criticized by many Marxists for not giving enough emphasis to the social factors of human existence; for instance, the limiting and determining factors of each person's situation such as social class, colonization, or race. They felt that this de-emphasized the need for collective action, through which the Marxists see progressive social change occurring. The emphasis upon individual freedom and choice could allow the individual to seek solutions to social problems in individual, rather than collective, activity. On the philosophical plane, Marxists such as Marcuse criticized the very categories of Sartre's thinking as derived from capitalist social relations of competition (the conflict between the self and the Other), of free enterprise (the necessity of individual free choice), and of exploitation (the appropriation of self through the appropriation of the Other).<sup>41</sup> Marcuse stated that these concepts might be descriptive of human consciousness under capitalism, but not descriptive of any universal situation.

In his later work, the long introductory essay, *Search for a Method*, and the monumental *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre has turned to an analysis of the individual in relation to the group and the group in relation to the individual.<sup>42</sup> Between his original work on existentialism and these later works, Sartre became a Marxist. The Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions and national liberation struggles in Africa convinced him that Marxism was the only living philosophy, that is, the philosophy which was developing out of, and at the same time influencing, the major changes of worldwide social and political revolutions.<sup>43</sup> Sartre then attempted to integrate existentialism with Marxism and to critically redefine Marxism by doing so. Like the critical theorists, Sartre based his theory on the dialectical reason of Hegel and a commitment to humanism. He believed that human beings and their societies and their

histories are dialectically related; that is, that the human philosopher or social theorist who thinks about her/his work is, at the same time, a part of that world, and can change it. His humanistic orientation is a belief that human beings are increasing their self-awareness, increasing their abilities to understand a great totality of experience and to thereby have more self-determination in their own history. He saw alienation as a result of historical conditions which can be changed, rather than an inevitable part of some universal human condition.

In his later writings, Sartre based the conflict between the self and the Other in the fundamental condition of scarcity—in there not being enough of the basic necessities, such as food and clothing, for everyone. This alienates the individual from Nature and from other people on a basic level of survival which influences thinking and behavior in other situations. Through praxis, human beings can go beyond such given conditions by realizing other possibilities. In going beyond one set of objective conditions to another possible circumstance, a project is created in the individual instance, or a *totalization* in the events of collective action. The element of human freedom and choice allows us to condition the environment which conditions us.

Sartre gave several examples of the force of circumstance on individuals and the impact of individual freedom to go beyond and alter those circumstances. One is an individual Black man stationed at an air base near London. He is on the ground crew, yet his one desire is to fly, a possibility denied him at this time because of racist discrimination. His possibilities are to remain as he is or to rebel. He chooses to rebel by stealing a plane and flying it across the Channel, risking prison and possibly death. He thus moves from a condition of deprivation to a condition of freedom in a concrete event which is both an individual and general revolt. In his revolt he reflects and calls attention to the situation of racism and also shows that the resistance to that situation is still an individual praxis. There is no organization ready yet to help him fight for his rights. His choice is an extreme example of the extent of human freedom. As an individual his action shows us both his own possible future and that of his race as well as the implications of that future for the white racists. "He affirms that a future *possible for whites* is *possible for everyone*."<sup>44</sup>

This example of individual effort is similar to the early stages of the Civil Rights movement in this country when a few isolated individuals risked prison and death to picket in front of segregated schools or to move into white neighborhoods or sit in "white only" places in buses and

restaurants. Eventually, because human beings can influence, in fact, can create their own history, thousands and thousands of people marched in protest to the White House in the massive March on Washington of 1963. They were able, through the merging of their common projects, to become conscious of and change their common situation in a further totalization of human history.<sup>45</sup>

Sartre explained the way individual projects can become collective efforts in which that original conflict between the self and Other is transcended. This transcendence occurs through *reciprocity*, or mutual aid. Human beings find themselves together in groups all the time. Usually we are together in what Sartre termed "seriality"—we are together, but we are separate and alienated from each other (for instance, in a line of people waiting for the bus or in a doctor's waiting room). There is something which brings us together, but we perceive we can do it alone without each other's aid.<sup>46</sup> Then sometimes there are moments in history when such a series becomes unified by a common purpose which no individual can accomplish alone, but which requires the unification of the group. Sartre gave the example of the storming of the Bastille prison in France in 1789, which marked the turning point of the French Revolution. He called such a group a "group in fusion," or a united group.<sup>47</sup> In such an experience, each individual can identify with the Other as with her/himself and can recognize the Other as a dimension of his/her own life. This process is the basis for Sartre's theory of social change, social organization, social institutions, and bureaucracy.

On the interpersonal level, then, there is the possibility for exchange, a reciprocal relation of mutual aid where each person agrees to serve the ends of the Other. And, for social theory, there is the possibility of understanding history, not only through the so-called facts, or objective social conditions of a time or place, but through living and reliving the experience of individuals and groups, as their lives and consciousness interact with and through these conditions. Sartre called this method the "progressive-regressive" method and preferred it to traditional Marxist methodology, because it is capable of understanding and illuminating the uniqueness of an event or of a person's life, rather than simply generalizing that situation to others like it. He gave the example of his own attempt to understand the life of the French poet Paul Valéry. The traditional Marxist view would be that Paul Valéry was from the petit bourgeois class and therefore exemplified through his poetry the idealism of the French petit bourgeoisie. His poetry would be explained by economic and political factors but "As for Valéry, he has disappeared."<sup>48</sup> Sartre

criticized this explanation for substituting the *idea* “petit bourgeoisie” for the concrete lived experience of Valéry, experience which formed a unique situation in its juncture with the petit bourgeois class. Only in understanding the uniqueness of this situation can the life or work of Valéry be understood at all. Many factors will affect such lived experience, such as Valéry’s particular parents and their relationship to each other, the kind of education he received, his relationships with relatives and friends, his perception of the objects around him. All of these things would form the context in which he would make the decisions affecting his life—for instance, the decision to write, and what to write. “Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, Sartre criticized traditional Marxism for attempting to force concrete lived experience into preconceived ideas, rather than always learning from history and experience and formulating theory on the basis of ever-changing knowledge. He proposed the progressive-regressive method as a rectification of such rigid theory through the integration of existentialism and Marxism. The concepts of his theory, as well as the method, are in agreement with the tenets of critical sociology which it shares with the Frankfurt School: the critique of alienation, the world view of dialectical reason, and the commitment to social change and human liberation.

## NOTES

1. Max Weber, *Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press, 1949) edited by Edward Shils and Henry A. Finch.
2. In his analysis of capitalism, Marx used a model based on the economy of England, but never formalized his method.
3. Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972).
4. Max Weber, *Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1947) Translated by Talcott Parsons.
5. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).
6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, (New York: International Publishers, 1967).

7. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946) pp. 180-195.
8. Max Weber, *The Religion of India* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958).
9. Max Weber, *The Religion of China* (New York: The Free Press, 1951).
10. Max Weber, “Socialism” in *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*, Ed. J.E.T. Eldridge (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), pp. 192-219, p. 199.
11. For our critique of Weber as the student of bureaucratic domination who ultimately capitulates to it, we are indebted to Herbert Marcuse’s essay “Industrialization and Capitalism in the work of Max Weber,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 201-227, and to Marcuse’s presence in San Diego and his encouragement on this project.
12. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972) and Roberts Michels, *Political Parties* (New York: Free Press, 1962).
13. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).
14. Max Weber, “Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy” in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*, op. cit.
15. This historical material is drawn from Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky, *The Discovery of Society* (New York: Random House, 1972). The attempt to take Weber seriously as a sociologist rather than to reject him was also stimulated by Randall Collins and Catherine Ryan.
16. One scholar who understands Weber’s position is Trent Schroyer in “Transcendental Reflection and Social Theory: Weber and Dilthey,” *The New Scholar* (1973), and one who does not is Lewis Coser in *Masters of Sociological Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace).

17. Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," in Maurice Natanson (Ed.) *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1963), p 378.
18. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) pp. 191-9.
19. Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, edited by Martin Heidegger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).
20. Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* op. cit. p. 13.
21. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939).
22. Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969).
23. Irving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1959).
24. Irving Goffman, *Asylums* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1968).
25. Irving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).
26. Dusky Lee Smith, "Symbolic Interactionism," *Catalyst* (Winter, 1973) pp. 62-76.
27. Aaron Cicourel, *Method and Measurement in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1964).
28. Harold Garfinkle, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959).
29. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).
30. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest* op. cit.
31. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

32. An excellent summary of Habermas' critique of social science can be found in Trent Schroyer, "A Re-conceptualization of Critical Theory," in David Colfax and Jack L. Roach, *Radical Sociology* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), and also "Marx and Habermas," *Continuum*, Spring-Summer, 1970, Vol. 8, No. 1.
33. See Hubert Blalock and Ann Blalock, Eds., *Methodology in Social Research* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968) for a good example of the positivist "high science" approach.
34. See H. Rickert, *Science and History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962) or Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).
35. Walter Kaufman (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: The World Publishing Co., New American Library, Inc., 1956).
36. William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958).
37. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufmann, op. cit.
38. *The Flies*, *No Exit*, *Dirty Hands*, and *The Condemned of Altona* are some of Sartre's better known plays. *Nausea* was his first novel, and he has written a trilogy of novels called *Roads to Freedom*.
39. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1963) and Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume I, Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. by Jonathan Rée (London: New Left Books, 1976; first pub. in France by Gallimard, 1960).
40. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: The Washington Square Press, 1953). See also Hazel Barnes, "Introduction" in Sartre, *Existential Psychoanalysis* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953) for a summary of Sartre's existentialist psychology and ethics.
41. Herbert Marcuse, "Sartre's Existentialism," *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 157-190.



42. For discussions of *Search for a Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, see Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971); Wilfred Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965); and R.D. Laing and David Cooper, *Reason and Violence* (New York: Vintage, 1964).
43. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1974).
44. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., pp. 95, 96.
45. Wilfred Desan, op. cit., p. 58.
46. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., pp. 256-269.
47. Ibid, pp. 345-404.
48. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., p. 54.
49. Ibid, p. 56.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Critical Sociology: The Transformation of Social Reality

#### WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY?

The foundations of a critical theory of society are found in the early philosophical manuscripts of Karl Marx.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 1840's, social theory, political theory, "scientific" sociology and classical political economy existed as coherent intellectual traditions, but a critical theory of society had not yet emerged. Utopian socialism, scientific political economy, and critical philosophy existed, but were as yet uncombined in a critical theory of society which could reflect the class struggles and social revolutions which were transforming Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Theories of history have existed at least from the time of Plato's dialogues, within his notion of the telos or goal of human society residing in the striving for infinite perfection. In Aristotle's *Politics*,<sup>2</sup> the nature of a just society as a goal for humans is rigorously analyzed. A philosophy of history was elaborated by Ibn Khaldun in November of 1377 in his treatise, *Introduction to History*,<sup>3</sup> and was further developed in *The New Science* in 1725 by Giambattista Vico.<sup>4</sup> But the most impressive formulation of a theory of history and society in Europe was by George Hegel and is a nineteenth century phenomenon. Hegel elaborated the most *systematic* philosophy of history to emerge in human thought and to establish itself as an intellectual tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Social theory in the work of Hegel, political theory in Rousseau<sup>6</sup> and positivist and "scientific" sociology in Comte<sup>7</sup> and Spencer,<sup>8</sup> were grounded in a criticism of the human condition in political society or in faith in the possibility of a "natural science" of the laws of society. Bound to a positivist image of science were the classical political economists—Adam Smith<sup>9</sup> and David Ricardo,<sup>10</sup> who analyzed the laws of motion of the economic structures of civil society as if they were laws of Nature.

In his early work, Marx sought release of humanity from the bonds of alienation—from domination by economic exploitation. This society was neither understood nor controlled, not popularly nor by the captains of industry and by the leaders of the state apparatus. The whole society was alienated<sup>11</sup> from the human actors who produced and reproduced it. An alienated society is a social formation which is out of control of the human beings who have produced it. In that sense, both European capitalism of the 1840's and American capitalism of the 1980's are alienated societies. These are both social formations which were created by human beings and their labor, but for a series of very specific reasons we shall examine in detail in this book, they are out of the control of the human beings who constructed them.

Alienated social theory does not understand human beings as the essential reality of society, nor does it comprehend the totality of the social formation. Past, present and future are reduced to a one-dimensional time frame, and rather than coming to terms with the nature of social reality as a whole, alienated social theory comprehends its parts.

The methodological basis of the critical theory of society is the dialectical logic of George F. Hegel.<sup>12</sup> According to the principles of dialectical logic, "that which is cannot be true."<sup>13</sup> In other words, our existing society cannot be the "truth" of human existence. Truth must lie somewhere else, not in the facts of the given reality, but in the negation or transcendence of those facts. Truth lies in the attempt to go beyond this reality to a better world. Truth lies in our attempt to change the world, in our critique of the established reality. A critical sociological analysis is *true* insofar as it helps change the world and make it a more human place in which to live. So while society as a whole may lie quite beyond human comprehension and can never be reduced to words, *truth* is the living of each moment of human life to its maximum potential, the unfolding of reality from its potential to a lived practice or actuality of human existence.

In contrast to a critical analysis, much of sociology remains at the level of the "facticity of the given." The difference between reality as it presently appears and its essential qualities is not made. Such analysis has the effect of justifying the status quo whether or not it intends to do so.

The criterion of verification cannot be applied to critical sociological analysis.<sup>14</sup> Only the criteria of transcendence and praxis apply. Does sociological analysis go beyond our taken-for-granted assumptions about the established reality? Does the analysis extend our *knowledge* of the established reality,<sup>15</sup> totality<sup>16</sup> or totalization<sup>17</sup> by transcending it, by

making it an understood part of a larger whole? Even conventional positivist sociology would usually agree to the criterion of transcendence. For what is sociology if it does not go beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions of the status quo? Another form of journalism with more statistical data? Transcendence of the status quo is a criterion of all sociology worthy of that name.

The criterion of transcendence may be thought of as the degree to which the analysis uncovers the potential for social change and human liberation inherent in any social situation. The "unactualized potential" of a social system implicitly acknowledges that social change is continuous. Change is the only absolute truth of critical theory.

The second criterion for judging the truth of a theory is praxis, or the degree to which sociological analysis is responsible to the human interest which theory has no choice but to serve.<sup>18</sup> Knowledge serves "real world" interests whether it is *encyclopedic*<sup>19</sup> knowledge aimed at cataloging the status quo or *contemplative*<sup>20</sup> knowledge of one sort or another, which claims a special status from which to view social reality apart from that reality. Sociology is part of society, not above it. No matter what pains are taken for "objective value-free analysis," knowledge cannot be divorced from reality.

## HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF CRITICAL THEORY

Two developments are responsible for the emergence of critical sociology, one theoretical and the other practical. At the same time as Karl Marx, in his own words, formed a synthesis of English political economy, French utopian socialism, and German idealistic philosophy, the class struggles and social revolutions within capitalism became so intense that the working class could not be prevented from becoming conscious of its exploitation within the capitalist social relationships.<sup>21</sup> Marx became part of the articulation of a new world view—a world view of the exploited wage workers, rather than a world view of the aristocracy or the rich bankers which previously had been dominant. Critical theory emerged in the criticism of capitalism from the point of view of the wage worker or proletariat.

Critical theory of society came into being along with the dominance of the capitalist social relations of production. In the nineteenth century, the antagonism between workers and capitalists became so intense that the workers were in actual danger of being exterminated—not given enough wages even to reproduce themselves. Prior to the 1840's, other

basic social antagonisms had been brought to the consciousness of the human race and written about in a critical way—the antagonism between master and slave, and between men and women. But it was only in the 1840's that critical thinking was able to reflect on the social relationships in the society *as a whole*. The development of capitalism created the preconditions for the demystification of social forces formerly conceived as natural or God-given for all of eternity—such as the feudal systems of social inequality which rested on the divine rights of the nobility. All that humans had created, from the gods to the social structures, became subject to the critique of human reason in the aftermath of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the American and French Revolutions.

At the same time, modern capitalism has generated its own system of mystification, that of “eternal” or “natural” economic relationships of exploitation, competition, and hierarchy. Science and technology have become the new religion of modern society. The dualistic form of the religious world view, the dichotomy of subject and object<sup>22</sup> formerly expressed as the alienation of humans from their constructed deities, was mechanistically replicated in the secularized version of religion which today is called science. The fall of religious metaphysics became a necessary step in the rise of a new God: science and technology, a god overriding the individual's belief in the primacy of human thought, creativity, and energy. As the theological or metaphysical epoch of history was seen by August Comte, the founder of scientific sociology and positivism, to be giving way to the rise of the scientific era, so the high priests of the new society were, for Comte, to be sociologists and other scientists. According to Max Horkheimer, the demand by the positivists that sociology must conform to the “facts” is similar to the demand in the medieval society that theories conform to religious dogma. According to Horkheimer:

The positivist command to conform to facts and common sense instead of to utopian ideas is not so different from the call to obey reality as interpreted by religious institutions, which after all are facts too. Each camp undoubtedly expresses a truth, under the distortion of making it exclusive . . . Both schools are heteronomous in character. One tends to replace autonomous reason by the automatism of streamlined methodology, the other by the authority of a dogma.<sup>23</sup>

In trying to explain why people in modern society worship science and technology as they once worshipped gods, Marx looked at the

sociological organization of labor in the capitalist society. He found that in capitalist society, labor is so organized as to make work involuntary for the vast majority of the population. They were wage workers or wage “slaves” who had to work in order to eat. Marx was trying to make the point that work in a capitalist society is essentially forced labor.<sup>24</sup> The reality of alienated labor under capitalism is more than a simple issue of economic exploitation or the “cheating” of the worker out of some of the value of his labor time. It is fundamentally a degradation of human life, not only because of the qualitative inequality of the worker's exchange of her or his life energies, but also because of the lack of control over the products of our work and the structures of our society.<sup>25</sup>

Critical theory in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* was not simply economic. In the work of Trent Schroyer, it is called the *Critique of Domination*.<sup>26</sup> Others have referred to critical theory as Hegelian-Marxism or dialectical Marxism. Having located the historical context within which critical theory was first articulated, we will now trace its development in order to briefly contrast it with modern scientific sociology.

#### THE ORIGINS OF CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY – KARL MARX

Karl Marx was both scholar and revolutionary. He participated in the European labor and revolutionary movements and spent the majority of the latter part of his life in the London library as a scholar. His work synthesized the various concerns which today are compartmentalized into the separate social science disciplines. From philosophical foundations in the work of Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach,<sup>27</sup> he developed a sociology of social classes,<sup>28</sup> a theory of history,<sup>29</sup> a sociology of revolution,<sup>30</sup> and a political economy and critical analysis of capitalist production.<sup>31</sup> Marx's work grew out of the biographical and historical circumstances within which it was written. He had the ability to express in the realm of thought the intellectual currents and historical movements of the time in which he lived.<sup>32</sup>

As a humanist,<sup>33</sup> Hegelian student of philosophy, Marx was confronted with certain inadequacies in hitherto existing philosophy—notably that of Kant and Hegel. Philosophy prior to Kant and Hegel had been divided into *idealists* (who believed in the primacy of mind) and *materialists* (who believed in the primacy of matter). Kant noted that a synthesis of these two systems profited both, since neither could be proved in its own terms. For the materialists to prove that matter is

primary, they must know the unknowable, they must experience matter independently of their own experience. For the idealists to prove the primacy of the mind, they must renounce the existence of the world outside themselves. For Kant, time and space must be in some way dependent upon the human mind, because somewhere the cognitive and perceptive faculties of human beings must organize the world of experienced matter. But, for Hegel, the static axes of time and space ignore the inner dynamics of history, the change of things as they become what they are.

For Marx, real social existence,<sup>34</sup> not pure human consciousness, was a *dialectic* between human essence and social historical conditions. Marx saw humanity as a species-being whose biological functions are not its ends, but the means by which its humanity is realized. Thus, in Marx's view, we are creative, we make ourselves according to what we can be, and within the context of the material conditions in which we find ourselves—conditions which we inherit from the past but have the power to transform in the present. In Marx's words, "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."

In Marx's theory of history, we find the economic foundations of a society changing and forcing changes in its social structure and ideology, leading to revolutions which demand the continuing liberation of human potential. History is the history of class struggles, according to Marx. Initially, we struggled for physical existence, and food was so scarce that it was essentially shared.<sup>35</sup> As agriculture developed and a surplus of food became available, this was stolen first by slaveowners and later by the lords and princes through the use of sheer force. With the development of industry, more surplus was produced, but the controllers of industry—the capitalists—had charge of the new means of production and made revolutions against the old aristocrats. The American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789<sup>36</sup> ushered in the dominance of bourgeois rather than aristocratic interests.

Marx's system, as a philosophy, has been called dialectical materialism.<sup>37</sup> It is a synthesis of naturalism and humanism.<sup>38</sup> It solves the problem of the primacy of mind or matter by recognizing that mind and matter exist in a dialectical relationship; that understanding the world is contingent on participation in the creation of the world; that change is inherent in the structure of reality itself; and within each individual is the need for freedom.

What is dialectical materialism? It is perhaps above all else, the study of the relationship between humans' ideas, consciousness, and philosophy and the concrete material existence out of which such ideas grow. Marx (in criticizing the idealism of the Young Hegelians) says, "It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings."<sup>39</sup> In short, dialectical materialism is the study of the relationship of the world (real, material, sensuous existence), and the ideas of humans in a particular historical epoch as members of particular social classes who continually re-create the world.<sup>40</sup> Dialectical materialism assumes that the interpenetration, through human activity, of material existence and ideas is reality for human beings. As the often quoted eleventh thesis on Feuerbach by Marx, notes: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."<sup>41</sup> Thus, dialectical materialism is a revolutionary tool, a method for social change by oppressed people.<sup>42</sup>

#### THE RE-DISCOVERY OF CRITICAL THEORY

After its formulation in the era of the class struggles of 1848, critical theory lay dormant and undeveloped until the eruption of the European revolutionary social movements around 1917, when it was revived by George Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács was appalled by the barbarism and depravity of World War I and inspired by the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the Hungarian Commune of 1919 (of which he was the deputy commissar of culture). At the time that he finished his major contribution to critical sociology—*History and Class Consciousness*—Marx's economic and philosophical manuscripts were gathering dust in Moscow, unpublished and unnoticed for nearly seven decades.

In the aftermath of the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (an attempt to historicize the development of Leninism from Marxism) were subjected to intense criticism from both the Social Democratic and Communist Parties of Europe. At this point, Lukács compromised with the Marxism of Stalin. He eventually recanted his *History and Class Consciousness*, thereby becoming another (if not the most articulate) apologist for the bureaucratic elite in the Soviet Union. Under fire from his former comrades, Korsch left the German Communist Party to independently continue his polemics against the "mechanical materialism" of the Communists and the Social Democrats. He taught

sociology at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. For a while, he taught Marxism informally to the playwright Bertolt Brecht. He died in Massachusetts in 1961. Lukács became active in political struggle and critical theory again in his later life, participating in the Hungarian Rebellion of 1956 against the Stalinist Bureaucracy of the Soviet Union.

Beginning in Germany, there is a tradition that has extended and enriched critical theory which includes the persons associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research—Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Neumann, and Habermas, among others. The rise to power of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany witnessed the near-destruction of the Frankfurt School, and it was only by leaving Germany that they survived. Walter Benjamin's unfortunate suicide while thinking he was about to be captured within occupied France was a severe casualty during one of the worst human catastrophes of all times. The Frankfurt School, as it is most often called, is historically traced in Martin Jay's book, *The Dialectical Imagination*.<sup>43</sup> Critical theory has two goals: to bring to consciousness the awareness of capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic domination; and to create a popular demand for liberation—a demand, desire and need for a better world. Critical theory is critical in two senses: it brings to our consciousness oppression of which we may or may not have been aware, and it calls for “criticism of life” to resist and change the existing system of domination. Some versions of Marxism are critical theory and some are not, and other theories can be used critically from time to time—theories such as phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and existentialism.

In Herbert Marcuse's analysis of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, the connections between the Frankfurt School's critical theory and the Hegelian humanism of Marx are evident. It is also clear from this exposition by Marcuse that the old Marx, who is the scientist and economist *par excellence*, developed his scientific categories for the analysis of capitalism from philosophical foundations. According to Herbert Marcuse, the critical theory of Marx already contained revolutionary praxis. “The theory is in itself a practical one; praxis does not only come at the end but is already present in the beginning of the theory.”<sup>44</sup> Praxis is the philosophical basis of the theory presented by Marx, which includes a demand for the overthrow of the capitalist social relationships involved in production by an economic and political struggle of the working class. Genuine human liberation implies much more than just a political revolution, and it certainly does not imply authoritarian tyranny of a state capitalism. It does imply a revolution in

the very being of humankind.<sup>45</sup> Marx criticized the categories of political economy because those categories were posed as naturally given laws. According to Marx, what humans have created, humans can change, not simply “discover.”

Both positivist sociology and classical political economy<sup>46</sup> are grounded in a faith in the scientific method, or in Western Rationalism.<sup>47</sup> Critical theory, as a moment of self-reflection of Western culture, achieves its most heroic intellectual insight with its criticism of the Enlightenment<sup>48</sup> and of the Western concept of reason and rationality.<sup>49</sup> The advances of technology and science have themselves undermined the humanistic roots of science. Science and technology are today “alien creations” out of popular control of understanding. They are ideology—a new god which combined with the State's power appear to be “omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.” By developing a philosophical critique of science, critical theory unravels the hidden essence of capitalism: the domination of a few through the submission of many. The ideology of science is the means to this hierarchy, as we will discuss in a moment.

Critical theory is that version of Marxism which conceives of itself as *critique*.<sup>50</sup> Rather than accepting the categories of social being as they exist in the East or West, critical theory has remained faithful to a conception of freedom which has yet to be realized in reality. The rapid standardization and bureaucratization of the Communist countries, on the one hand, and the rise of consumerism and mass society in the capitalist countries, on the other, make the Frankfurt School demand for critique seem very reasonable. Therefore, much of the work of the critical theory of society has been generated from a critique of the established practices of contemporary social reality and science.

## A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF MARX AND MARXISM

As a dialectical method, Marxism remains historically specific, enriching its theory and practice from the ever-changing nature of society. A dialectical method sees the concrete actions of human beings (not things or abstractions) as the substance of reality.

The rapid spread of Marxism in the last century has been accompanied by its fundamental reduction and simplification. The very language of Marxism has itself been reduced as shorthand versions of Marxism became mass-produced. While Marx would have described himself as a materialist and dialectician, he never used the words

“dialectical materialism” to describe his methodology. Today however, these two words are perhaps the first label appropriated by “Marxists” for themselves. As the Marxian movement initially developed and people active in it came to call themselves “Marxists,” Marx dissociated himself from the crude interpretations of his theories in his famous statement, “I am not a Marxist.”

An analysis of the theory of Marx and Marxism will now be undertaken in a critical spirit. Viewed from the vantage point of today, we can say that Marx was very much caught up in the ideology of his time; although critical of racism and patriarchy, Marx was a white, male European. As he wrote in the heyday of the industrial revolution, he also accepted much of the scientific ideology of capitalism. Marxism in the Soviet Union since the Russian Revolution of 1917 has been transformed from a means for liberation and subversion of the established reality into an instrument of domination and justification for the new social order. In the aftermath of 1917, the quantitative proliferation of the Communist Parties throughout the world under the leadership of the Comintern resulted in the qualitative reduction and standardization of what was the theory and practice of the European socialist movement. We will now develop a theoretical critique of modern orthodox Marxism. After an initial investigation of general philosophical issues, we will focus on the ideology of one of the more progressive moments of Marxist orthodoxy—Althusser’s structuralism.

## PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

What unites the various categories of orthodox Marxism in the modern world is a reduction of Marxism from a synthesis of rationalistic philosophy and empirical science to a scientific naturalism independent of human will and imagination. Following in the footsteps of Engels, modern orthodoxy considers natural reality to be the ultimate touchstone upon which the facticity of the dialectical method can be evaluated. As Stalin said:

“Nature is the test of dialectics . . . the materialist world outlook is simply the conception of nature as it is, without any reservations.”<sup>51</sup>

Given only this empirical foundation, the humanistic critique of the established reality, an essential element of revolutionary Marxism, has been lost. Dialectical Marxism is rooted both in the internal development of logic and philosophy as well as in the empirical foundations of natural

science.<sup>52</sup> By posing the “existence of Nature as it is,” orthodox Marxism fails to comprehend the mental act required in the construction of facticity—the epistemological problematic—and instead asserts the rules of natural science as the only methodology useful for the study of social reality.

The rules of natural science, such as those used by Marx in *Capital* to exhibit some of the necessary laws which operate within the capitalist system, have a validity rooted in the structures of capitalism. But the moment of truth in such a methodology reaches its limit when the focus of investigation becomes the human *transformation* of the totality of the existing system. Orthodox Marxism insists that:

“. . . the science of the history of society despite all the complexity of the phenomena of social life, can become as precise a science as, let us say, biology, and capable of making use of the laws of development of society for practical purposes.”<sup>53</sup>

This variety of “scientific” Marxism fails to differentiate between the naturally given realities of biology and the humanly constructed nature of the social world.<sup>54</sup>

Even in the writings of Marx, there are elements which may be said to have been preconditions for the hegemony of positivism within contemporary Marxist theory. In *Critical Theory of Society*, Albrecht Wellemer criticizes Marx’s approval of the comparison made by some between the phenomena of economic life as analyzed in *Capital* and the history of biological evolution. Marx’s disciples, particularly Engels, admiringly referred to *Capital* as following in the scientific tradition of Copernicus and Galileo. More recently, Althusser has referred to this analysis of Engels as “pages of extraordinary theoretical profundity.” Within the writings of Marx, the roots of the scientific reduction can be traced to his conception of the self-constitution of the human species as taking place only within the process of material production. This presupposition excludes important aspects of human existence from consideration and furthermore, the fetishization of work, not its quantitative reduction or qualitative transformation, has become the position of dogmatic Marxist theory.

Revolutionary praxis is a second dimension by which the human species has shaped itself. Habermas calls for a reinterpretation of the dialectic through the self-conscious integration of revolutionary praxis into our philosophical self-understanding:

. . . the meaning of this 'dialectic' must remain unclarified as long as the materialist concept of the synthesis of man and nature is restricted to the categorical framework of production. If the idea of the self-constitution of the human species in natural history is to combine both self-generation through productive activity and self-formation through critical revolutionary activity, then the concept of synthesis must also incorporate a second dimension.<sup>55</sup>

In calling for an integration of revolutionary activity into the notion of species-constitution, Habermas reinterprets the necessity of philosophical practice:

Social theory, from the viewpoint of the self-constitution of the species in the medium of social labor and class struggle, is possible only as the self-reflection of the knowing subject . . . Philosophy is preserved in science as critique. A social theory that puts forth the claim to be a self-reflection of the history of the species cannot simply negate philosophy. Rather, the heritage of philosophy issues in the critique of ideology, a mode of thought that determines the method of scientific analysis itself.<sup>56</sup>

Habermas rejects any science of society which follows in the positivistic tradition of fetishizing objective knowledge as the only goal of science. Rather, "objectivity" only reconfirms what absolute idealism had already accomplished—the elimination of epistemology in favor of universal "scientific knowledge"—but this time in the form of the ideology of technocratic science, rather than the dogma of religion.

It should also be said here that Marx never tired of criticizing what he called "crude Communism" for not centering on the human essence, the human subject of social reality, but operating in a world of things. The discovery of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in 1930 gave impetus to a revolutionary transformation of the conceptual framework within which orthodox Marxism continues to operate today. In the early work of Marx, and in his last work, *Capital*, political economy is derived from philosophical concepts. The crucial breakthrough made by Marx was the transformation of economic fact into human factors. Capital was never defined as a thing by Marx. On the contrary, at every point in the development of his scientific theory, he unmasked what had been regarded as the property of the capitalist as stored-up dead labor, as "objectified labor, i.e., labor which is present in space."<sup>57</sup> Even the

exchange value of Nature was seen by Marx as contingent upon the embodied human labor required to extract raw materials from their natural state.

Although such concepts as alienation exist within the theory of orthodox Marxism, they are compartmentalized and regarded as "facts" in the same sense that prices of commodities, ground rent, and other economic factors are considered. Instead of human reality being seen within the factual nature of economic relations, orthodox Marxism makes economic facts out of human relationships. By transforming the dialectical method of Marx into a universally applicable system of "base-superstructure," orthodox Marxism elevates its truth to a new metaphysics. Reality is poured into a bottle of static "scientific" propositions, reducing knowledge from a living human praxis to a dead conformity with the dictates of the formalistic model.

In discussing the philosophy of the Soviet Union, Marcuse points out the transformation of the function of the dialectic:

But while not a single of the basic dialectical concepts has been revised or rejected in Soviet Marxism, the function of the dialectic itself has undergone a significant change: it has been transformed from a mode of critical thought into a universal "world outlook" and universal method with rigidly fixed rules and regulations, and this transformation destroys the dialectic more thoroughly than any revision . . . The first step in this direction was made by Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature* . . .<sup>58</sup>

It is not simply the formalistic methodology of Orthodoxy but the content of its imposed forms which are called into question by critical theory. The language itself—that is, the words "base" and "superstructure"—belies a simplicity of analysis which, within the methodology of universally valid scientific knowledge, destroys in advance of its possibility the transformation of the qualities of human beings and our constructed reality. Especially in the modern world where the state plays an increasing role in the economy, it is increasingly difficult to accept the vulgar dichotomy of base and superstructure.

It is within this framework that Orthodox Marxism can be seen as predicated on a metaphysical, trans-historical idealism. As Lukács observed in *History and Class Consciousness*, what is common to all bourgeois systems of analysis is the inability to formulate the categories of the present as other than eternal ones. Modern Orthodoxy is predicated on a negation of the power of human reason and imagination as ideolog-

ical and unscientific. Parallel to the effects of sociological positivism, reality is thereby reduced to what exists as it is, and the definition of the totality of human existence excludes the possibility—indeed the necessity—of the qualitative transformation of the categories of social reality.

On the other hand, two-dimensional Marxism insists on the importance of distinguishing essence and appearance and of retaining the distinction between “pre-history” and the “leap into freedom.” According to Marcuse:

In a society whose totality was determined by its economic relations to the extent that the uncontrolled economy controlled all human relations, even the non-economic was contained in the economy. It appears that, if and when this control is removed, the rational organization of society toward which critical theory is oriented is more than a new form of economic regulation. The difference lies in the decisive factor, precisely the one that makes society rational—the subordination of the economy to the individuals’ needs. The transformation of society eliminates the original relation of substructure and superstructure.<sup>59</sup>

The “absolute knowledge” of Orthodox Marxism is predicated on methodological presuppositions including the formal logic of natural science. By making Marxism into an abstract scheme universally applicable through the Communist Parties of the world, the living subjects of the concrete history of human society—the “little people” (as well as the dialectical logic of Marx which conceived human beings as the creators of their social reality)—are destroyed, buried beneath the rule of bureaucratically organized science. Orthodox Marxism regards the workings of things—whether the economic base or the reified superstructures—as determining the consciousness and praxis of human beings. If this were simply so, how could a qualitatively new social reality be envisioned and fought for? By calling for a reintegration of philosophical concerns within Marxism, critical Marxism, in theory at least, prepares the ground for a popular reconstruction of reality. By negating philosophy, Orthodox Marxism fails to strengthen liberatory mass movements, and in practice, as we have seen in recent years, seeks to crush them.

Philosophy provided the basis for Marx’s theory and practice. Orthodox Marxism misses the dynamics of society and revolution in their human essence by rejecting the rationalistic foundations of Marxism. The class struggle, proletarian revolution, and freedom are retained but as

metaphysical truths. The dialectical method of orthodoxy has become a static shell of empty logic universally applicable yet increasingly irrelevant to the liberation of human beings.

### THE IDEOLOGY OF ALTHUSSER’S MARXISM

The scientific interpretation of the works of Marx as enunciated by Louis Althusser posits an “epistemological rupture” between the early “philosophical” Marx and the older “scientific” Marx: “This ‘epistemological break’ divides Marx’s thought into two long essential periods: the ‘ideological’ period before, and the scientific period after, the break in 1845.”<sup>60</sup> Althusser goes on to classify the writings of Marx into four more precise periods culminating in the “Mature Marx” after 1857.

The impositions of these constructed periods, and most importantly, the “essential” duality between the young, philosophical and old, scientific Marx, are themselves ideological. In the modern world where the technocratic ideology permits the rule of experts and elites, is it surprising that a justification for the reduction of Marxism from the philosophy of the proletariat to the science of the Party is couched in the language of science?

The dominant ideology of the modern world, in contrast to the era in which Marx articulated his revolutionary philosophy, is technocratic materialism, not feudal idealism. The elites of today, whose hegemony depends on the docility of their followers, rely on people remaining convinced of their own incapability to think and act properly without the presence of experts. Within the Communist Parties, a stratum of high priests of Marxism has been created to interpret the needs of “the revolution” for the members of the Party as well as for the working class. Despite the beliefs of the Althusserians that they are “non-ideological” scientists, we will indicate the self-serving nature of their interpretation of Marxism. Specifically, we will briefly discuss epistemological aspects within the Althusserian paradigm: the abolition of the subject of history and his differentiation between ideology and science.

In contrast to the humanism of the young Marx, Althusser insists that Marxism is a science devoid of humanistic considerations. Humanistic Marxism is viewed as ideology, which if accepted by scientific Marxists, would “cut ourselves off from all knowledge.”<sup>61</sup> In contrast to scientific theory, philosophy is seen by Althusser as a reflection of ideology which a science might develop out of, through an epistemological rupture. According to Althusser:



Without sciences, no philosophy, only world outlook . . . .  
The ultimate stake of philosophical struggle is the struggle for hegemony between the two great tendencies in world outlook (materialist and idealist). The main battlefield in this struggle is scientific knowledge: for it or against it. The number one philosophical battle therefore takes place on the frontier between the scientific and the ideological.<sup>62</sup>

Before dealing with the substance of the preceding quotation, we would like to digress for a moment to make a few observations about the language used. The words "battle" and "battlefield," despite their overtly militaristic connotations, might be accepted by the passionate reader on the grounds that class struggle is a continuous process, that politics is war without bloodshed. The word "frontier," however, is a peculiar one, looked at in the context of the westward expansion of European capitalism and the continual necessity of the incorporation of non-capitalist lands and labor-power for the existence of the capitalist system. The use of Madison Avenue's "number 1" seems out of context in a philosophical text, unless one believes that language is not ideological.

To draw the line between science and ideology as Althusser does in the above quotation is to fail to recognize the ideological nature of science. Fortunately, in the course of de-humanizing Marxism, Althusser deals squarely with our objection while criticizing the Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci:

In this way, Gramsci constantly declares that a scientific theory, or such and such a category of science, is a "superstructure" or a "historical category" which he assimilates to a "human relation" . . . Science can no more be ranged within the category "superstructure" than can language, which as Stalin showed escapes it.<sup>63</sup>

By elevating science to the status of pure knowledge, Althusser serves the cause of the ideology of science which today is the primary system of belief within advanced industrial society. The scientific ideology of advanced monopoly capitalism manifests itself in a variety of myths: belief in the solvability of all problems through the application of technology even if the problems are human ones; acceptance of the authority of experts; eating plastic foods with preservatives on the assumption that these chemicals will not harm one's body. Mass society engenders increasing popular docility and blind faith.

After asserting that science is not part of the "superstructure," that it is an eternal truth, Althusser's next step is to make philosophy the "study of theoretical practices," providing a framework for the activity of philosophers as the "high priests" of the Communist Party, while divorcing philosophy from the rank and file. For Althusser, "historical materialism" is the science of history or the science of social formations, while "dialectical materialism" is Marxist philosophy. This dualistic conception of reality is, of course, ideological. The specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge, reflecting the fragmentation of the productive process, is itself false consciousness which overlooks the philosophical basis of all science, and, in particular, overlooks the development of the Marxian critique of political economy from its philosophical roots and method. Furthermore, Althusser's contrived "epistemological rupture" in Marx, meant to purge the philosophical aspects of the "young" Marx, demonstrates how different his notion of rupture is from Marx's notion of *Aufhebung*, the development of the new from within the old, retaining key properties of the old, and decidedly not jettisoning the past altogether.

The distinction which Althusser makes between ideology and science corresponds to the positivistic reduction of reality to the facticity of the given. Human imagination is contrasted to facticity by Althusser, but more importantly so is class consciousness:

. . . men live their actions, usually referred to as freedom and *consciousness* by the classical tradition, in ideology, by and through ideology; in short, that the 'lived' relation between men and the world, including History (in political action or inaction), passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology* itself . . . In ideology, the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will, a hope, or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.<sup>64</sup>

The reduction of Marxism from the philosophy of the proletariat to the science of the Party has necessitated its rejection of humanism. Althusser has consistently reinterpreted Marxism from a "scientific" perspective, attacking intellectuals like Sartre as "petit-bourgeois" and systematically revising Marxism in an attempt to exorcise the "evil spirit" of humanistic philosophy.

In the name of science, he insists upon the need not to stray into the individualist-humanist error or conceiving that "the subjects of history

are 'real, concrete men'.' Who, then, if anyone, are the subjects of history? The reply from Althusser:

The "subjects" of history are given human societies. They present themselves as totalities whose unity is constituted by a certain specific type of complexity, which introduces instances, that, following Engels, we can, very schematically, reduce to three: the economy, politics, and ideology. So in *every* society we can posit . . . the existence of an economic activity as the base, a political organization and "ideological" forms.<sup>65</sup> (italics for emphasis)

In a later work, Althusser goes on to comment on the rejection of the views of the young Lükács by the Comintern:

"The Marxist tradition was quite correct to return to the thesis of the *Dialectics of Nature*, which has a polemical meaning that history is a process without a subject, that the dialectic at work in history is not the work of any Subject whatsoever, whether Absolute (God) or merely human, but that the origin of history is always already thrust back before history, and therefore that there is neither a philosophical origin nor a philosophical subject to History."<sup>66</sup>

Under the conditions of monopoly capitalism, the reduction of Marxist theory to a set of rigid categories has resulted in the standardization of thought common to the sectarian left in the United States. Under similar conditions in France, but with a more conscious base among the working class, the reification of Marxism is an important explanatory reason for the Communist Party's antipathy toward the popular movement of May 1968, whose constituency and visions were not and are not comprehensible from within the myopic world view of "scientific" Marxism.

The "scientific" treatment of Marxism may be seen as a reinterpretation of Marx from within the dominant ideology of modern corporate capitalism. A failure to break with the mentality of mass society has resulted in a fetishized treatment of Marx and Lenin. These "great men" of history have been turned into exportable commodities by the savants of Orthodoxy. In the United States, each sect resembles a collective capitalist struggling to reap as much profit (cadre) from the mass movement as possible, each selling their version of "the real thing." The house dogma which members freely recite is more in the tradition of a catechism than a questioning and critique of the established reality. In few groups do activists learn to think about important issues as a process of open

scientific investigation. Instead the answers (and the questions) are provided by higher-ups. Such standardization of thought parallels, not negates, the dominant ideology of our society, as the chart below summarizes:

<b>ORTHODOX MARXISM (including Althusser)</b>	<b>TWO-DIMENSIONAL MARXISM</b>
<i>The world view of the mass and their masters.</i>	<i>The world view of the revolutionary subject in the U.S.</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Essence and appearance not distinguished: things (structures) primary, not human beings.</li> <li>2. Great Men of History Powerlessness of individuals like you and me.</li> <li>3. No morality – "scientific objectivity."</li> <li>4. Unable to transcend the dominant forms of comprehending reality: categories of the past seen as eternal (biologically, theologically, or socially necessary). base/superstructure only the past/present only material needs (scarcity)</li> <li>5. Fragmentation: inability to comprehend individual phenomena, to understand connectedness, or to see the totality.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Essence and appearance distinguished: human beings at the center of analysis. Humans seen as creators of social life/wealth.</li> <li>2. Human classes, races, sexes and individuals as makers of history. Power of the people.</li> <li>3. Human morality – philosophical science.</li> <li>4. Consciousness of historical conditions give freedom to expand forms and content of life. only necessity is change past/present/future human needs as a whole</li> <li>5. Universality: begins from the totality and embraces individuality.</li> </ol>
<i>Individualism-atomization</i>	<i>Collectivity-real individuality</i>

In the context of the ossification of the Communist Parties of Europe as bureaucratic structures above the people, Althusser develops a scientific defense. History has no subject, or if it does, it is given as the society. The role of revolutionary philosophy as a part of the autonomous actions of the people is eliminated in favor of a science which guides the Party. Thus, the implications of Althusser's dissection of the works of Marx are a reduction of the substance of Marxism to a technocratic ideology, i.e., the degeneration of scientific Marxism into a justification for the facticity of the given.

By way of contrast with Critical Marxism, Althusser's abolition of the subject of history can be placed in a historical perspective. In a period where the working class has become contained within the consumer society of the "free world" and where the ideology of the Party has become a means of justifying the bureaucratic reality in "socialist" societies, critical theory has examined each development from the perspective of the unfreedom of the modern world and the potential of a qualitative step forward for human beings through the popular transformation of history. According to Marcuse:

"Critical theory's interest in the liberation of mankind binds it to certain ancient truths. It is at one with philosophy in maintaining that humans can be more than a manipulable subject in the production process of class society. To the extent that philosophy has nevertheless made its peace with man's determination by economic conditions, it has allied itself with repression."<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to the view put forth by academic sociology and by Orthodox Marxism that philosophy is nothing more than merely the expression of a specific social situation—ideology—critical theory continually returns to a conception of human beings as creative, rational beings who are not simply determined by the given reality. In this context, philosophy becomes socially realizable through the human transformation of the status quo.

In the twentieth century, critical theory has re-emerged as a philosophical project where the pursuit of "Reason" and "Truth" are part of the popular reconstruction of the social world, not simply an ideological activity reserved for the upper echelons of the Party or the inner sanctum of the corporate university. Standing firmly in the tradition of philosophy, critical theory has rooted its concerns with the problematique of freedom in the modern world. According to Marcuse:

But a social situation has come about in which the realization of reason no longer needs to be restricted to pure thought and will. If reason means shaping life according to peoples' free decision on the basis of their knowledge, then the demand for reason henceforth means the creation of a social organization in which individuals can collectively regulate their own lives in accordance with their needs. It was the task of social theory to demonstrate this possibility and lay the foundation for the transformation of the economic structure. By so doing, it could

provide theoretical leadership for those strata which, by virtue of their historic situation, were to bring about the change.<sup>68</sup>

Critical theory in the modern world has been defined by its philosophical and historical critique of theory and reality, capitalist and "socialist." In so doing, it has helped preserve the possibility of a real "leap into freedom" at a time when even the notion of human liberation has been in danger of scientific reduction.

## NOTES

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11. Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor" in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, op. cit.
12. Frederich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press) Also Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972).
13. Herbert Marcuse, "The Triumph of Positive Thinking: One Dimensional Philosophy," pp. 170-203 in *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

14. Hans Zetterberg, *On Theory and Verification in Sociology* (Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1964).
15. Herbert Marcuse, "From Negative to Positive Thinking: Technological Nationality and the Topic of Domination" in *One Dimensional Man* op. cit.
16. George K. Lukács, "What Is Orthodox Marxism? pp. 1-27 in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).
17. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Progressive-Regressive Method" p. 103 on "totalization" in *Search for a Method* (New York: Random House, 1963). See also Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Doubleday, 1965). See pp. 124-129 "The Philosophy of the *groupe en fusion*."
18. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Praxis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) and *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
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20. R. George Kirkpatrick, "Subject and Object and Form and Content in Social Theory," *Review of Social Theory* (Spring, 1974); also Paul Breines "Praxis and Its Theorists: The Impact of Lukács and Korsch in the 1920's," *Telos* #11 (Spring, 1972), and Russell Jacoby, "Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Philosophy from Lukács to The Frankfurt School," *Telos* #10 (Winter, 1971), Michael Lowy, "Lukács and Stalinism," *New Left Review* (May-June, 1975), No. 91, pp. 25-43; and Henry Pachter, "Lukacs Revisited: Orthodox Heretic, Stalinist Romantic," *Dissent* (Spring 1975), pp. 177-189.
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32. See Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* op. cit.
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68. Ibid., pp. 141-142.