

Critical Realism and Recent Developments in Social Theory

Introduction

It is well to be reminded that the disciplines of the social sciences are not “natural kinds” and, accordingly, that they have a history, intellectual and institutional. While this is not the place to review this, we should note that both the disciplinary divisions and the view of science generally taken-for-granted among most social scientists is fairly recent, dating only from the immediate post-World War I period. It is critical to note also that during the period of the institutionalization of the social sciences, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, there was a dominating conception of what a science was. Termed “positivism” or “empiricism,” this view was profoundly propelled in the 1930s by Viennese “logical positivism” and became by the 1950s the dominating conception among both philosophers and social scientists.¹

¹ The foundations are laid in the US just after World War I when German-inspired historical social science is expunged and replaced by quantitative and behaviorally oriented programs (Manicas, 1987, 1991). Symptomatic is Herbert Hoover's 1929 gathering of a distinguished group of social scientists "to examine the feasibility of a national survey of social trends." Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation with the full support of the Social Science Research Council and the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, four years of work by hundreds of inquirers resulted in "The Ogburn Report," 1600 pages of quantitative research. Pitirim Sorokin, who had no objection to the appropriate use of statistics, was not impressed. He noted: "in the future some thoughtful investigator will probably write a very illuminating study about these 'quantitative obsessions' ...tell how such a belief became a vogue, how social investigators tried to 'measure' everything; how thousands of papers and research bulletins were filled with tables, figures, and coefficients; and how thousands of persons never intended for scientific investigation found in measurement and computation a substitute for real thought" (cited from Neil J. Smelser, 1986: 27).

On this view, the sciences were not metaphysical: They did not import into their explanations assumptions which could not be tested in experience. In this sense, then, the sciences were “empirical.” This meant that the reference of terms in use had to be experimentally available. “Hypotheses,” understood as potential explanations, linked 'variables' that required evidence which had to be “theory neutral.” A theory was simply a premise set of hypotheses for which there were deducible empirical consequences. Finally, if metaphysical assumptions were not to be allowed, then explanation had to be in the form of “laws,” which, following Hume's expunging of metaphysics from causality, were “regularities” between associated “variables,” “whenever this, then that.” Explanation, accordingly, proceeded by subsumption under law.

On the assumption that there were no critical differences between the natural and social sciences, the approach eschewed subjectivity, theorized society as an objective functioning system, and employed objective methods to identify objective “social facts.” This view favored formal modeling and econometrics, behaviorism in psychology, behavioralism in political science, empirical survey research and quantitative methods and functionalism and structuralism in anthropology, sociology, political science, and, perhaps paradoxically, in textbook versions of Marxism. Social science would be science—with a vengeance.

But just as this view of science became taken-for-granted in social science departments in the US, it was coming under attack from philosophers, including its most important expositors, for example, Quine, 1950 and Hempel, 1958. New directions were taken by Stephen Toulmin, 1953, 1961; Kuhn, 1962; Harré, 1970; Hesse, 1970 and Hanson, 1958. By the mid-70s, *not one of the defining planks of logical empiricism remained.*² Critical was rejection of the idea that a

² Although the work of Harré is omitted, a useful one volume review of this history is Frederick Suppe, 1977.

theory of science could be epistemologically “foundationalist” and metaphysically neutral. Thus, neither sense data nor appeals to putative theory-neutral “basic sentences” could warrant truth-claims, for indeed, there could be no “God's eye view of the world.” The second critical difference was rejection of “Deductivism” (the Deductive-Nomological, “covering law model” of explanation). It was replaced by an ontological realism which made sense of the role of theory in explanation. While there had been decisive criticisms of the D-N model of explanation since at least the 1950s, once Humean causality was replaced by a robust notion of causes as productive powers, the covering law model had also finally to be rejected.³

A good deal of mainstream thinking in the social sciences is still uncritically beholden to the older views. Social scientists, like all others, are not comfortable with fundamental challenges to their ways of doing things. On the other hand, there were always challenges to this dominating view, beginning in a clear way with the work of Max Weber and extending in the recent past to a wide range of alternatives usually termed “hermeneutic” or “interpretative” sociologies. These critics sometimes argued that positivism, logical empiricism, or simply empiricism, may well be appropriate for the natural sciences, but that it is a fatally mistaken 'scientific' approach to the social sciences (Natanson, 1963). Or more radically, these critics abandoned altogether the idea of a social or human *science* (Rosaldo, 1989). Critically, neither

³ The ground-breaking work on causality is Rom Harré and Edward Madden, 1974. See also Bunge, 1979 and Bohm, 1894. One might argue that the covering law model is a *defining* attribute of 'empiricist' (positivist, neo-positivist) understandings of science. For a sample of some of the critical philosophical literature see Scriven, 1959, 1962; Harré, 1970, 1986; Dretske, 1977; Bhaskar, 1975; Salmon, 1978, 1984; Achinstein, 1981; Aronson, 1984; Woodward, 1984; Lewis, 1987; Kim, 1987; Manicas, 2006.

party challenged the idea of science that was being assumed. But the undermining of the dominating theory of science has opened the way for a deep reconsideration of the nature and methods of social science, including resolution of the older dispute between “naturalistic” and hermeneutical views of social scientific inquiry.

The present essay tests this idea by looking at four recent developments: the social theories of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, and the recent critical realist critique of mainstream economics. While there are some important differences between them, all share in rejecting mainstream assumptions regarding explanation in social science, the Humean conception of causality and along with this, the polarities of “subjective/objective,” agent/structure, micro-vs- macro, and hermeneutic/ethnographic vs. quantitative/ “hard science” methods. It will be convenient to begin with a sketch of the fundamental themes of critical realist philosophy and then to examine its critique of mainstream neo-classical economics, surely the most influential version of positivist theory of science. We then show that the views of Bourdieu and Giddens are excellent examples of a critical realist approach to social theory. The work of Foucault is more problematic. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned by considering his work from this point of view.

A Sketch of Critical Realist Metatheory

I begin with a minimum sketch of key features of realist philosophy of science as I understand it. I concentrate on the role and nature of explanation and of theory, between what is frequently termed “deductivism,” and on an alternative in which explanation requires the articulation of a causal mechanism, for example, the mechanism provided by molecular

chemistry which gives us an understanding of oxidation.⁴ I take the position that in social science, explanation requires social causal mechanisms, an idea clearly found in the work of Max Weber but often assumed, unclearly, in much current social science.

“Deductivism” assumes some version of the D-N model of explanation wherein theory is construed as a deductive system in which propositions—the *explanandum*, are deduced from initial conditions and axioms, usually buttressed by taken-for-granted assumptions, the *explanans*. Mainstream economics characteristically adopts this model.⁵ There are, however,

⁴ The two terms, “understanding” and “explanation” are frequently interchangeable, but “understanding” carries the connotation of “making intelligible.” “Explanation” is most comfortable as regards the explanation of events. Thus, we have an understanding of the fact that iron tends to rust when we have the mechanism of oxidation. We have an explanation of some event when we show how the pertinent mechanism combined with other actions and mechanisms to produce the outcome—why in some particular instance the iron rusted. For a fuller elaboration, see Manicas, 2006, Chapter 1.

⁵ Thus Arrow notes that

“in most mathematical, and generally, in most deductive studies in the social sciences, the starting point is the behavior of the individual. Each individual is conceived as acting in a way determined partly by his psychology and physical surroundings and partly by the actions of others. If there are n individuals, we may denote the actions of individuals i by A_i and the nonsocial determinants of his behavior by P_i . Then the actions of the first individual may be described by the symbolic equation,

$$A_1 = f(P_i, A_2, \dots, A_n).$$

There is one such equation for each individual. Together, they constitute n equations in the n variables A_1, \dots, A_n .”

by now well established problems with deductivism. I need here to be brief. In the first place, theories are not logical systems which can be fully expressed mathematically. As Harré writes: “In fact, in actual science, deductive systems are quite rare: fragments of such systems can be found in physics, but mostly scientists come up with descriptions of structures, attributions of powers and laws of change, related by having a common object, not by being then and there deducible from a common set of axioms”(Harré, 1970: 10). This requires an entirely different understanding of scientific theory, sketched in what follows.

Second (and following on the foregoing) it is easy to show that logical implication (entailment) is the wrong relation for explanation. That is, on the D-N conception, the explanandum follows logically from the premises: If P, then necessarily Q. If the explanans, P, is true, we have provided sufficient grounds for believing that the explanandum, Q, is true. So, presumably, Q is "explained."⁶ But not only is this contrary to our intuitions about explanation, it is easy to construct counter-examples of D-N “explanations” with true premises which are just plain silly. They not only do they not explain, but they do not even provide grounds for believing that the explanandum is true.

The alternative argues that scientific explanation is causal explanation but rejects causality understood in Humean terms as mere relations of constant conjunction. This is the key point: It argues, instead, that causes are productive powers. “Things,” (“powerful

Presumably, then, by solving these equations we can “determine the behavior of society in the sense that we can determine the behavior of any individual in society” (1968: 640).

⁶ Hempel acknowledged a weaker form, “inductive statistical explanation.” However, in these we lose all hold on the individual case. Sam wants to know why he got lung cancer and doesn’t smoke and Harry, who smokes, is free of cancer!

particulars”) have the causal powers they have by virtue of theorized causal mechanisms. To take the simplest case, on the standard view, if one has the “law,” “If salt is put in water, it dissolves,” you can then predict that in a particular instance, a consequence of putting salt in water will be that it will (probably) dissolve. But similarly, on this view, (allegedly) one explains why some instance of salt dissolved by appeal to the same “law.” On this view, explanation and prediction are symmetrical. Of course, it is part of the explanation of its dissolving that the salt was put into water and this explains some of the attractiveness of the covering law model of explanation. And indeed, while science may well begin by identifying patterns and regularities in the world, a scientific explanation does not aim at establishing “law-like” relations of variables, no matter how probable. Rather, explanation comes with identifying the causal mechanisms at work.⁷ In this example, there is something about salt and water, such that when salt is put in water, it tends to dissolve-- and not (say) to explode or turn the water to gin! People knew that salt tended to dissolve in water before we had molecular chemistry but they did not know why. Indeed, the idea that the goal of science is to identify and confirm “laws” which explain by subsumption, obscures the critical role of theory and model building in real science.⁸

⁷ The relative absence of discussion of causal mechanisms in the literature of the philosophy of science suggests that the “revolution” predicted by Harré in 1970 has not yet occurred. But for some very useful discussion of causal mechanisms, see Peter Machamer, Lindley Darden, and Carl F. Craver, 2000, and Mario Bunge, 2003.

⁸ The critique of deductivism in the current economic literature has been much influenced by the work of Lawson, who has argued that the absence of system closure is the problem for the deductivist account. From the present point of view, Lawson’s account is not so much wrong, but that it obscures the

Deductivism and Social Mechanisms in Mainstream Economics

The idea that explanation proceeds by providing a social mechanism has a long history in economics. Sketches of such mechanisms in economic theorizing have been available since Adam Smith, who saw, rightly, that the key concepts of economics: wages, rents, etc., presuppose the purposive behavior of agents. The market was then the pertinent causal mechanism. Smith's "invisible hand" required that actors had interests and were sufficiently enlightened in pursuit of satisfying them. The outcome was explained in terms of the consequences, intended and unintended, of the actions of actors. The idea thus preceded the "formalist" revolution of the recent past, a "revolution" which solidified—if incoherently—the taken-for-granted deductivism.⁹

main problem: that entailment is the wrong relation for explanation. That is, even under conditions of (approximate) closure (for example, our solar system) where outcomes are deducible from fundamental principles, the deduction does not provide an explanation of these outcomes, a point recognized by Newton, who struggled to find a mechanism. This problem led, eventually, to the views of Mach and Poincaré that science does not seek explanations. For them, to try to do so is to engage in metaphysics. See Manicas, 1987: 184-190.

⁹ See Peter J. Boettke, 1997; David Warsh, 2003, Part IV.

There is a long history of criticism of the neo-classical model, beginning perhaps with the Durkheim and the *Methodenstreit*, conveniently dated from the 1893 publication of Carl Menger's *Untersuchungen über die Method de Sozialwissenschaften und der de Politischen Ökonomie insbesondere*. One then needs to include Thorstein Veblen and a long line "institutionalists," from John Commons to John Kenneth Galbraith to many contemporary "economic sociologists." Useful anthologies of essays by representative writers include: Etzioni and Lawrence, 1991; Granoveter and Swedberg, 1992; Swedberg, 1993; Smelser and Swedberg, 1994; Biggart, 2002. See also Dugger, 1992.

Some of the confusion, at least, derives from the wide acceptance among economists of Milton Friedman's classic "instrumentalist" account of theory. He argued that "...theory is to be judged by the predictive power for the class of phenomena which it is intended to 'explain'."(Friedman, 1968: 512). As he says:

...the relevant question to ask about the "assumptions" of a theory is not whether they are descriptively 'realistic,' for they never are, but whether they are sufficiently good approximations for the purpose at hand. And this question can be answered only by seeing whether the theory works, which means whether or not it yields sufficiently accurate predictions (Friedman: 1968: 517).

An instrumentalist understanding of theory allows one to have a causal model and still be deductivist. But for the instrumentalist understanding of theory, since the test of theory is "good predictions"--as consequences of the mathematical model-- the theory of the mechanism need not be even a "sufficiently good approximation" of reality. P can entail Q even if P is false. Theory explains, however, only when the description of the mechanism is true. The problem with the mainstream theory, then, is not merely that it appeals to deductivism and to a causal theory of the market, but that the theory of the social mechanism it provides is false: it is not true of the concrete which it means to explain. We need to say a bit more about social causal mechanisms.

For some exceptional doubt offered by the discipline's most leading lights, see the AEA Presidential Addresses of Wassily Leontief , 1971; James Tobin, 1972 and Robert Solo, 1980. Similar themes have been expressed by other notable insiders, e.g., Lester Thurow, 1983 and (Lord) Thomas Balough, 1982; , A.O. Hirshman, 1985 and Amartya K. Sen, 1977. For a variety of critical analyses, see also the *Progressive Economics Forum* (www.web.ca/~pef).

First, and most critically, social mechanisms (unlike the many various mechanisms identified by theory in the physical sciences) require the actions of persons—one of the many meanings of “methodological individualism.” The theory of social mechanisms requires that persons be “powerful particulars,” able to intervene in the world as to change it. Advocates of critical realism are divided on the question of whether, in addition to agents as causes, social structures are causal.¹⁰ Second, specific typical attributes may be applied to them and their situation. These attributes are, to be sure, “emergent” properties of persons which they have only as social persons interacting socially. Some of these properties are generated by providing answers to the following questions: (a) What do they want? (b) What do they know—including what do they think that they know? (c) What are their attributes, personal and relational? Thus, do they have special skills, or advantages/ disadvantages as regards the social relations in which they stand? Given (c) we have (d): what can they do? Actors always have choices, but they do not choose who they are or the alternatives that they have.¹¹

While the neo-classical theory of the mechanism assumes, correctly, that the actions of persons, identified by means of the usual economic categories, “consumers,” “employers,” etc are the critical causal components of the mechanism, it badly misdescribes the actors and their situations. For example, they are not rational in the relevant sense, they lack the knowledge which is assumed by the theory, they stand in very different social relations, and thus have very different interests, powers and capacities, not acknowledged by mainstream theory.

¹⁰ We do not seek to settle the issue here, but as noted subsequently, this may be a point of difference between Giddens and Bourdieu. For discussion of much of the critical literature, see Manicas, 2006: 67-74.

¹¹ See Hernes, Gudmund, 1998. Many examples are provided in Manicas, 2006.

The immediate consequence of the critical realist conception of individuals and society is that social mechanisms are knowable only *a posteriori*: social mechanisms are historically specific and must be articulated empirically. In sharp contrast to the neo-classical theory, which attempts an ahistorical general theory of the market, the social mechanisms which constitute markets, both in some particular society at different times and in different societies, will be different – even if at some level of abstraction there will be similarities, including, for example, that prices, while fixed very differently in different markets, are critical to economic decision-making. Indeed, as is well-known, Russian, German, Japanese and American markets are all capitalist, but they differ in very critical ways, but particularly in terms of the legally and institutionally generated capacities of actors--from officials of government to capitalists to workers and households.

The problem, it must be emphasized, is not that the theory of the social mechanism is an abstraction: All scientific theories must abstract from concrete reality. We “strip away” all the properties of concrete (empirical) iron and define it in terms of its atomic structure. Theoretical iron is Fe and, according to theory, it must rust if exposed to H₂ O. And it usually does because most concrete pieces of iron are at instances of the abstraction, theoretical Fe, even if they are not purely Fe. Moreover, in the real world, all outcomes are the product of complex causes, so there is never closure—the condition in which there are no complicating causal facts. Empirically, the best we have are generalizations: iron usually rusts. But a strong *ceteris paribus* clause cannot save the neo-classical social mechanism since (as has been said many, many times), unlike the mechanisms of molecular chemistry, the neo-classical mechanism makes a host of false assumptions about the elements and processes of the mechanism. Indeed, it would be nearer to the truth to say that while neo-classical theorists claim to

abstract from concrete reality, as Fleetwood (1996) says, they fictionalize. Since the actors and their conditions are misdescribed, the process could not produce the predicted outcomes, even if the system was closed. So it is not a matter of saying “other things being equal,” markets would reach a Pareto optimum equilibrium.

Socialism and Realist Theories of Markets

Indeed, even we ignore the mainstream assumptions of rationality and the “free market,” the absence of the required information allows us to see in clear way why planned (non-market) economies have failed and why market economies, including those which are oligopolistic or monopolistic succeed to the extent that they do. Only a few hints can be provided here. Even if we acknowledge critical differences in the capacities of actors in market and centrally planned economies, a critical feature of market economies is overlooked by mainstream theory. Thus, if the Austrian political economy of von Mises and Hayek is correct in its critique, mainstream theory misses exactly what needs to be known: As Hayek insisted: “[E]conomic theory sometimes appears at the outset to bar its way to a true appreciation of the character of the process of competition because it starts from the assumption of ‘given’ supply of scarce goods. But which goods are scarce, of which things are goods, and how scarce or valuable they are—these are precisely the things which competition has to discover.”¹² On this view, competition is not the utopia of neo-classical free market, but a condition in every economic environment in which “entrepreneurs” try to take advantage of the dynamical conditions of existing disequilibrium.¹³ The greater efficiency of market economies in comparison to centrally planned

¹² Hayek 1978: 181; see Paul Lewis, 2006.

¹³ It is therefore no mistake, as pointed out by William Baumol, that “ideas of entrepreneurship, institutions, property rights, and freedom have almost no place in the textbooks of core classes and

economic is easily explained: Among entrepreneurs in market economies, information is widely dispersed. Accordingly, there is considerably greater information available to them.

The standard defense of private property market capitalism is then offered: “Economic calculation [to determine allocation of means of production] can only take place by means of money prices established in a market for production goods in society resting on private property in the means of production” (von Mises, 1936: 142)

industrial organization classes” (Baumol 2006). Baumol provided two powerful reasons: First, “entrepreneurial activities do not incorporate the homogeneous elements that lend themselves to formal mathematical description” and second, “equilibrium models exclude the entrepreneur by their very nature...[S]ustained equilibrium,” as insisted by Schumpeter and the Hayekians, “is something that the entrepreneur does not tolerate” --exactly because entrepreneurs --defined here as aiming at profit from productive investment --are constantly seeking genuinely new goods.

Worse, disaster awaits when, as Keynes long ago pointed out, “investment” takes the form of speculation—where no value is added. As he said: “Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation. When the capital development of a country becomes the by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done (Keynes, 1936: 159). Also see Manicas and Pooley , 1998.

The current global crisis provides a perfect example of the importance of law in the constitution of markets. The repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, agreed to in 1999 by President Clinton and Congressional Republicans, effectively deregulated banks and allowed non-banks, for example AIG, to engage in economic activities, for example, the purchase of derivatives, which had formerly been impossible. The outcome was the casino capitalism which led to the utter collapse of financial markets. .

So we are driven to the question: Why is private property in the means of production necessary? The answer would seem to be straightforward: without capitalists, there can be no capital markets. In capitalism, there are many owners of the means of production, each is interested in profit and they relate only in terms of markets. As buyers and sellers of capital, they make judgments about the use to which capital is put. These transactions establish exchange rates expressed as monetary prices. Similarly, producers of consumer goods then use this price information along with information regarding demand to make production decisions. Notice that on this view, speculation, for example, in money markets or real estate, is not considered.

But if a planned, command economy, even with the best intentions, cannot get the information it needs to allocate efficiently (and I think that it cannot), the argument does not hold against all forms of socialism. That is, once we assume a critical realist posture and see that concrete markets are socially constructed and that the legal system, including rules of ownership exchange and contract, are constitutive of concrete markets, there is no reason to hold that a socialism could not be both efficient and just (Elson, 1988; Manicas, 2007). Indeed, Hayek was himself sensitive to this possibility: He wrote:

There is no reason to assume that the historically given legal institutions are necessarily the most “natural” in any sense. The recognition of the principle of private property does not by any means necessarily imply that the particular delimitation of the contents of this right is determined by the existing laws are the most appropriate. The question as to which is the most appropriate permanent framework which will secure the smoothest and most efficient working of competition is of the greatest importance and one which it must be admitted has been badly neglected by economists (1935: 22).

More generally, what is demanded by a robust realist theory of markets, is insight into the real world conditions of the political economy and what needs to happen if they are to be efficient and just—a task powerfully advanced by the social theories of Bourdieu, Giddens and Foucault.¹⁴

Pierre Bourdieu and Critical Realism

Bourdieu, the successor to Foucault's chair in the Collège de France, absorbed the vigorous French debate between existential Marxists, phenomenology, structuralism and post-structuralism and, like Foucault, he made the effort to transcend the whole string of polarities and dichotomies which had characterized that debate. These included the antinomy between “subjective” and “objective” modes of knowledge, the separation of the cultural and symbolic from the material, the divorce of theory and practice and, more familiar to American sociology, the “micro-macro” gap and the dualism of agency and structure.

Bourdieu's effort (like Giddens') to revision social science begins, logically, with epistemology and ontology. Bourdieu agrees with critical realism (and Foucault and Derrida) that the idea of scientific “objectivity” must be deconstructed, that power always plays a role in sustaining scientific belief. He agrees also that “reason” needs to be historicized and that there can be no appeal to a transcendental subject. But employing a version of Foucault's appropriation of Althusser, Bourdieu “partakes wholeheartedly of the Enlightenment project of

¹⁴ For his criticism of neo-liberal political economy, see Bourdieu, 1998. He writes that equilibrium theory is “a pure mathematical fiction” which “brackets the economic and social conditions of rational orientations and the economic and social structures that are the condition of their application.” For an assessment of the relation of the social theories of Bourdieu and Giddens to their politics, see Alex Callinicos, 1999.

reason” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 47, note). Wacquant (*ibid.*) quotes him: “Against this antiscientism which is the fashion of the day and which brings grist to the mill of new ideologists, I defend science and even theory when it has the effect of providing a better understanding of the social world. One does not have to choose between obscurantism and scientism. ‘Of two ills,’ Karl Kraus said, ‘I refuse to choose the lesser.’” He hopes to manage this with two moves, with his concept of “epistemic reflexivity” and with the Althusserian idea of “scientific practice.”

Wacquant summarizes epistemic reflexivity as “the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 6). It differs from the usual notions of reflexivity in three ways: “first, its primary target is not the individual analyst but the social and *intellectual unconsciousness* embedded in analytic tools and operations; second, it must be *a collective enterprise* rather than the burden of a lone academic; and third, it seeks not to assault but *to buttress the epistemological security of sociology*” (*ibid.*).¹⁵

As with Althusser, practices are the key unit of analysis, and as for him, a form of realism is sustained by the theoretical practice of a proper social science. The task of sociology, Bourdieu

¹⁵ This is evidently different from both the “interpretivist skepticism” which characterizes work influenced by Derrida, and it is also very different from what Wacquant terms “textual reflexivity,” a posture which appropriates a hermeneutic approach. Bourdieu comments: “What [has] to be done [is] not magically to abolish [the distance between the observed and the observer] by a spurious primitivist participation but to objectivize this objectivizing distance and the social conditions which make it possible, such as the externality of the observer, the techniques of objectivation he uses, etc.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 42f.).

writes, is to “uncover the most profoundly buried structures of the various social worlds which constitute the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' which tend to ensure their reproduction or their transformation” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 7). As the product of properly reflexive theoretical work, these are objectivities, but there is a “constructivist” moment, identified but misconceived by subjectivist approaches.¹⁶ Thus, “if it is good to recall, against certain mechanistic visions of action, that social agents construct social reality, individually and also collectively, we must be careful not to forget, as the interactionists and ethnomethodologist often do, that they have not constructed the categories they put to work in this construction” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 10).

Two central concepts in this proffered solution are “habitus” and “field.” Habitus are “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to obtain them” (in Calhoun: 277). They are “embodied history,” traits of character, attitudes and capacities acquired by individuals who have “internalized” structure. They get played out in a “field,” which “may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions.” Paralleling Foucault's “discourse/practices,” one can speak of the field of the academy, or the economic, artistic, religious, or political field. And in an Althusserian mode,

¹⁶ Comparison to Berger and Luckmann, 1969, is apt here. There is a Hegelian tone to both, but it is not clear whether the form of “dialectic” transcends subjective/objective or whether it collapses into a Cartesian ontology in which “subject” and “object” are related causally—reminiscent of Engels' classic effort. Appeal to “dialectics” is always troublesome. Compare also Giddens below.

these relate as relatively autonomous “spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are *specific* and *irreducible* to those that regulate other fields” (97). Thus, in capitalist society, the rules and relations of the artistic “field” are constrained by the power relations of the economic (in Calhoun,).

While “fields” define possibilities for action, actions are neither autonomous nor mechanical products, but are the outcome of specific tendencies (constitutive of habitus) of an agent's location in specific fields. Finally, one can speak of “fields of power.” Given this metatheory, specific theories pertinent to a specific time and place are then called for as, for example, regarding a specific field of power.

The field of power is a *field of forces* defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a *field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power...* The struggle for the imposition of the dominant principle of domination leads, at every moment...to a *division of the work of domination*. It is also a struggle over the legitimate principle of legitimation...(76).

Wacquant is probably correct in judging that Bourdieu's overall revisioning of the social sciences has not much penetrated US academic social science. This includes not only his effort to reformulate an epistemology and ontology for the social sciences, but his attack on very idea of disciplines in the human sciences. Once we adopt his revisioning, we can see

how artificial the ordinary oppositions between theory and research, between quantitative and qualitative methods, between statistical recording and ethnographic observation, between the grasping of structures and the constructing of individuals can be. These alternatives have no function other than to provide a justification for the

vacuous and resounding abstractions of theoreticism and for the falsely rigorous observations of positivism, or, as the divisions between economists, anthropologists, historians and sociologists, to legitimate the limits of competency: that is to say that they function in the manner of a *social censorship...*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 28).

Giddens and Critical Realism

One might hold that the divorce of social science from history was the most critical step in the empiricist effort to assure the "scientific" character of social science. In part, at least because the tradition of Weber and Marx remained viable in Europe, there was never there a complete divorce of history and social science.

For our purposes the critical problem for Giddens was the proper understanding of "historical materialism" --a term never used by Marx.¹⁷ Indeed, as he has remarked, his idea of "structuration" is an extended gloss on Marx's famous remark in the *18th Brumaire* that persons make history but not with materials of their own choosing. Structuralism and the French debates had filtered across the Channel in the 60s. At the same time, developments in the philosophy of science, in both the US and France entered the argument. Out of this welter came the efforts of Roy Bhaskar (1979) who provided a full fledged critical realist philosophy of social science and the work of Anthony Giddens (1976, 1979, 1980) whose fundamental concern was to resolve the "agency/structure" bifurcation.

¹⁷ Of significance, the successor to Isaiah Berlin's chair at Oxford was the Marxist philosopher G.A. Cohen, 1968, who, significantly, made his mark with an effort to defend historical materialism. His "defense" amounted to both a functionalism and a technological determinism. This generated a host of critical responses, including Derek Sayer's excellent 1987. See also Giddens, 1981.

As with Bourdieu, in contrast to the “interpretativist skepticism” which characterizes post modern epistemology, the point of departure is a realism which posits *a knowable and causally efficacious independently existing nature*. But versus positivist epistemology, given the impossibility of standing outside of a historically constituted conceptual scheme, “objectivity” is not absolute, and as with Bourdieu, requires a hermeneutic moment.¹⁸

Second, as with Bourdieu, society is a social construction, the outcome of “a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings” (Giddens, 1976: 15). But, following Marx, actors work with materials at hand--historically sedimented structured practices. For Giddens, structures are constituted by indexically interpreted rules which legitimate, define and sustain social relations. These relations in turn constitute “resources” for actors. Resources are means of power, and as Mills, Foucault and Bourdieu insist, power is the central concept of social theory. But for Giddens, structure, as incarnate in activity, has but “virtual existence.” Accordingly, for Giddens, agency/structure dualism is replaced by a “duality” in which there are no agents without structured practices and no structured practices without agents. The central concept of his meta-theory is “structuration” –“the attempt to determine the conditions which govern the continuity and dissolution of structures or types of structure” (1976: 120). For Giddens, then, as for Bourdieu, since these conditions are historically various and contingent, social science is inevitably historical and concrete, and there can be no general theory of social

¹⁸ Compare Bourdieu, above. There are also differences on how to resolve the problem of relativism in epistemology. Bhaskar (1976) gives the most developed argument for his transcendental realism. Giddens has not pursued the problem in any detail, but see his remarks in the 1966, Introduction, and pp. 144-154.

change. Finally, because “structure” has but “virtual existence,” Giddens is committed to the idea that apart from natural causes, *only* agents are causes (Manicas, 2006).

Third, acknowledging the power of the tradition of interpretative sociology, there is a critical hermeneutic moment for all social science. But in contrast to Schütz, e.g., actors' understandings of themselves and their social world are corrigible. Thus getting a grasp of the actors' understanding is but a first step (albeit an essential one) for social science. For Giddens, “the knowledgeableability of human actors is always bounded on the one hand by the unconscious and on the other by unacknowledged conditions/unintended consequences of action” (1984: 282). Hence, as with C.Wright Mills and Bourdieu, but in contrast to the usual reading of Goffman and Garfinkel, social science is potentially emancipating.

Foucault’s Anti-positivist Human “Science”

In the 1960s Foucault was in agreement with structuralist writers in rejecting Marxist humanism and phenomenology. He agreed also on the decisive role of language in constituting social reality. But he never quite succumbed to an agent-less fatalism, indeed, perhaps changing his mind on the pertinence of humanism for a viable social theory (Paras, 2006). The days of May 1968 are critical. As Poster argues, “the events of May 1968 signified that an oppositional stance toward existing society was possible beyond the confines of contemporary Marxist orientations (Poster, 1984: 7). What came to be called “the New Social Movements:” the women's movement, gay rights, ecology, anti-nuclear, prison reform, patient's rights, could not be fit into the revolutionary class analysis of standard Marxism. Foucault and others, including here, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, Castoriadis, Lefort, Lyotard, and Braudrillard struggled for answers for what they took to be an entirely new social and political condition.

Some of these writers, Derrida, for example, seemed to have despaired, not merely of offering an emancipatory social science, but of the possibility of knowledge and truth at all. Having already rejected the humanism of existential Marxism, Derrida abandoned completely the idea that reality could be “represented.” He opted for “deconstruction.” As summarized by Hoy (1985: 4): “Deconstruction shows the failure of a work's attempt at representation and by implication, the possibility of failure of any such work, or by an text whatsoever.” As Hoy sees it, “grammatology” was a very radical hermeneutics: Instead of arguing that there was a problem to be solved in interpreting a text, “Derrida would make us unable to read it.”

Dissidents in anthropology, especially sensitive to issues of neo-colonialism, sexism and racism, found the Derridian challenge liberating.¹⁹ It was not difficult to show that the standard ethnographies offered representations which were in the interests of the colonizer and of elite males. But political critique would seem to require that there had to be *some* veridical representation.

Sometimes unnoticed, Foucault, despite sharing some key assumptions with Derrida, was one of his sharpest critics—exactly because the only politics which it seemed to allow was dubious. Instead of offering deconstruction, Foucault, drawing on Bachelard via Canguihem and Althusser, offered “archaeology,” a way to inquire into the groundwork of bodies of knowledge, and in the post '68 writings, “genealogy,” “a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make

¹⁹ See J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds), 1986, R. Rosaldo, 1989; P.T. Clough, 1992.

reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (Foucault, in Calhoun, 2002: 204).²⁰

Foucault, then, is properly seen as providing a critique of the conventional wisdom of those sciences whose focus is “life, labor and language.” While “archaeology” and “genealogy” parallel efforts in the sociology of knowledge,²¹ his aim would also seem to be critical--without assuming that there is some system of thought which could be known to actually “represent” “reality” and, as part of this, without assuming any sort of “autonomous” self.²² We might say

²⁰ Commentators have noted a number of critical shifts following the events of 1968. In addition to an obviously overt political concern, these include the shift to genealogy, which unlike archaeology, was understood in terms of power, a shift from systems of exclusion, e.g., the insane or criminal, to concern with how humans turn themselves into subjects, and finally, a shift from language to 'discourse/practice,' a shift which, it seems, was lost on some his American epigones. See also Paras, 2006.

²¹ Hacking speaks of “systems of thought” as Foucault's domain and notes that these are not transparent and are studied “by surveying a vast terrain of discourse that includes tentative starts, wordy prolegomena, brief flysheets, and occasional journalism. We should think about institutional ordinances and the plans of zoological gardens, astrolabes or penitentiaries; we must read referees' reports and examine the botanical display cases of the dilettante” (Hacking, 1979: 42).

²² This is best seen in his rejection of the concept of ideology: “The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of, for three reasons. The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing a line between that in a discourse which falls under category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false. The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject. Thirdly, ideology stands in a

that this is social construction with a vengeance; and indeed, it raises a host of questions and possible responses.

The couplet power/knowledge is a central and influential feature of Foucault's effort to rethink history and the constitution of subjects. For Foucault, power is an inherent feature of all social relations and functions where there are alternative possibilities of action to constrain or direct action. Moreover, power is an inherent component of the production of truth (knowledge). But in contrast to liberal and Marxist thought, Foucault's anti-realism makes this insight epistemologically relevant. That is, a liberal or Marxist might assent that claims made by various "disciplines" are secured as authoritative through the use of structured power, but still argue that some or all of these claims are false. Foucault would insist that this is not a helpful response. At the same time, he has provided important historical trajectories of the constitution of modern medicine, psychiatry, punishment, sexuality, and the attending construction of active subjects, active because they are participants in this construction. He has argued that these are forms of "disciplinary technology" and are, as such, forms of domination. Indeed, aligned with Weber and Critical Theory, for Foucault, while disciplinary technologies were a pre-condition for capitalism, we are, for him, fast approaching a "disciplinary society."

That Foucault stands in opposition to this is plain. But his critics have often noted that he would seem to lack epistemological ground for this posture (Philip, 1985: 79). While his pronouncements are often unclear, ambiguous, and perhaps equivocal, he seems to offer a version of anarchism--a generalized resistance to power in all its forms (Schürmann, 1985: 546; Rabinow, 1984: 22).

secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc." (in Calhoun, 2002: 204).

In the US, Foucault's influence is considerable in Women's Studies. It commands some attention in political science and anthropology, but only recently does it seem to have made some in-roads into sociology departments. As the editors of a recent American collection have noted, it is not clear 'whether Foucault should be considered a philosopher or a historian' (Calhoun, 2002: 188).

Conclusion

The recent past witnessed both a vigorous critique of empiricist philosophy of science and a clear and defensible alternative in some form of realism. Attending this was an explosion of efforts to redefine social science in non-positivist terms: from pragmatism, to hermeneutics, to structuralism, to post-structuralism to the synthetic efforts of Bourdieu, Giddens and Foucault. But it is not clear that, except perhaps among philosophers, positivism and its correlative scientism have been expunged. Mainstream economics still dominates thinking. On the other hand, dissidents in the academy seem more attracted to the view that the very idea of a human science is a mistake. But while Foucault, Bourdieu, and Giddens would agree that a *scientific* social science is part of the problem, unlike many fashionable dissidents, they would insist also that a proper human science is also a critical part of the solution.

References

- Achinstein, Peter, (1981). "Can There be a Model of Explanation," *Theory and Decision* 13.
Reprinted in Ruben (1993).
- Aronson, Gerald (1984). *A Realist Philosophy of Science*. New York: St. Martins Press.

- Arrow, K. (1968). "Mathematical Models in the Social Sciences" [1951]. In Brodbeck, May (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. New York: Macmillan.
- Balough, Thomas (1982). *The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics*. New York: Liveright.
- Baumol, William (2006). "Textbook Entrepreneurship, Comment on Johansson, *Economic Journal Watch*, Vol. 3, No. 1,
- Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Bhaskar, Roy (1975). *A Realist Philosophy of Science*. 2nd Edition, 1978. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press.
- Bhaskar, Roy (1978). "On the Possibility of Social Scientific Knowledge and the Limits of Naturalism," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 8. 1.
- Bhaskar, Roy (1979) *The Possibility of Naturalism*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press.
- Biggart, Nicole Wesley (2002). *Readings in Economic Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Boettke, P. J. (1997). "Where Did Economics Go Wrong? Modern Economics as Flight from Reality". *Critical Review* 12.
- Bohm, David (1984). *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics*. New Edition. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loïc, J. D. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____ Bourdieu (1998), "The Essence of Liberalism," *Le Monde* (December).
- Bunge, Mario (1979). *Causality and Modern Science*. New York: Dover.
- Bunge, Mario (2003). "How Does it Work? The Search for Explanatory Mechanisms," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 34, No. 2.
- Calhoun, Craig, Gerteis, Joseph, Moody, James, Pfaff, Steven, and Virk, Indermohan (2002) (eds.), *Contemporary Social Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Callinicos, Alex (1999). "Social Theory Put the Test of Politics," *New Left Review* 1, 236.
- Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (1986) (eds.). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clough, P.T. (1992). *The Ends of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism*. Newbury

- Park, CA.: Sage.
- Cohen, G.A. (1978). *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dretske, Fred (1977). "Laws of Nature," *Philosophy of Science*, 44.
- Dugger, William M. (1992). *Underground Economics: A Decade of Institutional Dissent*. Armonk: M.E.Sharpe
- Elson, Diane (1988). "Market Socialism or Socialism of the Market". *New Left Review*, 172.
- Etzioni, Amitai and Lawrence, Paul R. (1991). *Socio-Economics: Toward a New Synthesis*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Fleetwood, S. (1996). "Order Without Equilibrium:A Critical Realist Interpretation of Hayek's Notion of Spontaneous Order". *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 6.
- Foucault, Michel (2002). 'Truth and Power', in Calhoun, Craig, *et al*, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Friedman, Milton (1953) "The Methodology of Positivist Economics," in *Essays in Positive Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1976). *New Rules of Sociological Method*. Hutchinson of London.
- Giddens, Anthony (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory*. London: Macmillan
- Giddens, Anthony (1981). *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1980). *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Granoveter, Mark and Swedburg, Richard (1992). *The Sociology of Economic Life*. Boulder: Westview.
- Hanson, Norwood (1958). *Patterns of Discovery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hacking, Ian (1979). "Michel Foucault's Immature Science," *Noûs*, 13.
- Harré, Rom (1970). *Principles of Scientific Thinking*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harré, Rom and Edward Madden (1975). *Causal Powers*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hayek, Fr. (1978). "Competition as a Discovery Procedure," *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Hempel, C.G. (1950). "Theoreticians Dilemma," in *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*. New York: Free Press, 1965. .
- Hernes, G. (1998). "Real Virtuality," in Hedstrom, P. and R. Swedberg,(eds.) *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* .Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hesse, Mary (1970). *Models and Analogies in Science*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Hirshman, A.O. (1985). "Against Parsimony," *Economics and Philosophy* Vol. 1 .
- Hoy, David (1985). "Jacque Derrida," in Quentin Skinner (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keynes, John Maynard (1960). *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* London: Macmillan [1937].
- Kim, Jaegwon (1987). "Causal Realism and Explanatory Exclusion," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12. Quoted from the reprint in Ruben (1993).
- Kuhn, Thomas (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Langlois, Richard N. (ed.) (1986). *Economics as a Process: Essays in the New Institutional Economics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawson, T. (1997). *Economics and Reality*. London: Routledge.
- _____ (2003). *Reorienting Economics: London: Routledge*.
- Leontief, Wassily (1971). "Theoretical Assumptions and Nonobserved Facts," *American Economic Review*, 61.
- Lewis, David (1987). "Causal Explanation," in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*. New York: Oxford University Press. Quoted from the reprint in Ruben (1993).
- Lewis, Paul (2006). "Hayek: From Economics as Equilibrium Analysis to Economics as Social Theory". In Barry, N.P. (ed.) *The Elgar Companion to Hayek*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar,
- Machamer, P., L. Darden, L. and C.F. Craver (2000). "Thinking about Mechanisms". *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 67.
- Manicas, Peter T. (1987). *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- _____ (1991). "The Social Science Disciplines: The American Model," in Wagner, Peter, Wittrock, Bjorn, and Whitely, Richard (eds.) (1991) *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of The Social Science Disciplines*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- _____ (2006). *A Realist Philosophy of Social Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
- _____ (2007) "Endogenous Growth Theory: The Most Recent 'Revolution' in Economics?" *Post-Autistics Economic Review*, Issue 41, 5.
- _____ and Sam Pooley (1998). "Wall Street Fallacies," *Social Alternatives* (August).
- Mises, L. Von (1936). *Socialism*. New York: Macmillan.
- Natanson, Maurice (ed.) (1963). *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. New York: Random House.
- Paras, Eric (2006). *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press).
- Poster, Mark (1984). *Foucault, Marxism and History*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Quine, W.V. (1950). "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From A Logical Point of View*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rabinow, Paul (ed.) (1984). *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon.
- Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ruben, David-Hillel (1993) (ed.). *Explanation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Salmon, Wesley (1978). "Why Ask 'Why?'" Presidential Address. American Philosophical Association 51.
- Salmon, Wesley (1984). *Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sayer, Derek (1987). *The Violence of Abstraction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Schürmann, Reiner (1985). "'What Can I Do?'" in an Archaeological –Genealogical History', *Journal of Philosophy*
- Sen, Amartya K. (1977). "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6.
- Skinner Quentin (ed) (1985). *The Return of Grand Theory i n the Human Sciences*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Scriven, Michael (1959). "Truisms as Ground for Historical Explanations," in P. Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*. New York: Free Press.

Scriven, Michael (1962)/ "Explanations, Predictions and Laws," in H. Feigl and G. Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. III. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Smelser, Neil (1986). *Behavioral and Social Sciences: Fifty Years of Discovery*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Smelzsr, Neil and Swedberg, Richard (eds) (1994). *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Solow, Robert (1980). "On Theories of Unemployment," *American Economic Review*, 70, 1.

Stinchcome, Arthur (1983). *Economic Sociology*. New York: Academic Press.

Suppe, Frederick (1977). *The Structure of Scientific Theory*, 2nd Edition. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Swedburg, Richard (1993). *Explorations in Economic Sociology*. New York: Sage.

Thurow, Lester (1983). *Dangerous Currents*. New York: Random House.

Tobin, James (1972). "Inflation and Unemployment," *American Economic Review*, 62.

Toulmin, Stephen (1953). *The Philosophy of Science*. New York: Harper and Row.

Toulmin, Stephen (1961). *Foresight and Understanding*. New York: Harper and Row.

Warsh, D. (2006). *Knowledge and the Wealth of Nations*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Woodward, James (1984). "A Theory of Singular Causal Explanation," *Erkenntnis* 21. Quoted from the reprint in Ruben (1993).