

THE NORMATIVE STRUCTURE OF SOCIOLOGY

Conservative and emancipatory themes
in social thought

Hermann Strasser

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Contents

Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
1 Guiding interests of cognition and vocabularies of social explanation	1
i <i>The humanistic ferment of sociology</i>	2
ii <i>Sociology: science of progress v. science of integration</i>	4
iii <i>Sociology: its conservative interest of cognition</i>	6
iv <i>The guiding interests of cognition and vocabularies of social explanation</i>	9
v <i>A paradigm for the analysis of sociological theories</i>	19
part one The origins of sociology: its intellectual and social matrix	
2 Setting the sociological stage	31
i <i>Hobbes</i>	32
ii <i>Rousseau</i>	34
iii <i>Montesquieu</i>	38
iv <i>Summary</i>	41
3 The case of the Scottish Enlightenment	44
i <i>Adam Smith: the theory of human emancipation by perfecting civil society</i>	45

CONTENTS

ii	<i>Adam Ferguson and John Millar: toward a theory of social conflict</i>	52
4	French social criticism	64
i	<i>Henri de Saint-Simon: a social system perspective</i>	64
ii	<i>Auguste Comte: progress through order</i>	76
5	The German alternative	85
i	<i>Lorenz von Stein: the transformation of the dialectic into sociology</i>	85
ii	<i>Karl Marx: the dialectic of the science of society</i>	97
part two The rise of modern sociological theory		
6	The functional approach: the problem of integration	113
i	<i>Emile Durkheim: the founder of Western functionalism</i>	113
ii	<i>Talcott Parsons's functionalism: from action frame of reference to social system theory</i>	122
7	The conflict theory of society: a theoretical antithesis	149
i	<i>Georg Simmel's formalistic method and the functions of social conflict</i>	149
ii	<i>Alvin W. Gouldner's radical sociology as reflexive sociology: a critique of the infrastructure of social theorizing</i>	162
iii	<i>Continuities in the study of social conflict: Lewis A. Coser</i>	190
	Notes	211
	Select bibliography	254
	Index	265

Preface

This study represents an expression of uneasiness with respect to the ways sociological theories are constructed and different kinds of sociological theories are analyzed. My device to reduce such negative feelings is based on the assumption that all social theorizing functions, intentionally or not, to conceptualize and classify social facts, to explain them, and to exercise a judging influence on them. Therefore, an attempt is made, first, to develop a paradigm that takes those three functions or steps of social theorizing into account. And second, employing the paradigm in the analysis of developments in sociological theory, one should discover that conceptual and explanatory models cannot escape from being affected by normative considerations. But the question is not only whether the normative perspective is to be regarded as part of the theoretical enterprise, but also what consequences normatively infused theories have. The consequences incurred, of course, do not depend on the stated goals of the respective authors, but on the social and epistemological context within which their theories are expounded.

A special word of appreciation must go to Professor Werner Stark. His untiring encouragement, generous consideration and valuable criticism were instrumental in motivating the completion of this study. To him and his wife, Kate, I owe a great deal. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank my friends at Fordham University, the University of Oklahoma and the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, who made many things possible. I am also grateful to Lewis A. Coser, Friedrich Fürstenberg, Alvin W. Gouldner, Sigurd Höllinger, Paul Kellermann, Niklas Luhmann, Peter Posch, Susan C. Randall, Robert Reichardt, John Rex and Leopold Rosenmayr for critical comments and interest in my work. Mrs Eva Paulus must be given credit for doing a splendid

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Hermann Strasser

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1 Guiding interests of cognition and vocabularies of social explanation

Many sociologists have defined sociology as an empirically-oriented science that is directed toward the future.¹ Sociology should not be identified with, and legitimated by, authorities or dogmas. The sociological discipline, we are told, is not a mausoleum of names and doctrines, but rather an institution whose purpose is to attempt to explain and to solve those problems that this discipline encounters here and now.

This poses the question of the tasks of sociology. As an empirical science, sociology is supposed to adhere to the methodological rules of empirico-theoretical systems from which propositions and theories are to be formed. 'Scientific' sociology not only rejects the assumption that the sociological enterprise should rest on some valuative presupposition, but also accepts the idea that sociology should take a *neutral* stand on the political consequences its findings might have in social practice. It is conceded, however, that the political relevance of their practical impact may become an object of study *ex post facto*. At best, the positivistic model of science leaves the sociologist to his double role as citizen and scientist, whereby he may *select* sociological topics in terms of political relevance, while his actual study, carried out according to objective rules, could not be affected by such prejudgments.²

It is our contention that the inquiry into the functions, tasks and mission of the sociological discipline is legitimated only by its own historical development. Its past and present state 'is the only firm basis for evaluating whether we have "progressed," and, if so, how much and in what ways. . . . A science *ignorant* of its founders does not know how far it has travelled nor in what direction; it . . . is lost.'³ Talcott Parsons, for example, has amply demonstrated, especially in *The Structure of Social Action*,

that the history of sociology 'constitutes a convenient way of elucidating the structure and empirical usefulness of the system of theory itself.'⁴ The first point to be made concerns the origin and intention of sociology, particularly its relationship to the established social order. From this idea it will be possible to derive propositions regarding the nature of sociological theory, its past development and present state.

i The humanistic ferment of sociology

Modern science was made possible only after the theologico-metaphysical view of life, together with the collectivity-bound social order of the Middle Ages, had been destroyed. Modern philosophy became the medium through which the rising autonomy of the human intellect expressed itself. Underlying these developments was a *humanistic* outlook on social and intellectual affairs which arose in educated and politically powerful circles of the medieval and Renaissance cities.⁵ Don Martindale has noted that 'Humanism was a man-centered (secular), normative orientation intended to justify as well as implement the new kinds of individuality and community represented by the citizen and the medieval city.'⁶ On the other hand, as soon as a rational ideal of knowledge—namely, one based on rational proof—was conjoined to a method of establishing 'truths' in the world of physical things, empirical experimentalism, i.e. *science*, was born. In contrast to humanism, science arose as a non-normative method in circles of artists and craftsmen whose 'objectives were not to establish a particular state of natural or social affairs but to acquire the most exact knowledge of nature possible and to increase to the maximum man's ability to control the material world.'⁷

Humanism and science evolved in the *city*, 'the first distinctive community of Western men.' By the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the center of humanistic endeavor had shifted to the new *national* societies. In the formative periods of the city (the eleventh and twelfth centuries) and of the nation-state (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), social and philosophical theorizing was strongly influenced by an *individualistic* perspective. When people started to form new collectivities and to find approaches to new problems, where no established patterns were available, creativity and charisma gave rise to individualism. As social history evidences, once a collectivity has been created and its institutions consolidated, individualism usually appeared as a disruptive principle. Thus, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed a predominance of scholastic *collectivism*; similarly, collectivistic ideologies tended to dominate the nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries.⁸ Correspondingly, in the formative stage societies tended to be dominated by younger leaders, while older leaders enjoyed greater popularity during mature collectivism.

The thesis is thus suggested that in those few epochs of human history, in the course of which class distinctions receded, men of knowledge and craftsmen were able to stimulate one another to a greater extent. Moreover, in these periods the rising class attempted to dominate the various fields of culture and science, thus making them accessible to more people. The great achievements in terms of a better understanding of the world and its practical application during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and during the Industrial Revolution in England seem to testify to our proposition. Isaac Newton's idea of a world that is structured and that operates according to given laws had fundamental philosophical and political consequences. Later on the concept of evolution and its application to mankind paved the way for discovering man's position in nature. Science and its different branches began to supersede philosophy and religion—the systems of knowledge (production) dominating until that time.⁹

However, sociology evolved only when rationalism was conjoined with humanistic values in the newly forming nations. The sociological perspective came into focus as the individual began to acquire intrinsic value *vis-à-vis* the collectivity. Along with the newly gained autonomy of the individual, the metaphysical construction of reality had to be replaced with a social analysis which grew out of a system of laws of human nature. The English and Scottish social philosophers in the century prior to the French Revolution were among the first to place man in the center of social phenomena by viewing him as a psycho-social entity.¹⁰ The English bourgeoisie had already successfully revolted against the *Ancien régime* in the seventeenth century. Developing out of an opposition to the feudal order, the bourgeoisie became the socio-political midwife of a new science of man and society.

The advent of the middle classes in the nations of Western Europe and in the USA caused a major revolution in the value-system by which men and social roles were now to be judged. The middle-class standard of utility came to measure all other social strata by their utility or the imputed lack of it.¹¹ The middle class was useful because of the services it performed, and 'because what it produced, it held, was what *others* wanted.'¹² Western sociology was a response to the conditions of the utilitarian culture in which it arose. However, it should be noted that the revolutionary, humanistic, ferment which had put the middle class in power, did not cease to be operative in social and intellectual life. Socialism and the laboring classes were next to claim to be its historical bearers.

In short, we are led to the proposition that sociology's task of investigating and explaining social phenomena is grounded in normative objectives. There has been a dialectical development in the intellectual history of sociology, specifically in the 'public interpretation of existence' (Martin Heidegger). Four structural conditions of social life seem to produce this dialectical element in mental productions: (1) the insight, profoundly demonstrated by Emile Durkheim, that the 'essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life are the work of the *group*;¹³ (2) the fact that social groupings with *distinctive world views* persist;¹⁴ (3) the fact that the phenomenon of *competition* pervades intellectual life;¹⁵ (4) the fact that *generations* persistently play an important role in shaping a discipline's development.¹⁶ Finally, the normative aspect of the sociological enterprise is interdependently linked with the immanent dialectic of social theorizing.¹⁷ The discussion which follows is intended to demonstrate the validity of these propositions.

ii Sociology: science of progress v. science of integration

If one is to understand the debates among opposing sociological schools, one has to study the antinomies in their awareness of the subject matter itself. These antinomies of mind actually reflect the conflicts that center on the object and objectives as professed by the different approaches to the study of social reality.¹⁸ For example, the sociological theory of the Scottish Enlightenment not only attempted to focus on, and to explain, the emancipation of civil society, but also conceived of itself as part of this process of liberation. The cognitive interests of Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, John Millar and others were guided by the Whig-gist principle of pursuing enlightenment, in the sense of naturally progressing civil society according to standards of social utility.¹⁹ Sociology operated as a *science of progress* so long as the practical and theoretical connections between authority and utility in the development towards civil liberty, seen as a natural process, were objectively maintained. The French Revolution and its aftermath destroyed this context of authority and utility and, by altering the discipline's consciousness of its scope and objectives, brought about a change in the sociological design itself.

The fall of the *Ancien régime* was interpreted by progressives as well as by conservatives as the symbol of a turning point which bore all the marks of a social revolution. Sociology came to be claimed by both sides as a contribution to the solution of a crisis that had become permanent. Thus, sociology began to parade as a *science of crisis*. Specifically, Henri de Saint-Simon designed

sociology as an opposition discipline, while Louis de Bonald imputed to it the function of *stabilization*. The spirit of revolution and restoration apparently provided both material and perspective to early sociology. That is to say, the revolutionary spirit purported the critical dissolution of traditional authority, while the restorative spirit aimed at its conservation at any cost. To Saint-Simon reorganization of society meant the completion of the revolution,²⁰ while de Bonald wanted to reduce the latter to an episode through a reconstitution of traditional society.²¹ The new science of society, for a moment at least, seemed to be torn between service to *industrialism*, i.e. the separation of society from the state seen as emancipation, and service to *traditionalism*, where such a separation represented anarchy to be overcome only by grounding society in tradition and a hierarchical structure. It was Auguste Comte who integrated the 'industrial' and 'constitutive' notions of society into a structural-functional concept of social organization. By attempting to harmonize order and progress under the primacy of order, he eventually stripped the idea of progress of its emancipatory power and sociology of its critical function. He thus paved the way for the science of society to become one of justification (of the *status quo*).²² Saint-Simon, de Bonald, and Comte, however, agreed—each in his particular way—that sociology could hope to be effective only in the *Gestalt* of a theology.

We have looked at key issues responsible for the origin of sociology and found that the science of society was guided by certain *interests of cognition*.²³ The sociology of the Scottish moral philosophers represented a natural history of civil society that was to provide an orientation for social and political practice; that is, for rationalizing civil society and thus promoting the historical process. Their sociology was conservative within the limits of this natural development; it was critical in so far as it studied the utility and—where indicated—the malfunctioning of existing institutions. Yet Saint-Simon saw in the total reorganization of society, rather than in intellectual enlightenment, the key to bringing about social progress and the perfection of human capabilities. For him, the French Revolution was therefore a social, not a political, crisis. Following Ferguson's idea, he postulated that society should be organized according to its most dynamic and progressive sector, i.e. as an 'industrial system' based on science and technology. Most importantly, and for the first time, Saint-Simon designed his sociology on the radical assumption that social progress could be organized by man himself.²⁴ In contrast, French conservatives expected social redemption to arise from the subjugation of individuals to 'natural' institutions such

as corporations, and the latter to the 'political society' of monarchy, nobility and clergy. Comte was faced with *the* fundamental set of sociological problems; namely, to study social reality (*Wirklichkeit*) which is geared toward order, and at the same time not to ignore the social potentiality (*Möglichkeit*) that points to the perfectibility of the *status quo*.²⁵ As mentioned, he gravitated toward the study of social reality opting for the perspective of order at the expense of the idea of progress. He not only christened the discipline but also inaugurated its mission as a *science of integration*.

iii Sociology: its conservative interest of cognition

We have already stated that a strong will to progress led to a social and intellectual current, the structural center of which was dominated by a maturing nation-state, rising middle classes and an unfolding science of society. We also pointed out that quite a different political program evolved in the post-revolutionary societies of Western Europe also generating, on its part, a distinctive mode of thinking.

Like the progressive current of thought, the conservative line of thinking envisioned a total structure of the world,²⁶ including a science of man and society. We have already dealt with the emancipatory origins of sociology in some detail. Let us now briefly consider the variables contributing to the conservative structure of viewing the world and sociology.

In his analysis of the origin of conservative thinking, Karl Mannheim attributed the rise of modern conservatism in many nations to the fact 'that the modern world has become dynamic.'²⁷ This *dynamic* was caused by an accelerating division of labor and differentiation in society, in which particular events increasingly tended to be related to the problem of growth of the total social complex. Thus homogeneously reacting strata originated. Furthermore, the intellectual world, and its supporting sentiments, split along the lines of the socially differentiated cosmos. The fundamental intentions of the major social strata, in turn, became the center of agglomeration, but also the creative center of opposing world views and thought patterns. Specifically, these fissions into progressive and conservative elements began to cluster in the political and economic spheres, so that political economy gained autonomy and advanced to a center of agglomeration for intellectual, and for that matter, sociological currents.²⁸

It is important to bear in mind that politics were not the province of the people until recent centuries; that is to say, prior to the English and French Revolutions politics concerned only rulers and those

who could aspire to become rulers. The attention of ordinary people was not drawn to political affairs. Moreover, there was no intellectual class to play a major role in politics, no class of independent professional literary men and journalists who were free of patrons, who had no need to remain on the right side of the authorities.²⁹

As long as politics were not an instrument of justice or of the realization of the right social order and were concerned with the mere maintenance of order, the conservation of the power of dynasties which already had or sought it, there was no room for ideological politics.

The rise of ideological politics had much to do with the invention of printing and its consequences in terms of diffusing arguments to a wider public, with the Protestant belief in the Bible and not the priesthood as the vehicle of the sacred and with the gradual rising of the mass of the European population, notably the laboring classes and the peasants, from their torpor. As noted earlier in this chapter, a crucial role in the 'ideologization' of politics and the correspondent development of opposing world views must be attributed to the emergence of a body of intellectuals since the sixteenth century. Their imagination carried them beyond the requirements of everyday life; they were no longer forced to depend exclusively on ecclesiastical, governmental, aristocratic or mercantile patronage for their existence. Their freedom to attach themselves to symbols beyond those embodied in those institutions began to spread and reached its first peak at the time of the French Revolution.³⁰

These social and intellectual developments profoundly reflect the great metamorphosis of the rising middle classes. By the end of the eighteenth century the power of the bourgeoisie, at least in England, was secured and the Industrial Revolution bestowed upon it an enormous amount of wealth. The bourgeoisie had few reasons to extend the existing privileges, indeed many reasons for limiting them. When the leaders of the French Revolution were successful in liberating man from his political fetters, but stopped short of freeing him from his economic chains as well, voices (for instance, that of Gracchus Babeuf) began to make themselves heard in the name of the laboring classes. It was not until the publication of *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (1848) by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Das Kapital* (1867) by Karl Marx, and the *Anti-Dühring* (1878) by Frederick Engels that the basic outline of *scientific socialism* came into existence.³¹

This is not to support the thesis regarding the class character of science, but rather to view the development of the sociological

discipline as decisively influenced by antagonistic social groupings each putting forward a more or less distinctive world view and pattern of social thought. Nevertheless, we begin to understand more thoroughly what Marx and Engels meant when they contended that all *written* history was a history of class conflict.³²

The new science of society was soon to enter into the field dominated by the bourgeois value of utility, a utilitarian morality and an assorted way of thinking. Sociology was molded by the conservative pattern of philosophizing which attempted to grip the existing reality in its relativity. Auguste Comte's, Frédéric Le Play's, and Lorenz von Stein's works are illustrative examples. The conservative thinking rested on the factual substratum in its understanding of the normative realm.³³ Hegel set the tone when he assigned philosophy the task of comprehending that which is: 'for that which *is*, is reason.'³⁴ Progressive thinking, by comparison, sees empirical reality through the lenses of the possible and the normative. Unlike the concreteness of conservative thought, progressive thinking is more likely to present itself in an abstract fashion. In progressive thinking, the particular phenomena of social reality take on meaning through their relation to a future utopia or a normative code which floats above the factual substratum. Conservatism, however, derives the meanings of empirical items from the past in so far as the past partakes of the present. When the progressive thinker views things, people and institutions under the aspect of some kind of 'ought to be,' he experiences them differently from the conservative who regards them as 'organically grown,' as having *necessarily* come into *being*.³⁵ The former orientation tends to neglect the immediate realities of the current world (e.g. human selfishness, rooted in organic and cultural properties, and its expression in society), while the latter is likely to accept the given circumstances, suggested by the 'realistic' assumption of the likelihood of social experiments to fail. Mannheim goes on to say that the progressive experiences the present time as the beginning of the future, while for the conservative the present represents the last stage of the past.³⁶

The dominant principles of the eighteenth century, namely freedom and individual autonomy, were increasingly introverted and the external relationships subjected to the principle of order. A potential colliding of 'introversion' and 'order' was found to be prevented (1) by presupposing a kind of 'prestabilized harmony' guaranteed either by God, the state, a sociocracy, or some other national-social force; or (2) by insisting on the primacy of social control based on the conviction that there exists no pre-established state of order. On this point, at least, the conservatives of the first half of the nineteenth century, including their most prominent

sociological representatives, learned their lesson from humanistic rationalists such as Leibniz and Smith. Particularly Edmund Burke, de Bonald, de Maistre, Hegel and, later, Comte began to establish propositions about the nature of society to the effect that it was seen as an organic entity, something greater than the sum total of its members. They were led to insist upon the indispensable value of the sacred, non-rational, and, in part, non-utilitarian elements of human existence.³⁷ It was precisely these idealistic philosophies which gave rise to organismic tendencies and finally to Structural-Functionalism. And conservatism provided idealistic as well as positivistic infrastructures of social theorizing with a stable ground of social anchorage.³⁸

iv The guiding interests of cognition and vocabularies of social explanation

We have seen that certain constellations of socio-cultural factors on the one hand, and rather divergent conceptual developments on the other, have given birth to sociology as a scientific discipline. We now formulate the proposition that these major theoretical positions are decisively guided by specific interests of cognition.³⁹ Thus, scientific activity involves prescriptive attitudes concerning expectations held by members of a disciplinary reference group that consists, among others, of social scientists. Doing science, social science in particular, begins to take shape as role-taking behavior. Specifically, a theoretical position is determined either by a social-technological interest (e.g., Comte, Spencer, Gumpłowicz, Dahrendorf) or by a social-emancipatory interest (e.g. Ferguson, Saint-Simon, Marx, C. Wright Mills).⁴⁰ Social scientists with a social-technological perspective base their theoretical endeavor on the ontological assumption that a universal structure exists independently of the knower. A technical interest of cognition enters into their work, particularly in view of the rules according to which they apply theories to reality.⁴¹ Their thinking tends to display a positive attitude that does not question its beginning. 'It is only by the positive acceptance of the authority of the beginning that one moves ahead, that work gets done, that results appear.'⁴² Since the beginning of something is treated as real and past, 'it necessarily concretizes the relation between its authority and products of that authority as an external relation between something and its consequences.'⁴³ The capitalist society may serve as an example for the positive spirit that turns away from origin and reason. Alan Blum goes even as far as to say that 'to describe is to subject some matter to an authority which holds it fast, and in such an act of subjectitude

contributes to the preservation of the authority.'⁴⁴

A social science interested in social emancipation, on the other hand, not only purports to produce nomological knowledge, but also tries to uncover theoretical statements that possibly express unalterable laws of social action, which, in fact and in principle, are subject to change. These sociologists' emancipatory concern with knowledge leads them to the thesis that the processes of cognition are inseparable from the creation of society and cannot therefore function only as means of maintenance and reproduction of social life, but serve equally to establish the very definitions of this life.⁴⁵ Thus, knowledge is an instrument of self-preservation and at the same time transcends mere self-preservation. The guiding interests of cognition show themselves not only in the medium of methodological considerations, but in the media of language, authority relations, and work in general. The vocabularies of cognitive motives are linked to anticipated consequences and specific actions. The agent who expresses these motives is not trying to describe his exercise in methodology; rather, he is influencing others and *himself*. This is precisely the point C. Wright Mills was trying to make, when he considered motives 'as typical vocabularies having ascertainable functions in delimited societal situations.'⁴⁶

The social emancipists go on to reason that the only quality which raises man above nature is that which he achieves through language; namely, that he *can* have knowledge. Along with the structure of language, the idea of, and capacity for, *autonomy* is given to us. Consequently, the interest in autonomy is closely linked to, and practically identical with, knowledge that aims at the accomplishment of reflection as such. According to social emancipists, in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest become one.⁴⁷ The social emancipist is an actor 'Who seeks to hear the enunciation of the logos in things, one who seeks to reenact in speech the enunciation of Reason.'⁴⁸ The positivistically oriented social technologist, by comparison, can be described as an actor who 'is without time to hear, one concerned to rush into things—into their midst—and to take them up as concern.'⁴⁹ Blum's contention that positive speaking stands in relation to dialectic speaking somewhat as work stands to play seems to parallel the relation of social-technological and social-emancipatory research interests: 'positive speaking is serious about words and irreverent towards commitment, while dialectic is ironic towards words and serious about commitment.'⁵⁰ Since social emancipists base the truth of theoretical statements on the anticipation of a life without repression, they surrender to the cognitive interest in the advancement of mankind towards individual autonomy through social liberation. In other words, they aim at free

communication among emancipated citizens. This presupposes the realization of elements of 'concrete utopia' such as individual autonomy, liberation from dogmatism,⁵¹ and democracy⁵² as expressed by current 'critical theory'⁵³ or of only the progressive elements in traditional philosophy such as the constructs of the best state, the greatest pleasure, the perfect happiness, or the eternal peace.⁵⁴ These critical social scientists are assumed to envision their (concrete) utopia not independently from the existing social reality, in which it has been conceptualized. Thus they derive their goals from the given tendencies that can be discovered in a study of social processes. In that social emancipists negate facts, they do not mean to be elusive. In contrast to social technologists, they do not aim at saving theory for the benefit of reality, but rather at conceptualizing unbearable circumstances in order to be able to change them.⁵⁵ Social emancipists are primarily concerned with the materialization of theory, not with its confirmation. They do not follow the path that many social technologists tread, namely, to append theory to practice and not to precede it. The question, of course, is whether and how theory can help to make reasonable conditions of practical life possible. There is no doubt that 'The relation of theory and experience changes with that of theory to its subject matter.'⁵⁶ However, we do not suppose, as some critical theorists do,⁵⁷ that in a socialist society reason and reality would necessarily tend to coincide and hence strip philosophy of its substance (i.e., to negate everything that is not materialized reason, particularly the misery and repression).⁵⁸

Once we have recognized the significance of subjective and/or societal interests which guide social theorizing, a distinction between empirical and normative approaches to the study of social problems, for example, as presented by Martindale, must be rejected. Rather, Martindale's definition of normative theory can be applied to the study of society in general: 'Normative theory converts facts and laws into requisite means and conditions and is unique in being addressed to a system of objectives desired by the formulator or by those in whose services he stands.'⁵⁹ With the foregoing propositions in mind, we contend that the sociological enterprise was bound to develop into conservative and radical schools in correspondence with either a technological or an emancipatory intellectual setting.

Since the normative universe *and* the explanatory universe are created by man, Martindale and others like him overlook the fact that neither is a statement about reality, and neither can thus be deduced from observation. The gap between the factual and the normative is as readily misconstrued by mistaking the meaning of 'fact' as by distorting the meaning of 'norm' or 'value.'⁶⁰ This is

not to say that the integral unity of value and fact cannot be broken analytically. At any rate, social scientists have to realize that explanations are set up and value judgments are made for the same aim, namely, to fulfill human purposes. In practice, the universe in which man lives is factually created by him and not discovered, while in science we discover, and in so far help to recreate, the factual order; we set it up conceptually; we uncover the structure of reality. In sociological terms, the *theory* of society, or of man-in-society, thus becomes a function of *the problem* of social order.⁶¹

We are now ready to expand a previously stated proposition to the effect that one's relation to the scope of reality indicates in sociology the normative perspective adopted by the sociologist. We have derived this variable from the origin and functions of sociology as demonstrated by its historical development. In the first place, therefore, the cognitive status of a sociological theory is decisively influenced by the interest of cognition by which the social scientist is guided. To actually formulate a social theory that organizes what we know about a posed question at any particular time, requires a connecting shaft between the normative perspective—as expressed in terms of axioms, assumptions or value-sentences—and data-sentences.

This mediating function is accomplished by vocabularies of social explanation or *models*.⁶² What is suggested here is a concept of sociology as a science based on *three*, not just *two*, types of sentences. A sentence constitutes the basic unit of knowledge about reality. Sentences may take the form of data-sentences—that is, verbal reports about facts or their composite products, empirical generalizations; there are also theory-sentences, so-called hypotheses, arrived at by deductive reasoning inside open sets of propositions; finally, value-sentences, usually referred to as axioms, dichotomize the scope of reality under study in points accepted and points rejected.⁶³

At this point it is important to reiterate that we conceive of knowledge of social reality as composed of competing interpretations of structures and processes of society emitted by social groupings which stand in opposition to each other. As recent social systems theory⁶⁴ has taught us, what social systems which use meaning need (in order to cope with the possibility of differentially selective experiences and actions by several participants) is a structure with a special capacity for controlling selections: a code.⁶⁵ Language takes over the function of such a code in that (1) it consists of symbolically generalized signs and (2) is capable of negation (i.e., of finding a complementary alternative item for any given item in its scope of relevance). The code form of language prevents the potential of *different* selections from being

resolved in consensus and thus abolished. In order that the language code may complete the various possibilities of communication about possible negations, additional codes are required, which intervene in the motivational mechanism and regulate the acceptance or rejection of negatable linguistic communications. Such codes are formed for specific sub-systems of society, for example, in the economic system a code for having and non-having (property) or in the area of science the code of binary logic.⁶⁶ Through media codes and general languages codes not only are rules for processing information provided, but also values and their opposites are ordered by codes.

The important thing is to realize that a self-substitutive system such as society is one which cannot be replaced by another but can only be changed and further developed. A system of a different type, such as an organism, cannot be substituted for society. Science cannot be replaced by politics or the economy but only by a different form of truth production:

Self-substitutive systems are only possible by means of special mechanisms coordinating continuity and discontinuity. The other, i.e. the opposite, must be looked for and further developed on the basis of the given. The most abstract expression of this requirement is the duplication rule of the code.⁶⁷

What Niklas Luhmann has attempted to do with regard to the political code, though with somewhat different consequences, we are trying to accomplish with respect to the scientific subsystem of sociology and its subject matter, namely society, or rather the problem of social order. Our sociological code, as the following pages will show (see also Table 1.1), is designed to apply the duplication rule to the normative component, the guiding research interest, as well as to the conceptual apparatus, the vocabulary of social explanation. In correspondence with the basic characteristics of self-substitutive systems, we conceive of the major types of sociological theories (to be developed later in this chapter—see Table 1.3) as alternative systems of scientific knowledge production. The respective alternatives, be they the social-technological and emancipatory interests of cognition or the order and conflict models of society, are always developed on the basis of the *given* scope of social reality and conception of the social order under consideration. These normative and conceptual categories constitute the meaning complexes of the sociological code. They actually control the processes of code duplication in a direction that can be specified, for example into the meaning complex of positive analysis,

GUIDING INTERESTS OF COGNITION

reality, results, authority, integration, socialization, consensus, equilibrium, social constraints, and so on.

Sociology, like any other science, not only produces sentences about reality, but also constructs systems in which these sentences are somehow tied together (see Figure 1.1). Accordingly,

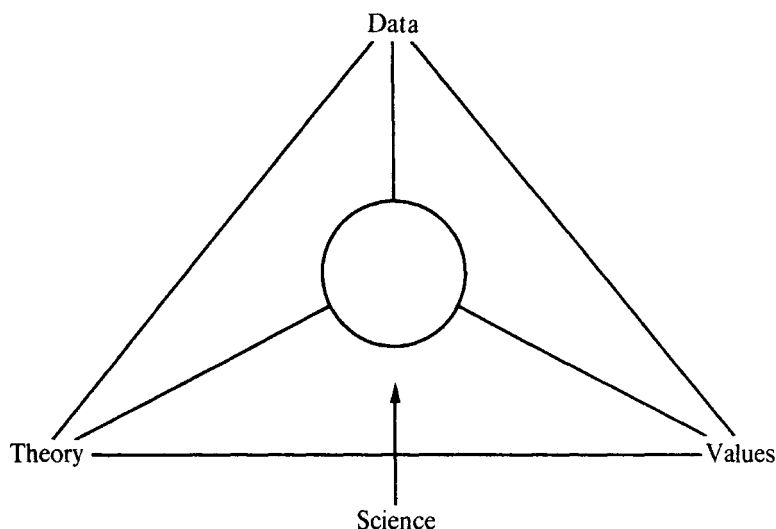


FIGURE 1.1 *Scheme of trilateral scientific activity*

Source: Adapted from Galtung (1972), p. 365.

before axioms and propositions may be linked with operational concepts, the former are, though often only implicitly, defined by two fundamental premises; namely, a conservative or progressive interest of cognition, and a particular vocabulary of explanation. A model is usually considered as consisting of a set of propositions which are logically connected with one another. These propositions are not assumed to be reflecting the facts within an area of inquiry. Rather, they are assumed 'because they refer to facts which are considered similar to those studied within an area of discourse.'⁶⁸ These vocabularies of social explanation focus attention on relevant problems, thus suggesting *important* data to be methodically exploited (see Figure 1.2). Specifically, any vocabulary of social explanation has to deal with three important questions, all of which are central to *the* solution of the problem of social order: (1) that of societal *development*, i.e., the genesis of new social structures (diachronic dimension); (2) that of societal *organization* in the sense of regulation and self-regulation (synchronic dimension); and (3) that of societal *exchange*, i.e., between the social system and its environment and among subsystems (autonomy dimension).⁶⁹ A judgment of what is important imposes

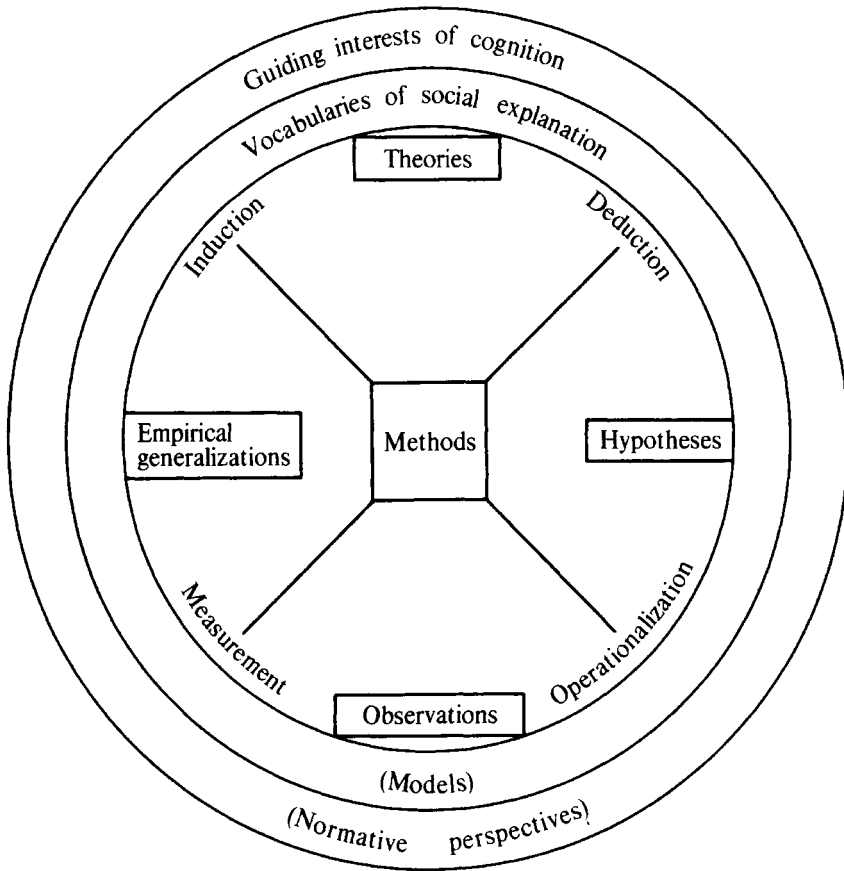


FIGURE 1.2 *The stages and components of sociological theorizing*

a perspective in terms of some co-ordinating relation and brings form into the multiplicity of social facts.⁷⁰ According to Dorothy Emmet and Alfred N. Whitehead, the notion of importance as governing the initial judgment from which a model is developed may be justified on several grounds. First, it must be possible to show that a coherent perspective can be developed in terms of this idea. Next, a judgment of relevance can claim support from the fact of its comprehensiveness. It is thus prevented from being merely a subjective impression. Finally, it must be able to show that a wide range of diverse facts and experiences can be ordered from that perspective. To demonstrate the validity of these criteria as they apply to model selection, is one of the central tasks of this study.⁷¹

The cognitive value of a model for social theories, as we shall subsequently show, does not lie so much in its truth content, but rather in the clarification it introduces into the field of cognition which it covers. It is the scientific imperative of a model to induce

a selective focus. In looking about for a clue to the understanding of the social world, sociologists seem to come up with two basic sets of categories more regularly than with any other modeling device; namely, the *order* model and the *conflict* model of society, the respective structural characteristics of which become the scientist's basic concepts of explanation and description. As Stephen C. Pepper has suggested for his world hypotheses which are also determined by their root metaphor, the adequacy of models depends on their potentialities of description and explanation rather than upon the accumulation of actual descriptions.⁷²

We assume the order and conflict models to be relatively adequate if they are capable of presenting credible interpretations of any facts in terms of their respective sets of categories. Furthermore, since the facts these two models must adequately interpret overlap considerably (although these facts are never literally the same), a model that cannot reasonably interpret the errors of the other system of explanation is automatically inadequate. Sometimes what are pure facts for one model are highly interpreted evidence for the other. This is precisely why we need alternative models, granted that they are adequate, for mutual comparison and correction of interpretative bias.⁷³

And finally, since sociological theories are conceived here as focusing on some social phenomenon with social order implications, the order-conflict alternatives will most likely avoid and eventually solve the problem of displacement of theoretical scope. It is hypothesized that macro-theories of intergroup relations explicitly contain micro-ideas, and that micro-theories implicitly, and often explicitly, involve references to macro or emergent categories. In other words, structural theories as well as interactional theories are characterized by more or less steady processes of fading in and out of micro- and macro-explanations respectively.

We have recognized that social theorizing actually proceeds in three steps. The normative perspective, often pre-scientifically⁷⁴ acquired, will ultimately determine a theory's social and political fate. Together with the second step, model definition and model selection, a general image of the main outline of some social phenomenon is provided. Our pre-scientific interests as members of some society guide our acquisition of knowledge and influence the basis for selecting appropriate models for theories, thus constituting the intellectual ground on the basis of which sociological theories develop their informational power and *theory* establishes its role as the 'information storehouse for the discipline.'⁷⁵ Here, in a third step, social reality is captured in a form which stresses the strength of the observed, the positively existing. That is to say, hypotheses are derived from a set of propositions and sub-