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Look Ma, We're Still Theorizing: The Continued Search for Theoretical Integration

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In this paper, we explore the often-fractured attempt at theoretical integration within contemporary sociological thought. Theoretical integration was a goal of the early pioneers of sociology but has since been discounted by many as unattainable idealistic vision. We challenge this virtually universal assessment. The belief that theoretical integration is beyond grasp has been owed to a number of debates within contemporary sociological thought, including but not limited to, those surrounding human nature and rationality. We conclude our paper with a proposal for a new direction forward and a hopeful starting place for a promising integrated sociological perspective.

Keywords: Sociological Theory; Sociological Integration; Max Weber

Introduction

Charles Perrow recently reported that he was amazed at how much more social scientists know today, and how much more sophisticated the field of sociology is, particularly in the areas which most interest him, including organizations, structure, and society. This was, he said without further elaboration, his conclusion in spite of many criticisms he continues to get hold of the current direction that the discipline is taking. Perrow has come a long way since his 1981 comment that theoretically,

"*Neither social scientists nor people in general are as smart and rational as we think they are. Social scientists mask this reality by desperately trying to make sense of many things that are really quite senseless when examined closely. Yet they convey the impression of lawful, even rational behavior because of research techniques that are largely self-serving.*" (Perrow, 1981: p. 2).

The authors hold that, while some advancement since Perrow's 1981 comments has been made, there is little good reason for a bright-eyed sense of optimism as the current state of sociological theory is concerned. This is because sociological theory has, to a significant degree, failed the challenge of theoretical integration. With that said, this article will offer a survey evaluation and critical treatment of the general state of sociological theory, tracing prominent changes from the 1960s to the present. The authors offer an identification of issues relevant to the crisis that has faced the discipline, particularly since Ritzer's seminal work on sociology as a multiple paradigm science was published in 1975.

This paper strives to advocate for the need to incorporate greater efforts at theoretical integration into sociological theory. Specifically, we call for a greater integration of both structural and individualistic accounts of social action as means to better describe the social world. We reject the view that either an entirely positivistic or hermeneutic approach can adequately account for the complexities of social reality. What is needed is a blended or integrated approach to social theory. We argue in the second section of the paper that the lack of theoretical integration within social theory, and sociology generally, has contributed to a sociological crisis in which increasingly less social knowledge is being produced. Poor theoretical integration amounts to the poor generation of social knowledge. The development of an integrated social theory is a substantial step toward expanding sociological knowledge and reach. A primary contribution of this paper is that it chronicles and exposes the limitations of non-integrated social theory while at the same time offering a way forward to better describe and understand the social world through increased theoretical integration.

We continue in the third and fourth sections to explore the ways in which, for the most part, efforts at theoretical integration have been unsuccessful and often been unfortunately subject to attack. The fifth section of the paper chronicles the ways in which traditional ones, that is to say positivistic approaches to social theory, have served as barriers to an integrated approach to social theory. Sections 6 through 9 focus on the role of values and the notion of value-free social theory and research. In these sections, we specifically examine the role that the treatment of rationality has played in fostering a nonintegrated approach to social theory. We propose that the inclusion of rationality in its means-end form can only typically offer a trivial benefit to social theory but that rationality in its more robust form, which endorses a specific end of action, will necessarily include substantial value judgments. Thus a social theory that strongly replies upon a notion of rationality will face the dilem-

ma of using a trivial notion of rationality or one steeped in researcher value driven judgment. In Section 10, we incorporate lessons from the paper as well as Max Weber's approach to social action to outline the benefits and tentative approach to an integrated social theory. In Section 11, we conclude with a few summarizing thoughts.

Sociological Crisis

Addressing the crisis Ritzer identified, in the 1970s, graduate students learned, some for the first time that theories are not right or wrong, but rather that each provides a particular angle of vision on the social world. They are factual *descriptions* of "what is" rather than normative suggestions of "what ought to be." Sociological theory is a descriptive endeavor.

This makes sociological theory distinct from normative ethical theory, which has, as its primary charge to uncover the way the world *ought* to be. It was quickly realized that some social theories would offer more accurate predictions of social action than others because certain social theories offered more accurate descriptions of social action. Regardless of the accuracy of its domain assumptions, however, no theory will, despite the empirical rigor of the procedures used to test it, succeed in permitting the generation of social science *laws*, axioms that will hold *true* under any and all circumstances. The reason for this is that all social action remains somewhat uncertain, tentative, i.e., subject to change, and not open to accurate law-like prediction. Empirical models will never, regardless of their level of sophistication and/or inclusiveness of relevant variables yield results that will be *accepted* as laws. Results offer *probabilistic descriptions*, not proof, and not predictions that are certainties, whether they are arguably 70%, 85%, or 99% accurate. Social models that purport to offer universal laws will, as Perrow (1981) would remind his readers, be doomed to catastrophic failure.

Gadamer, likewise, makes the astute insight that, "*the world of human freedom does not manifest the same absence of exceptions as natural law*" (Gadamer, 1975: p. 8). Gadamer's controversial and illuminating insight in *Truth and Method* was that the human sciences would be doomed to continued failure or crisis if they kept insisting that their research subject (the human being) be studied and examined with the same scientific method applied to the natural object, e.g., billiard balls. The object of inquiry of the human scientist, the person, is not knowable in the same fashion as the rock determined to act in an exception-less way by natural law, and hence the scientific method applied to the natural object of scientific inquiry, e.g., the rock or billiard ball, is inadequate when applied to the person. At the very least, the human (social) scientist must hermeneutically supplement a normally applied scientific method when evaluating the social relations of human beings.

Students of social theory were, consistent with the thoughts of Perrow and Gadamer, instructed to recognize the inherently dynamic and dialectical interrelationships between micro and macro-levels of analysis and among factors on an objective (e.g., law, bureaucracy, language), subjective (e.g., norms, values, and ideas) continuum. They were also reminded not to lose their sense of the importance of sociology's structural roots. This would include reading and appreciating the contributions of both Parsons and Davis. Briefly, Parsons' concept of voluntarism, critical in his early writings on action theory, was consistent with Blumer's approach to symbolic interactionism and

Davis (1959) reminded sociologists a half-century ago that all sociological analysis is functional analysis.

Instead of emphasizing the differences and limitations of each theorist's approach, there have been ample opportunities to bridge the gap(s) among theories, and to work toward integration so as to create and offer better descriptions of the social world. Nonetheless, to many students, the charge of theoretical integration seemed contradictory or even hopelessly intractable. It seemed, nonetheless evident that supporting a purely structuralist position would be problematic because a consideration of social institutions and social structures absent an understanding of what individuals (and their imaginative and creative powers) contribute to them would yield an incomplete understanding of social action and a model with low predictive power. After all, whether empirical indicators of intra or inter-subjective factors can be easily identified or measured, they nonetheless remain significant aspects of the social world (Ritzer, 1981). To ignore subjective factors is to ignore the imaginative and creative powers of human consciousness and creative powers which do little more than create an unnecessary source of unexplained variance in research (*Ibid.*). Any comprehensive social theory that fails to recognize this will, at best, offer a highly limited and cumbersomely qualified account of social action. It was inculcated into students' understanding of social theory that these elusive subjective factors were important, however, it seemed discouraging to begin considering the complex process of mapping the seemingly endless combinations and permutations of possible outcomes inherent in the interaction process.

A new generation of sociologists appeared to be ready to tackle the challenge of theoretical integration that Sorokin had issued in 1965, i.e., that the discipline should and would be working towards theoretical integration. Nonetheless, by the late 1970s and into the 1980s, crass empiricism and positivistic approaches continued to thrive and remain the dominant approach. Entire courses (and the bulk of graduate departments) were devoted to the development of uni-directional causal path analytic models (some three-dimensional), and increasingly sophisticated statistical packages such as LISREL, which was used to fit models to the data. This particular program allowed social science researchers to empirically assess their theories, controlling for and alleviating measurement error. In addition, the sophistication of statistical software including SAS and SPSS which, in addition to getting rid of those infernal punch cards, helped to bring the organizational and institutional rigidities of the profession to the surface. The result was an appreciation of the technical flaws in research methods, i.e., the tools of research designs (Baldus, 1990: p. 152).

The focus on unidirectional causality remained an obstacle and made Sorokin's criticisms of the discipline increasingly clear. He had observed that while sociology had adequately provided at least some knowledge of a few specks and dimensions of the social world, it had not significantly increased its understanding of the total socio-cultural reality (Sorokin, 1965). Considered a radical by many conservatives within the discipline, Sorokin nonetheless shed light on some of the deficiencies in sociological theory, leading researchers and theorists alike to ask whether in addition to the adequacy of their research designs, it was equally as important that their theories offered accurate approximations of the course and content of social action.

Understanding decision-making requires an emphasis on the dynamic processes which produce behavior. Any research de-

sign, qualitative or quantitative must include more than the traditional "What would you do if…?" and "What do you think…?" questions routinely asked in survey driven research. Techniques traditionally used in evaluation surveys often asked respondents to project themselves into future time periods that had not yet been incorporated into experience. When this occurs, available options are considered "absent the knowledge and a consideration of the actual consequences of decisions" (Waggoner, 1983: p. 15). Whether models are built to achieve an understanding of an observed causal processes or recursive relationships, the assumptions and functional relations should be as complex yet as realistic as possible, making it clear that theory, method, and methodology are inextricably interrelated (Zeitlin, 1973; Ritzer, 1975, 1981; Bailey, 1982; Waggoner, 1983). The result has been, and in some instances remains, the obviously meager and limited level of knowledge which has been generated (Sorokin, 1965; Baldus, 1990).

Over the next three decades, adherence to the thought-provoking theoretical and paradigmatic image(s) of the discipline led many sociologists, albeit cautiously, to question whether Sorokin's analysis of the direction the discipline would likely take, could be realized. His concern that research designs were far too preoccupied with "scientific techniques, narrow concrete problems, and analytical theorizing" (Sorokin, 1965: p. 833) was directly on point. Because of an almost exclusive emphasis on micro-sociological problems to the exclusion of the broader socio-cultural universe, the discipline was entering a crisis brought on by a lack of theoretical integration, a point which, to reiterate, by 1975 Ritzer would confirm.

Unrealized Optomism

By the 1990s, using Sorokin's sense of optimism, Ritzer had become something of an optimist as well, suggesting the theoretical and paradigmatic integration he called for in 1975 was closer to becoming a reality. With all due respect to Ritzer, as the authors continue to evaluate the theoretical literature, it is suggested he has perhaps become too optimistic. In illustration, Blalock has concluded that sociology is not a high-quality discipline. By the 1990s, he wrote that sociology was more deeply divided than ever, in part because of a lack of theoretical accumulation. Gans, in his 1988 presidential address to the American Sociological Association, broadly agreed, stating that problems with the discipline included deficiencies in sociological theory, the organizational and institutional rigidities of the profession, and the technical flaws inherent in research methods (Gans, 1989: p. 10).

Baldus (1990), for example, wrote that the promise of positivism had not been realized. As a result, the search for universal social laws has been unsuccessful. Other than the vulgar and trivial simplicity of the axiomatic assumptions that "some do" and "some don't," the authors would agree. Some would no doubt argue the answer lies in more sophisticated statistical procedures. In 1983 Waggoner was informed the statistics needed to adequately evaluate data collected from her simulation research did not yet exist, i.e., there were no statistical procedures available to analyze *models in motion* (interestingly the same inadequacy could be given to Waggoner in 2013). In 1990, Baldus reminded the discipline that mathematical modeling had not yet resulted in a better understanding of social action. To suggest that future advancements in statistical analysis will make the need for theoretical integration moot or obsolete is a

hope of many within the discipline. The authors suggest this is perhaps little more than the most desperate and unrealistic of hopes. Statistical analysis has an important place within contemporary sociology, but it simply cannot replace the need for theoretical integration.

The authors maintain that Sorokin's predictions, however realistic, optimistic, and feasible they may have been some 40 years ago, were perhaps overly hopeful forecasts, many of which have not been realized. But then, who reads Sorokin anymore? His work is, quite unfortunately, rarely to never referenced. By the late 20th century, sociologists had begun to engage in an expanding post-modernist (and the authors would add for clarification, deconstructionist) dialogue that has, as Collins has noted virtually made it unfashionable to inquire into the scientific prospects of the discipline (1994: p. 155). The loser is the discipline itself as it has been pointed out over the years by numerous theorists, including Wrong (1961), Turk (1965), Mayhew (1980, 1981), Perrow (1981), Goffman (1982), Turner (1988), Baldus (1990) and Davis (1994), the latter of whom noted that sociology as a discipline, because it is not united and lacks theoretical relevance, is incoherent (Davis, 1994: p. 184).

The Crisis Gets Political and Entrentched

In spite of his sometimes severe criticisms of the discipline, Sorokin remained confident that sociology would ultimately opt for creative growth, and move through the crisis stage, into a revolution that would result in a new era of great theoretical and methodological synthesis. Neither Sorokin, nor Gouldner, however, counted on the depth or the breadth of the crisis. They did not adequately recognize just how entrenched crass empiricism and positivism have become within the discipline. Even though there were increasing numbers of anomalies that in some areas of research were unparalleled, e.g., in attitude-behavior research (Waggoner, 1983, 1993), many social scientists would continue to subscribe to business as usual, primarily because they had been educated under and were highly committed to ways of thinking which were now being threatened. Neither they nor their reputations would easily withstand criticism, particularly since it meant some would not fit into a new era of social science which would be dominated by an unfamiliar way of thinking (Ritzer, 1975; Waggoner, 1983).

As the (meta) theoretical evolution of sociology continued, it appeared evident that those who remained interested in theory would invariably become involved in self-appraisal as well as the appraisal of those they viewed as their theoretical competitors. A step which could have resulted in significant advances within the discipline degenerated at times into the tendency for colleagues to unleash politically motivated attacks on those whose theoretical predispositions differed from their own. This has been evident in the ongoing and often nasty debate between George Homans and Robert Blain (1961) as well as that between Eckberg and Hill and Ritzer (1979).

Instead of identifying and building on the strengths of each mode of thought (by finding a theoretical approach that properly integrated), the focus zeroed in on the theoretical limitations or what some would refer to as weaknesses. In some instances the result was brutal public attack. Ritzer illustrated this in his reference to Lewis Coser's 1975 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association where the latter launched an attack on ethnomethodology, labeling it "trivial," a "massive

copout," a "self-indulgent enterprise," and an "orgy of subjectivism" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 12). In 2001, the mud slinging continued when, Risman in her review of Udry's work on gender concluded that "value free science" is not only an impossible goal, it is an inappropriate one that distorts the research and publication practices of sociology (Risman, 2001: p. 606). Udry, no doubt, submitted his article for publication at least suspecting he might be criticized for it. It was, however, probably surprising for him to learn Risman concluded the review process had failed because his work was published (Risman, 2001).

Udry graciously wrote he considered it an honor to have inspired such heated attacks on his work, particularly from distinguished critics (Udry, 2001). At the same time, however, he pointed out one critical insight that should be acknowledged. That is, any sociologist's views as to the "current consensus about discredited theories" as opposed to those theories that *must* be included in an analysis are "distorted by our own positions within the field," i.e., "each of us sees sociology through our own set of distorting lenses" (Udry, 2001: p. 617). If Risman's resounding criticisms of Udry's work had been isolated, this would be the end of the story. They were, however, not isolated which is one of the reasons the authors offer an evaluation of the evolution of theoretical discourse within sociology - discourse that as optimists they truly believe will likely lead to the theoretical integration that is critical for sociology.

Sometimes, Ritzer has said, it is not possible to avoid contentious and self-defeating competition for theoretical and paradigmatic hegemony, particularly when the inevitability of the territorial imperative enters into the equation. What seems obvious to the authors, however, is these games of one upmanship are counterproductive and detract from the issues that must be addressed if sociology as a discipline is going to move beyond the problems Wrong identified in 1961 when he wrote "forgetfulness of the questions that are the starting point of inquiry leads us to ignore the substantive assumptions 'buried' in our concepts and commits us to a one-sided view of reality" (Wrong, 1961: p. 183). There was also the status which Perrow, in 1981, attached to the discipline, i.e., *the disintegrating social sciences*; what Turner meant when he titled his Presidential Address to the Pacific Sociological Association in 1988, *The Disintegration Of American Sociology*; or when Baldus concluded, "After three decades of positivist sociology, its vital signs are not good" (Baldus, 1990: p. 150).

What would seem to be an important mark of a good theory is the degree to which it can be subjected to falsification, i.e., stand up to rigorous testing. When a person tests or evaluates her theory she should be trying her best to falsify the results and not "prove" her theory true. The first step could perhaps be to examine the theoretical and ideological gap between structuralists and individualists, i.e., those who argue the "organization of a human society is the framework inside of which social action takes place and is not the determinant of that action" (Ritzer, 1975: p. 89) and those who adhere to its antithesis, that human society is simply the framework within which social action occurs and not the determinant of that action (*Ibid.*).

Somehow, as many theorists have recommended, there should be an effort to integrate these two domain assumptions. One essential reason for this needed integration is straightforward: they are two sides of the same phenomenon. It is recognized this is not as simple as it first appears. Perhaps the starting point of a properly integrated social theory is not only to pay attention to the individual as an agent of self-control but

rather as Turk suggests to consider "the importance of internalized social standards in making the individual an agent in the social control of self as well as others" (Turk, 1964: p. 519). As he points out, the "application of internalized norms to others may well be the principal source of order in society" (*Ibid.*). Groups as well as individuals are, that is, not simply sources of social approval; they (i.e., *groups qua groups*) have the capacity to bestow or withhold a broad variety of needs, e.g., *self-worth and self-esteem* (*Ibid.*) as well as expectations of others, each of which requires one's cognitive ability to engage in a reciprocity of perspectives, i.e., take the role of the other. Simplistic as this may appear at first glance, an integrated social theory must take into account the delicate balance between internal and external social factors, which once again introduces the pesky notion of consciousness, intra and inter-subjectivity, coupled with externally defined social factors that have a tendency to influence individual thought and action. Or perhaps it is not so pesky, because after all whether referring to the biological entity, the individual, the actor, the reactor, or the person, human beings are creatures of habit, of routine. This is the important insight that Aristotle exploited to build his virtue ethics approach to ethical normative theory. That people must habitually practice the virtues in order to become virtuous. It is axiomatic that *patterns* of behavior *will* emerge. Consider just how difficult it would be able to imagine a human actor with no discernable patterns of behavior (surely this "human" actor would not survive for long). This again, however, is not the end of the story. The next step is to determine the direction those patterns will be likely to take. This necessarily interjects the inherent instability of individuals *per se*, making it necessary to distinguish between individuals and the roles, statuses, and positions they assume.

Turner has aptly taken repeated note that deliberations over the micro-macro link continue to be a long-standing issue (1988). At the social structural level, Colignon (1994) asks whether there is a need to break the cycle of reification. Blau recognizes it is not possible to analyze processes of social interaction apart from the social structures surrounding them, and Baldus has picked up on the fact that the discipline is deeply divided politically because of the concentration on the "statistical analyses of hypotheses derived using a minimum of theoretical conjecture" (Baldus, 1990: p. 151).

Having identified some of the problem areas, it is curious to see that in the top-tier sociology journals, well published authors seem to concur it is necessary to use only a minimal conceptualization of the individual, since, as Markovsky has said, macro-level structures "frame the proposed encounters in which individuals relate to one another" (Markovsky, 1993: p. 270). Kanazawa (1988) for example, argues that theoretical assumptions are and ought to be unrealistic, in large part because after all, it is not theories but rather empirical propositions which are tested. Therefore, the more unrealistic the assumptions of one's theory the better. He argues that theories should not be judged by the properties of their assumptions because such tinkering is not a productive exercise. The authors beg to differ with Kanazawa on this score. Sociological theory must include assumptions which are as realistic as possible; theory is after all little more than a descriptive representation of the world.

Resurrecting Parsons early work would address some of the general theoretical factors Sorokin recognized, i.e., that,

"*Each theory offers knowledge of an element, a relationship, of the elements of the totality. This ignores the unknown, the*

indeterminate, unpredictable nature of emergent properties. We need knowledge of the specks as well as of the whole." (Parsons, 1965: p. 836).

Sorokin's conception of social theory seems to be consistent with Ritzer's in that for both, the study of levels of social reality and their interrelationships is critical. This means the focus "should not just be on the emergence of higher levels, but on the dynamic relationship among all levels" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 208). Sociologists need to be attuned to the reciprocal and by extension, dynamic relationship between large-scale social structures and institutions and the micro-level relationships and groups from which they emerge. Individuals, that is, are not simply controlled by macro-level social structures that have been internalized, institutionalized, and reified. Broadhead utilizes this thought as an opportunity to reject functional analysis as he notes, "It reduces man to a single motivational drive of continually striving for social acceptance and conformity to social norms, instead or properly recognizing the multi-diversity of motives in man" (Broadhead, 1972: p. 35). In illustration, as relationships are formed, it is reasonable to presume that at least some meanings re apprehended by the individual in *a priori* fashion. When this occurs, it is sometimes concluded that self and others accept meanings as axiomatic. They are then perceived to be objectively real so that the situation is no longer subject to (social) negotiation. At this point the danger of reification has occurred (Waggoner, 1983). This is important because reification implies that individuals are capable of forgetting their own authorship of the world. Acknowledging this sometimes leads researchers to view externally defined social factors as if they contain a somehow timelessly valid quality which implies they *must be* adjusted to rather than altered (Ritzer, 1981). This may lead the social scientist to neglect a consideration of the interpretive process. It may also result in ignoring the idea that when assigned meanings, for any set of reasons do not serve the functions intended, they *may be* changed, deleted, or expanded. Individuals are not merely acted upon by objective, clearly defined and institutionalized social factors; rather they are constantly shaping and creating their own sense of the definition of the situation (in W. I. Thomas' interactionist sense of the term). As Berger and Luckmann (1966) recognized, actors play an active role in the construction of macro-level structures both historically and contemporaneously. This recognition set forth nearly fifty years ago presented the possibilities for a significant step toward theoretical integration.

The Status Quo or Moving Forward

Theoretical integration and an increase in sociological knowledge would seem most likely to occur *after* sociologists have identified a common ground that would serve to direct the scope of the debate. This means reinventing (as opposed to eliminating or relying solely upon) sociology's structural roots. It also means, as Marx noted, "human nature cannot be studied in isolation from the society in which it is found; it is shaped by the social environment" (In Ritzer, 1981: p. 212). On one side there are Marxist positivists (sometimes labeled conservatives or misguided empiricists) (Baldus, 1990: p. 150). On the other side there are hermeneutic critics who argue human behavior is in a constant state of conflict and alienation not consensus, cooperation, and loyalty (Broadhead, 1974: p. 37). At the same time, there are the ever present and unpredictable *emergent properties* that even Durkheim would have concluded are impor-

tant, particularly since he said sociologist should be careful not to reify social factors, but rather only to treat them *as if* they are things. One worries that sociology is becoming increasingly fractured along the fault line, endorsing *either* a crass positivism *or* a crass hermeneutics. The authors offer that such a fracturing will succeed only in offering two inadequate approaches to the discipline and that the solution (as difficult as it might be to realize) is to strive toward integration.

Cole, whose ideas seem to be consistent with those of both Baldus and Blalock, contends that, "problems with fields like sociology is that they have virtually no core knowledge" (Cole, 1994: pp. 133-134) and therefore no cooperative consensus as to the subject matter of the discipline. This premise led Cole to conclude, "There seems to be no sociological work that the great majority of the community will regard as… important" (*Ibid*). He was quick to note that this lack of core knowledge would not likely be remedied by increasing levels of positivism. Even natural scientists do not "do science the way the positivist philosophers say they should because such prescriptions do not work in the natural sciences either" (Cole, 1994: p. 138). He then took his argument a step further, concluding sociologists cannot and will not be able to establish a core or base of knowledge in the same sense that the physicists does. While, as Wallace noted, objections can no doubt be raised to these points, they appear to offer qualified reasons to conclude sociology could not be like the physical sciences "*even if it wanted to*" (Wallace, 1995: pp. 313-318). The central tenet of positivism is, as Stinchcombe somewhat sardonically noted that,

"*Researchers are forbidden to think between the time they posit their hypotheses and the time they accept or reject the hypotheses after calculating a bit and transforming something they want to know into something they do not want to know (the null hypothesis). A true positivist will only accept or reject the null hypothesis, never leaving the sacred precinct to think about what the real world is like. The extreme of positivism is to agree to avoid talking about which theories have been rejected by the facts.*" (Stinchcombe, 1978: pp. 3-4).

Sociology is not a mathematical discipline; neither can it be predicated on the laws of physics. It cannot, therefore, subsist on wholly empirical fare. As Bierstedt commented, the consequence is that busy work will yield a rampant empiricism that determines the direction that research will take, while at the same time it emphasizes the importance of some kinds of research at the expense of others (Bierstedt, 1974: p. 146). These arguments are consistent with those of Psathas (1972) who wrote more than 40 years ago that the distinction between the natural sciences and the social sciences, is that individuals are not simply objects to be observed. Psathas continued, in creating this world, individuals interpret their own activities. If social scientists create artificial distinctions that are too far removed from actual individuals, they may never discover the meanings which actions have for the actor's themselves.

Aside from the assumption that positivism better represents the objective ethos of "good science" other important considerations have contributed to the lack of theoretical integration. As Collins has written, increasingly, sociology has,

"*Split, more than ever before, into separate cocoons that scarcely occupy the same intellectual universe. Recent statistical sociology makes no concession of intelligibility toward outsiders and shows almost no interest in linking up with larger theoretical concerns. On the other side, anti-positivists, once a somewhat embarrassed minority, militantly advocate their own*

program of interpretive, *historical*, *Marxist*, *structuralist*, *or ethnomethodological sociology and condemn their positivist opponents in absentia*." (Collins, 1984: p. 330).

Modern sociology can scarcely be called "a discipline," largely because the gulf between those who rely on numbers and those who rely on aspects of social reality which cannot be properly quantified is sometimes so great that *different* academic conferences and professional journals cater to their predispositions and intellectual biases, i.e., the quantitative socioscientist and the qualitative socio-humanist. It is often forgotten that sociologists are at their best when their work incorporates both qualitative and qualitative content, i.e., when they show a concern for both the syntax and the semantics of social action. This would seem to make Sorokin's comments more of an ongoing alert for the discipline, not merely a speculative topic for intellectual or meta-theoretical debate.

The arguments set forth by Psathas, Cole, and Wallace stand parallel to the contention that creating or endorsing a continued positivistic approach to sociological inquiry would do little to alleviate extant obstacles. Many sociologists no longer believe social processes follow the same orderly, linear, and observable causality that governs the natural world (Baldus, 1990: p. 151). Positivists no longer have the luxury of turning a blind eye to their own problems. They need to come to terms with the fact that the subject matter of sociology must include an emphasis on the effects of social structure on individual thought and action. They must also address the inherent indeterminacy of the dynamics of interaction at both the micro and macro levels (Baldus, 1990). Perhaps this means neither positivist theories nor their accompanying methodologies are suitable for the analysis of the subject matter of sociology whether it is social structures, social definitions, or social behavior. The production of increasing numbers of studies whose strengths lie in the sophistication of the statistical procedures used are, to a degree, theoretically impoverished and seem to be of little to no benefit to anyone except those more able to convince like-minded colleagues of their value (Baldus, 1990: p. 160).

The Role of the Value Judgment

In an attempt to foster a positivistic approach to sociological theory many social theorists have embraced the need for a value-free approach. Gouldner offered a recommendation to those who adhere to the conclusion that sociologists can remain or exist as value free, that somehow they can remove themselves from the biases inherent in the application of their theories. Gouldner reminded them that in the early 1970s, sociologists from Parsons to Lundberg freely entered into an implicit agreement binding them to the dogmatic assumption that sociologists must not commit a value judgment (1962). Gouldner offered a pointed evaluation of the *myth* of a value free sociology, a myth which was and continues to be often accepted as axiomatic, i.e., sociologists shall not commit a critical or negative value judgment. The sociologist's overall objective is to understand, explain, and predict social action, not to criticize or to control it. For Gouldner, this meant:

"*The legacy of the intellectual is the fear of reprisals if one criticizes—that is a very old and a very human concern. Since they do not feel free to criticize society, for that requires a measure of courage, they turn to the cannibalistic criticism of sociology itself and, begin to eat themselves up with theoretical and methodological criticisms.*" (Gouldner, 1962: p. 209).

Skidmore would write in tacit agreement with Gouldner that

objectivity may be the desirable route to take. After all, at least in principal, objective things "can be measured, counted, observed and correlated" (Skidmore, 1979: p. 25). This would, of course, offer an advantage to the social scientist who wants to make the strongest possible empirically supported argument in support of his theories and to use observable or measurable facts to do so (*Ibid.*). Skidmore further noted that some would even argue there is a formidable argument that there is no alternative to an objective and therefore, value free approach (*Ibid.*).

The safest place to reside becomes a zone of unattainable objectivity encircled by the norm of rationality, i.e., the norm of science. A value free (objective) science then goes hand in hand with rationality. If, however, rationality were based on values or schema thereof, it would be nearly impossible to impose the often assumed—but usually elusive link between value free research and rationality. To value rationality and all that *it* is presumed to entail is to abandon the pretense of engaging in a value-free exercise. The authors are not necessarily opposed to the idea that values (and researchers with values) must accompany social theory, what they do oppose is the idea that one can embrace the values that accompany rationality and all that is presumed to entail and at the same time propose to be engaging in a value-free endeavor.

Weber and the Problem of Rationality

In their efforts to establish sociology as a "science of society" or, e.g., Comte's suggestion of "social physics," many sociologists have become entangled in the micro analysis of over-rationalized conceptions of social action, which have resulted in a distorted image of Weber's objective or scientific understanding of social action. Weber identified an important distinction between formal and substantive rationality. The latter is concerned with "uncountable/unquantifiable" phenomena, including factors such as values and religious reward; the former is concerned with an objective rationality that can be directed toward a largely agreed upon *end* goal such as material possession. Along these lines Weber explains that Western culture, with its emphasis on capitalism in particular, gained influence because of a shift from the substantive to the formal.

Weber's distinction can be clarified and expanded upon by noting two different conceptions of rationality, 1) *instrumental rationality* and 2) *ends-rationality*. Instrumental rationality suggests that an act (as means) is rational if it is the most effective or efficient way to realize a predetermined end. For example, when capitalistic gain is the predetermined end, then rational action can be assessed with respect to this end by determining whether agents (or a community of agents) take the most effective or efficient means to realize capitalistic gain. This notion of instrumental rationality is similar to Weber's formal rationality. Rationality, viewed in an instrumental light, is a procedure for evaluating whether a person is behaving rationally in pursuit of a predetermined end, but notice importantly that this conception of formal or instrumental rationality tells nothing about evaluating the *ends qua ends* of social action. It only offers a decision making strategy for examining whether a particular end was indeed rationally pursued.

One might wonder, however, whether another more robust sense of rationality can be developed, a sense that evaluates an end of action *qua end* as opposed to merely evaluating an agent's means of realizing a pre-determined end—we could call this ends-rationality. After all, it is this notion of ends-rational-

ity, as opposed to instrumental rationality, that social theorists typically employ, either implicitly or explicitly, in their theoretical models yet one must inquire into the realistic prospects for developing a non-question begging and substantive account of ends-rationality. Philosophers and theorists for more than two millennia, including Aristotle, Locke and Kant, have tried to develop grand systems of rationality that depend upon the notion of ends-rationality as opposed to the more formal or instrumental sense of rationality. The authors contend their efforts on this score have been *highly* problematic at best. The efforts seem to reduce to begging the question or essentially "hand-waving" assertions such as, "*that end* is just *obviously* irrational." To understand what is at stake consider whether we can conclude that the *ends* of Hitler in respect to his final solution were irrational? No doubt, it is true that his ends were nefarious, monstrous, morally horrible, unjust, and perhaps psychotic (and the authors would vigorously argue that Hitler's ends were all of these), but none of these adjectives will help us conclude that his ends were *nonrational* or *irrational*. The concepts of rationality (and irrationality or non-rationality) are bantered around as if their meaning is clear and impressive, but in a substantive ends formulation, the concept might be little more than just another term used for normative assessment. That is, we call something irrational in many cases when we have a negative moral or normative judgment about it. In fact, if one were able to give an account of ends-rationality, it would likely rely heavily upon some *other* (likely normative) value, but this is exactly the problem. When social theorists (or anyone for that matter) suggest that "*end* X" is irrational what they are most often really suggesting is that end X is objectionable, silly, misguided, disgusting, immoral, or something else. Further, one wonders exactly how this more substantive account of rationality could be made consistent with an account of "value-free" research.

There is a dilemma for the social theorist who relies upon rationality or assumptions thereof. Either those theorists must admit they are operating under the formal or instrumental notion of rationality (a limited notion which would not provide the work that many theorists assign to rationality), or they must admit they are operating under a notion of ends-rationality and explain just how their conception of rationality cannot be reduced to yet another (normative) value. Invoking the notion of rationality often provides an erroneous air of objectivity, but if the above analysis is accurate this air of objectivity when properly understood is reduced to little more than a whiff of reliance upon the acceptance of other (normative) values. In either event, when rationality is properly understand, in both its formal or substantive senses, it can be seen that social theorists must be careful when they apply the concept, and indeed most applications will either be highly limited (in an instrumental sense) or reliant upon other values in a more substantive robust sense. As such social theorists who invoke rationality in their theoretical models might have to choose between offering a theory that incorporates a sense of instrumental rational that says very little and adds little knowledge about the social world or offering a theory that incorporates a sense of ends-rationality that offers much more potential to increase social knowledge but cannot accurately be described as value-free.

Assumptions of Rationality

Models which have been developed from micro-level theo-

ries have largely been a reflection of positivist/objectivist modes of thought. Assumptions that reflect this approach continue to be used, and generally speaking, embrace the following conclusions:

1) Social action is intrinsically rational (Perrow, 1981); sometimes they do not ask—rationality from whose point of view —the researcher's or the subject's?

2) Rationality is *or must* be the norm of science (Turner, 1976); but again, from whose point of view?

3) Reality exists external to individuals so that once they come into interaction, social structures are formed which constrains subsequent interactions (*ibid*.); but, once created, has it also been unalterably reified?

4) Individuals consciously choose between alternative courses of action by evaluating their experiences with each in terms of a preference ranking and then select the "best" and therefore the most rational alternative (Homans, 1960); which assumes adequate information that may not always be accessible or processed.

5) In the development of an abstract theory, social action can be understood (Turner, 1976); this recognizes the need for distinguishing between individuals and the roles that play. How far is too far when the sociologist is establishing those artificial distinctions; and finally

6) In trying to understand the social world, the biased influence of human values can be suspended by using a positivist methodology (Kinloch, 1981); the authors would argue this is not possible.

These assumptions are not surprising when it is considered that, in their efforts to understand the social world, contemporary sociologists have been encouraged and rewarded for adopting what are taken to be objective and rational assumptions. Weirich, a respected authority in decision and game theory, in his *Realistic Decision Theory*: *Rules for Non-Ideal Agents in Non-Ideal Circumstances*, addresses the problem of using overly idealized hyper-rational agents in decision and game theory (Weirich, 2004). In this work he describes how traditional theoretical approaches often utilize an over-idealized conception of rationality and as such often may not offer adequate insights into real (social) actors. He then offers solutions, using bounded rationality, to deal with the oversights of traditional approaches. Weirich's approach to incorporate a notion of bounded non-idealized rationality offers a promising approach that social theorists can gain from.

Emphases on rationality and objectivity have created the belief that it is possible to "observe, count, enter data into the computer, have them analyzed statistically, and in this way gain valuable knowledge about human beings" (Morris, 1977: p. 4). This perspective encourages the reduction of social action to evermore rationally consistent, orderly, and generalized forms of understanding and artificially creates a classification of deviants, i.e., those who do not fit within the narrowly defined parameters of the model (Perrow, 1981). The primary requirement is that the social scientist must act as a disinterested and detached observer having, "no vital or practical interest in the situation he observes, only a cognitive or theoretical one" (Zeitlin, 1973: p. 179). It is anticipated this point of view will not only permit, but encourage social scientists to believe they can not only observe interactions from the outside, as uninvolved bystanders, uninterested in the hopes and fears of their participants.

The assumption that social action is shaped primarily by internalized and commonly accepted norms severely restricts the

range of social actions of relevance to social science research, making it inevitable that the dynamic and ever-changing nature of social action may be downplayed or largely ignored (Wrong, 1961; Waggoner, 1983, 1993). The most pronounced treatment of this can be seen in the way in which the sociological concept of the "norm" has become synonymous with rationality and objectivity. Actors are presumed to be acting *rationally* if their behavior is manifested in a manner that corresponds appropriately with the externally defined social environment. The norm, however, becomes rational not because it is objective, but because it presumes consistency which, when abstracted from the real world allows for identification of indicators of abstract concepts as well as easier development of empirical models. The norm is thus presumed to be rational because it has been justified and legitimated in the name of a level of consistency which may or may not exist with respect to real social actors. For many sociologists, the rational must also be the measurable. From there it is not is difficult to criticize or even to neglect that which does not fit into a neatly constructed model as simply an outlier or an example of *irrationality*.

Social scientists should neither downplay nor ignore the anomalies that defeat the tradition of sociological inquiry. Despite the deconstructionist's insistence to the contrary, concerns need to shift to testing whether mainstream theories offer valid representations, i.e., realistic approximations of social reality. Doing so will necessitate moving beyond asking whether the empirical model accurately reflects the theory sociologists have chosen to use, to whether the theory itself accurately reflects the reality they are trying to understand. As Sorokin was quick to recognize, until a re-examination of theory becomes a reality, there will be an overabundant supply of statistical samples and collections of objective facts, many of which will be rendered meaningless or non-applicable to a treatment of social reality. If the discipline makes a choice to stay in that state for too long a time, it will have condemned itself to a sterile state of knowing more and more about less and less—and the authors would suggest, by extension—until it knows everything about almost nothing at all. After all, when the theoretical question is asked, "Why are these objective things the way they are and not otherwise, objectivity falls by the wayside and sociologists are forced to come face to face with human motives, which do not respond well to purely rational, objective research" (Skidmore, 1979: p. 25).

The Role of Ratioality Challenged

A half century ago, March and Simon commented that to assume individuals possess both the cognitive and intellectual tools needed to consciously determine the best alternative course of action requires a significant leap of faith, primarily because,

"*Individuals cannot process large amounts of information but only limited bits and pieces, and these only slowly. Information is distorted as it is processed. Individuals cannot gather information very well even if they could process it; they do not always know what is relevant information, in as much as they do not always understand how things work. Above all, they cannot even be sure what their preferences are. They also have contradictory preferences, of contradictory goals, and are unable to fulfill them all at once. As a consequence, they do not always look for optimal solutions; they settled for the first acceptable solution to come along.*" (March & Simon, 1956: p. 137).

Since that time, social theorists have re-examined the rules of objectivity and rationality in social science research. Kinloch, for example, indicated that one of the major problems faced by social scientists in their efforts to remain detached and objective is the inevitability of,

"*An imposition of rationality upon individuals (as an interpretive device) rather than appreciating their construction a reality as methods in their own right. Social scientists in particular… attempt to 'remedy' their behavior through empirical and theoretical devices, and continue their search for the 'invariant' and 'calculable' in their research.*" (Kinloch, 1981: p. 138).

As Perrow indicated, such an image will ultimately result in a models of limited use developed in an effort to:

1) Mask the limited capacity for cognition possessed by all individuals who filter information in the minding process;

2) Fulfill a need to make sense of things, to find in order, to acknowledge a rationality;

3) Eliminate disorder with rational designs; and

4) Generally, to simplify explanations of all types of social action (Perrow, 1981).

In their search for order, some social scientists have created artificial social beings "who have no real biographical situation in the social world" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 211). It is not the individuals under study, but rather social scientists who are defining situations for them (*Ibid.*). This one-sided image of social action does not account for the fact that actions can be understood only if cultural definitions and their meanings, along with a consideration of the context within which social action occurs, are taken into account. A vast majority of social scientists fall short of providing much, if any, insight into this apparently subjective dimension of social action, primarily because of their commitment to a narrow sense of science (Ritzer, 1981: p. 211). Essentially, the position is that subjective dimensions of social action cannot be studied scientifically, and as such, are not a legitimate part of sociological inquiry (*Ibid.*). To reiterate, the problem with this narrow scientific orientation is that,

"*Whether subjectivity can be studied scientifically or not, it is a significant aspect of the social world. Thus to ignore it for scientific or other reasons is to ignore an important component of social reality. In ignoring it, sociologists simply create a source of unexplained variance in their work.*" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 211).

Social scientists often, despite these astute criticisms, persist in their efforts to maintain a relatively narrow scientific attitude. In the process, they have developed, for imposition on the social world, a standardization of presupposed common understandings. This view leads to a conception of social action as anticipated compliance and presumed alternatives that the common culture and extant social structure provides. The construction of a hierarchy of needs coupled with continued references to standardized expectancies have, however, led social scientists to underestimate the individual's interpretive complexity. By manipulating the research environment in this way, it has become difficult for researchers to consider the multidimensional nature of social action that a more integrated approach to social theory would allow for.

The authors recognize it would be easy to become critics for criticism sake. Thus, in all fairness, it is acknowledged that if social action were genuinely nonrational, a science of social and cultural phenomena would be impossible, since there could be no meaningful correspondence between the order of ideas

and the order of things. There would be no way of drawing generalized inferences and therefore no possibility of scientific explanation or prediction (Kokelmans, 1979). In fact, "most of the time social action is rational; individuals *allege* to have good reasons for what they do" (Kokelmans, 1979: p. 86). From the proverbial *god's eye* view of objective observers, however, the result of those actions may well have been contrary to what rational individuals *should do*. It is therefore assumed, consistent with Skidmore's (1979) thought that all forms of social action are oriented toward *some goal*, regardless of the motives or reasons given. When an action is said to be nonrational what this often means is that the goal of the actor in question was ill-informed, i.e., the actor was not able to consider either possible constraints or the possibility that the decision involving rationality was subjectively judged absent some degree of relevant information.

It is no surprise that sociologists generally agree on a broad definition of rationality, even as it is applied to themselves. To be a respected academic, for example, one *must* possess certain traits, including an appreciation of a *long-term* outlook toward gratification and success. Rationality is, after all, focused primarily on the long-term maximization of goals. Social scientists who live by this principle write about rationality (as a norm centered around the goal or *end* of long-term prospect maximization), yet how different the concept would be treated if the gambler, the drug addict, or the waitress who is a single parent, put pen to paper to discuss their assumptions of rationality—assumptions which are also bound by conceptions of risk adversity and temporal outlook—both highly subjective measures. Perhaps then the social science debate over the continuum of rational and nonrational actions could be appropriately referred to as superfluous or at least subject to one's assigning a particular value to the *end* under discussion.

Working toward a New Direction

The authors would suggest a careful re-examination of positivism and the ensuing methodological, theoretical, and practical reasons to strive toward theoretical integration. A re-evaluation seems especially important in light of the obvious need to understand how and in what ways the subjective states of individuals are created, re-created, and maintained over time. It is noted in particular that the ability of an individual to respond at least some of the time innovatively and creatively does not mean there are no patterns to that creativity. Rather it means that social action must be considered in its totality, not merely with reference to extant coercive structural elements which, downplay or largely ignore the ability of individual self appraisal and self judgment. Individuals, and their inherently subjective states, must not, as Ritzer notes, be reduced to dependent variable status (Ritzer, 1981: p. 211). To do so would mean researchers would have created *reactors* who add little to an understanding of the "real" social world. Social theorists should accept that, on occasion, individual judgment will weaken their predictions, yet at the same time hold hope that it is precisely the stage at which their theory went wrong that might yield the most interesting results—results that could pave the way for future research. It is in this way that the limits of rationality and theoretical modeling might be stretched to account for a greater and more representative account of sociological knowledge.

A resolution to the problems of a nonintegrated approach will necessitate uncovering one of the fallacies in social science research—a fallacy of *simple predictable rationality* in social action. An adequate inquiry should begin with silence and involve an effort to understand and evaluate the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in ordinary situations. Researchers must not presume to know what things mean to the people they are studying. In an *ex-post facto* review of criminal or dangerous activity, for example, the respondent frequently states, "it seemed like a good idea at the time." It might well be prudent to expand on this retrospective description of behavior and the degree to which it involved risk adversity and temporal outlook both of which fuel actions that are far too readily labeled and dismissed as nonrational. Again, it is worth stressing that those acting deviantly might well have been, given their ends or desires, acting instrumentally *rational*. Thus, if sociologists insist that such conduct was nonrational they must struggle with providing a coherent account of ends-rationality, a very difficult task discussed earlier in the article. There should be an avoidance of presuppositions and axiomatic assumptions about the ways in which individuals "should" behave. As Perrow points out,

"*Social scientists do not attest to the fact that most human actors are less than brilliant, or that they have not developed adequate commented skills, or that there are failures information processing. 'Aberrations' they say are due to such things as inadequate internalization of 'norms,' or 'values,' or 'culture,' or 'tradition,' or 'unrealized consequences.*'" (Perrow, 1981: p. 7).

It would appear untenable to hold on so tenaciously to a theoretical need for unvarying, orderly, and rational explanations of social action when, within real world settings, individuals clearly have a conscious capacity to create, re-create, and socially negotiate the situations they experience. An adequate theory of social action should emphasize a multiplicity of factors, which work *together* to produce individual behavior and social action. Such a theory would be general enough to consider the scope of diverse and often conflicting perceptions held by individuals, yet specific enough to generate adequate explanations and predictions of social action. A re-introduction of Weber's contributions to the development of a scientific understanding of social action may well provide the foundation for such a theory. Many would attest to the merits of Weber's approach to social action, yet more continue to debate the interpretations of his work. Nonetheless, his goal of developing an objective/scientific understanding of social action has contributed immeasurably to sociological theory. The uniqueness of his contribution lies in the fact that he did not distinguish social structures and institutions from the diverse actions of the individuals who both construct them and provide them with meaning.

As he developed his interpretive scheme for understanding, there is little argument that Weber recognized the complexities of the social world. He acknowledged social reality is a phenomenon unknowable in its totality, reasoning there will always be at least one other way of looking at any situation. Because of the unknowable qualities of social reality, Weber insisted that the social sciences not copy the natural sciences by searching for general laws of behavior (Weber, 1949: p. 80). Recently, work in hermeneutics, specifically Gadamer's efforts in his *Truth and Method*, have carried forth this Weberian insight, i.e., Gadamer, like Weber, would agree if the social sciences were to copy the natural sciences not much useful knowledge would be produced. His reasoning was that any social science,

"*Oriented toward the development of timelessly valid laws would, of necessity, emphasize those patterns of action that are nomothetic (common from one society to another), with the result that idiographic (individualized) events would ultimately be omitted from consideration.*" (In Turner & Beeghley, 1981: p. 215).

Weber did, however, realize the danger inherent in over emphasizing subjective meaning, concluding that to focus *wholly* on the intuitive understanding of each individual's inner nature (*verstehen*) would preclude the development of an objective social science. He took the position that while a concern for individual meaning was critical, an unevenly weighted conceptualization would limit the realm of knowable phenomena to some sort of mystical and intuitive re-experiencing of the other (In Hughes, 1958: p. 309).

With some degree of success, Weber reconciled the objectivity-subjectivity debate by constructing a way of emphasizing the significance of *verstehen* that would permit an integration of individual meaning and general patterns of action. In defense of his orientation, Weber (1949) defended the view that, in order to achieve an adequate causal explanation of its course and effects, sociology should concern itself with the interpretive understanding of social action. Social action, he noted, is that which takes account of the behavior of others and is oriented by this concern. Weber was careful to point out that social action can only be understood when considered within an intelligible and inclusive context of meaning.

In acknowledging the importance of adopting a dynamic conceptualization in the analytical process, Weber sought to integrate nomothetic (generalizing) and idiographic (individualized) levels of analysis. He did so by pointing out that individual factors or events may at times be the more salient in understanding social action. To ignore them in favor of an emphasis on general patterns of action would result in the reduction of reality to a set of meaningless static "laws" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 208). Weber also noted however, that individuals, societies, and events, are not wholly unique, but are representative of one or another general category. Each therefore can be understood by reference to those categories, i.e., a sharing of similar characteristics. Wherever people converge, it is possible to develop a schematic description of behavior that can be interpreted as a "pattern into which ideas may be placed for convenience and clarity" (Skidmore, 1979: p. 119). Implicit in this assumption is the realization that the social scientist must be attuned to the reciprocal and dynamic relationship which exists between individuals and their social environment(s). It was Weber's consideration for the inherently dynamic nature of social action that led him to conclude the key to its understanding lay in the development of ideal types, which he described as

"*Conceptual models or mental construct used in the analysis of social phenomena. They are constructed from observations of the characteristics of subjects under study, but they are not intended to correspond exactly to any single case. Rather, they are used to describe and test hypotheses about empirical reality.*" (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 1981: p. 131).

Ideal types, i.e., conceptual models, approximate social factors within real world settings. They permit the classification of the numerous, diverse dimensions of social action, making possible the uncovering of norms characteristic of these dimensions. By stablishing ideal types, Weber put forward a powerful and helpful notion. He made it possible to see where it was that inevitable deviations are likely to take place. Ritzer's approach

to theory parallels Weber's on ideal types, particularly his emphasis on the construction of the artificial distinctions between individuals and the roles they play. Ritzer, commented as folows, arguing these distinctions are needed in order to understand social reality:

"*We should not mirror the social world in our conceptual systems. If we do, we are simply replicating the confusion of the world in our paradigmatic systems. Instead, what we should be doing is developing systems of ideas that help us to better understand the confusing reality of the social world. In short, a confusing or confused paradigm is of little utility in helping to understand a confusing social world. It is a paradox, but artificial distinctions are needed in order to deal with the real world.*" (Ritzer, 1981: p. 208).

Ritzer concluded, as did Weber, that artificial, abstract, and fictitious models are indispensable in thinking about real people and their actions. The objective approach that is used to develop models and theories that reflect the real world is not intended to do so isomorphically, but rather by using realistic approximations. As long as the model and the theory are logically consistent, and each references the subjective meanings of the actors involved, adequately approximating social action in the real world, accurate descriptions and explanations are feasible. It was in this manner that Weber concluded, it would be possible to understand social action while at the same time realistically evaluating events in the social world in an objective and scientific manner. Of equal importance, Weber noted this method of inquiry would encourage social scientists to recognize that the dynamic quality of social action is inseparable from its inherently historical orientation. Therefore, instead of stressing reified, ahistorical "slices" of the social world, he offered a dynamic and historical theory of social action.

Weber's approach was part of an overall blueprint for answering what he concluded was the most important methodological question confronting the social sciences. It involves the sense that there are objectively valid axioms in those disciplines concerned with social and cultural phenomena. Weber's primary goal was to demonstrate the manner in which objective scientific inquiry is rationally plausible in a discipline where the subject matter includes the objectively meaningful actions of individuals. He assumed his goal would be realized when social science data were distinctly conceptualized and systematically analyzed (Weber, 1949).

Weber further commented on the need to use a rational method in which the research process would be systematic in the sense that the researcher could assume:

1) It is possible to categorize empirical data in terms of clearly formulated concepts which would

2) Permit the use a proper rules of evidence, and

3) Permit the researcher to draw logical inferences about the phenomena under study (Weber, 1949).

It is evident from his criticisms of functional analysis that Weber did not consider his approach to be without problems. For example, he commented that

"*Sociological analysis must ultimately refer to human action rather than to collective social phenomena because such entities as a state do not think or act; only people act. In functional analysis, concepts tend to become reified overtime such that the needs of the social system become the focus of attention rather than individual action. As a result, functional analysis is inevitably oriented for the development of general theories similar to those in the natural sciences, and emphasis that can nev-*

er result in understanding of the subjective meanings individuals attached to behavior." (In Davis, 1959: p. 757).

Contemporary sociologists have come to view Weber's theoretical and methodological contributions in a somewhat distorted manner. His belief in the development of a dynamic yet objective science of society has been transformed into a sociology concerned with establishing causal linkages among concepts, often without a consideration of the meanings attached to social phenomena (Ritzer, 1981). Weber's conviction of the increasingly well-organized nature of social life suggests he foresaw the propensity for and emphasis on generalized laws when he stated:

"*Social life was becoming increasingly rationalized in the sense that people tend to lead relatively methodical lives. Sociology participates in this process of rationalization to the extent that it produces objective knowledge about social phenomena with a result of sociology can help people make decisions by providing them with accurate information.*" (In Turner & Beeghley, 1981: p. 214).

The importance of the contemporary preoccupation with rationality is that it has become inextricably intertwined with generalized theories of social action. As a consequence, in the same way that Durkheim's concept of the social fact has been reified, Weber's ideas have also been reified, leading to the potential for distortion and manipulation of his conceptual and methodological systems. This is in part because sociological theory needs to redirect itself back to its stated mission—providing adequate answers to questions asked of social reality. Wrong, writing in agreement, using words that seem prophetic on a continuing basis, stated that,

"*Social theory must be seen primarily as a set of answers to questions we asked of social reality. If the initiating questions are forgotten, we readily misconstrue the task of theory and the answers previous thinkers have given become narrowly confining prisons, degenerating into little more than a special professional vocabulary applied to situations and events that can be described with equal or greater precision in ordinary language. Forgetfulness of the questions the starting points of inquiry lead us to ignore the substantive assumptions buried in our concepts and commit us to a one-sided view of reality.*" (Wrong, 1961: p. 104).

The distortion and manipulation of Weberian objectivity in the social sciences has been further aggravated by the continued use of positivist models of social action, which invariably create methodological problems in social science research.

Whether researchers develop observational or cross sectional representations of social action or computer-generated simulations viewed as "models in motion," they address two critical issues. The first is that their models will be imperfect representations of social reality. The second is that because of these imperfections, their models will not be isomorphic with that of reality. As Watkins and Meador pointed out:

"*Social scientists' predictions of human behavior are only as reliable as the stability and accuracy of their models. The introduction of human variables causes models to become imperfect representations; and dangers appear when they and the humans involved are treated as perfect replicas of reality.*" (Watkins & Meador, 1979: p. 199).

Any social scientists that acknowledge the imperfections of their models must further acknowledge that the value of the results of the methodology adopted depends entirely upon the quality of the components included in the model and on the degree to which the dynamics of the interrelationships among their components approximate the real world. Needed is the development of a dynamic methodology which encourages social scientists to utilize assumptions and functional relations among components of models which are as complex yet as realistic as possible. The resulting models will take on the capability of producing that output which most closely resembles that observed within ontological reality.

Ritzer (1975 & 1981) points out that the theoretical orientation selected to explain the phenomenon under study determines the method of data collection a social scientist will adopt. This raises the specter that traditionally defined survey research techniques may lead to imposed or predefined methods. Concern for this has been set forth by Kinloch who said:

"*Professional sociologists continue to grasp the invariant in their studies, 'manage' research situations, focus on 'assumed' correspondence between observed appearances and intended events, and attempt to bring each situation into conformity with an anticipated state, that is, the goal, the solved problem. These methods mean that little, if any, insight into individual rationality is gained, since the unavailability of formal structures is assured by the practices of constructive analysis.*" (Kinloch, 1981: p. 141).

Perrow, has commented, through their insistence that insights can be gained through the study of objective phenomena, researchers fail to realize that many of the events they seek to explain are the result of "happenstance, accidents, misunderstandings, and even random, unmotivated behavior" (Perrow, 1981: p. 3). He further commented:

"*Social scientists write goals with simple, elegant, and inclusive hypotheses of what the world should look like. Models are generated intestate with questionnaires that create the world they want to prove exists. Each step contains some elements of self-deception.*" (Perrow, 1981: p. 3).

The implication seems clear. The primary stumbling blocks to the development of an adequate understanding of social action remains as they were when Wrong generated his theoretical polemic on the Hobbesian question in 1961, that too many mainstream sociologists continue to:

1) Deny the reality and meaningfulness of the Hobbesian question (by presuming they already know the answer to the question);

2) Apply theoretically imposed rationality, represented in models of individuals as overly constrained by social structure;

3) Use research methods which may largely ignore the interpretive processes individuals use in constructing their own social structures;

4) Use research methods which utilize standardized constructs, placing only a minimal emphasis on the dynamically constructed nature of social reality.

Needed is a theory that focuses on how and in what ways the subjective states of actors are created, re-created, and maintained, and altered, as well as an ensuing methodology which encourages a sensitization to consciousness and to the dynamic social processes which work together to produce social action. The authors maintain that this need is best satisfied with an integrated approach to social theory. As Crow and Knowles pointed out nearly a half century ago,

"*A less precise method may be preferable because it produces information more quickly and/or at less cost. Moreover, the information is more likely to be used if the method by which it was obtained is familiar and acceptable to the respondent—an*

important consideration to those who must produce it. If the purpose is, e.g., to generate new and unexpected contingencies as an aid to planning a hypothetical situation, then a loose method might be more valid than a precise one." (Crow & Knowles, 1965: p. 356).

Crow and Knowles thoughts about loose methods are consistent with Weick's (1976) suggestion that society is a loosely coupled system.

Conclusion

Factors to be included in the development of an accurate model of social action must reflect the realization that an imposed formalized methodological structure plainly contrasts with the commonsense actions made by individuals in the course of their everyday life. Therefore, if researchers rationalize or reconstruct the individual's intentions, the very processes used in the dynamics of reality construction, they are effectively prohibited from gaining insights into those processes. An integrated social theory must not only break down the barriers between structuralism and individualism but also must impose rigid and imaginative notions of rationality to social action that rarely describes real world actors. It must be taken into account that individuals play an active role in the construction of the social forces which so directly affect them, both historically and contemporaneously, and as a result, an emphasis on the subjective and socially constructive nature of reality is of overwhelming significance to anyone concerned with the development of models which accurately represent the social world (Ritzer, 1981). This task of theoretical integration (with a concerned and interested eye toward the subjective features of social action) is no easy charge, but it must be one that contemporary sociologists adopt if they wish for their discipline to progress and prosper through the gain of increased social knowledge.

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