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CRITICAL THEORY AND THE LIMITS OF SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM

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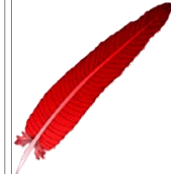
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THEORY

A. WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY? The foundations of the critical theory of society are in the early philosophical manuscripts of Karl Marx (Marx, 1963). Prior to the 1840's, social theory, political theory, "scientific" sociology, and classical political economy existed as coherent intellectual traditions, but a critical theory of society had not yet emerged. Utopian socialism, scientific political economy, and critical philosophy existed, but were not yet combined in a critical theory of society which could reflect the class struggles and social revolutions which were transforming Europe in the middle of the 19th century.

Theories of history have existed at least from the time of Plato's dialogues, in which his notion of the telos or goal of human society resided in the striving for infinite perfection. In Aristotle's Politics (Aristotle, 1962), nature of a just society as a goal for humans is rigorously analyzed. Following in each of these traditions is a continual philosophical dialectic between various idealist and materialist schools of thought. A philosophy of history was elaborated in Aristotelian form by Ibn Khaldun (1963) in November of 1377 in his treatise, Introduction to History, and was further developed in Italian by Giambattista Vico (Vico, 1968). But the most comprehensive theory of history and society in Europe was formulated by George Hegel in the 19th century. Hegel elaborated the first systematic philosophy of history or social theory to emerge in human thought, and to establish itself as an intellectual tradition

(Hegel, 1956).

But social theory in the work of Hegel, political theory in Rousseau (1950), and positivist and "scientific" sociology in Comte (1966) and Spencer (1969) were either grounded in a criticism of the human condition in political society, or in faith in the possibility of a natural science of the enduring laws of society. Criticism of society was reduced by these theorists to criticism of the state, and critical thought was reduced to a search for formal laws of social structure and development. Equally bound to a positivist image of science were the classical political economists--Adam Smith (1909) and David Ricardo (1965), who analyzed the laws of motion of the economic categories of civil society as if they were the laws of nature.

It was not until Marx that the basis for a truly critical and social theory was established. In his early work, Marx sought release of humanity from the bonds of alienation--from the domination by a society of wage labor and economic exploitation. This society was neither understood nor controlled, neither by the captains of industry nor by the leaders of the state apparatus. The whole society was alienated from the human actors who produced and reproduced it (Marx, 1963:120-134). An alienated society is a social formation which is beyond control of the human beings who have produced it. In that sense, both European capitalism of the 1840's and American capitalism of the 1970's are alienated societies. These are both social formations which were created by human beings and their labor, but for a series of very specific reasons have grown out of control of the human beings who constructed them in the first place.

Social theory which does not recognize the alienated relations of capitalist society does not understand human beings as the essential reality of society, nor does it comprehend the totality of the social formation. Past, present and future are reduced to a one-dimensional time frame, and rather than being able to come to terms with the nature of social reality as a whole, alienated social theory simply comprehends its parts.

The methodological basis of the critical theory of society is the dialectical logic of George F. Hegel (1956). According to the principles of dialectical logic, "That which is cannot be true," (Marcuse, 1941). In other words, our existing society of racism, genocide, and possible nuclear holocaust cannot be the "truth" of human existence. Truth must lie somewhere else, not in the facts of the given reality, but in the negation or transcendence of those facts. Truth lies in the attempt to go beyond this reality to a better world. Thus, truth lies in our attempt to change the world, in our critique of the established reality. A critical sociological analysis is true insofar as it helps change the world and make it a more human place in which to live. So while reality may lie quite beyond human comprehension and can never be reduced to words, truth is the living of each moment of human life to its maximum potential, the unfolding of reality from its potential to a lived practice or actuality of human existence. In contrast to a critical analysis, much of sociology remains at the level of the "facticity of the given," (Marcuse, 1964 :170-203). The difference between reality as it presently appears and its essential Qualities is not distinguished. Such analysis has the effect of justifying the status quo whether it intends to do so or not.

There are no textbooks on the "methodology" of critical theory. Rather, critical analysis refuses to acknowledge the reduction of epistemology to methodology. Where most sociology asks "how is it possible to prove this fact?", a critical analysis asks "what is a fact?" Facticity resides in the whole for critical theory while it is a mere fragment for others. The criterion of verification can never be applied to critical sociological analysis (Zetterberg, 1964). Only the criteria of transcendence and praxis apply. Does the sociological analysis go beyond our taken-for-granted assumptions about the established reality? Does the analysis extend our knowledge of the established reality, totality (Lukacs, 1971), or totalization (Sartre, 1963) by transcending it, that is by making it an understood part of a larger whole? Even conventional positivist sociology would usually agree to the criterion of transcendence. For what is sociology if it does not go beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions of the status quo...just another

form of journalism with more statistical data? Transcendence of the status quo should be a criterion of all sociology worthy of that name.

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

A second criterion for judging the truth of a theory is praxis, or the degree to which sociological analysis is responsible to human values (Habermas, 1971). Praxis is the key concept that differentiates the critical sociologist from the ahistorical gatherer of "common sense facts" and cataloguer of mathematical abstractions whose activities characterize contemporary sociological positivism. Praxis refers to the ideal of conscious practical action--of making the critique of alienation speak for popular needs and lead to concrete actions against the capitalist commodity relationships--within historical possibilities. Knowledge serves "real world" interests whether it is encyclopedic (Foucault, 1970) knowledge aimed at cataloguing the status quo so that someone else may act to maintain it as in the case of sociological positivism, or contemplative (Kirkpatrick, 1973) knowledge which assumes a special status from which to view social reality, status that claims to be apart from that reality. Sociology is part of society, and does not objectively stand above it. No matter what pains are taken for "objective value-free analysis," (Weber, 1949) knowledge cannot be divorced from social reality and values. Critical theory establishes truth as that which negates or opposes the status quo. The mere description of the status quo, whether it be statistical or interpretative, can never by itself qualify as critical theory.

B. HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF CRITICAL THEORY. Two developments are responsible for the emergence of critical sociology. First, intellectual theories from England, France, and Germany had been put forth in specialized form. Marx attributed his analysis to a synthesis of English political economy, French utopian socialism, and German idealistic philosophy. Second, the class struggles and social revolutions within capitalism became so intense that the working class could not be prevented from becoming conscious of its exploitation within the capitalist social relationships (Korsch, 1970). Marx became part of the articulation of a new world view--a world view of the exploited wage workers, rather than a world view of the aristocracy or the rich bankers as had previously prevailed. Critical theory of society emerged in the criticism of capitalism from the point of view of the wage worker or proletariat.

Critical theory of society developed along with the dominance of the capitalist social relations of production. In the 19th century the antagonism between workers and capitalists became so intense that the workers were in actual danger of being exterminated; they were not given enough wages to even reproduce themselves. Prior to the 1840's other basic social antagonisms were brought to the consciousness of the human race and written about in a critical way--the antagonism between master and slave, and between men and women--but it was only in the 1840's that critical thinking about society was able to reflect on the social relationships in the society as a whole.

The development of capitalism created the preconditions for the demystification of social forces formerly conceived as natural or God-given for all of eternity--such as the feudal systems of social inequality which rested on the divine rights of the nobility. All that humans had created, from the gods to the social structure, became subject to the critique of human reason in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789. However, capitalism generated its own system of mystification, that of "eternal" or "natural" economic relationships of exploitation, competition, and hierarchy.

Science and technology have become the new religion of capitalist society. The dualistic form of the religious world view, the dichotomy of subject and object (Greenberg, 1971) formerly expressed as the

alienation of humans from their constructed deities, was mechanistically replicated in the secularized version of religion which today is called science. The fall of religious metaphysics became a necessary step in the rise of a new God--science and technology--overriding the individual's belief in the primary of human thought, creativity, and energy. As the theological or metaphysical epoch of history was seen by August Comte, the founder of scientific sociology and positivism, to be giving way to the rise of the scientific era, so the high priests of the new society were, for Comte, to be sociologists and other social scientists (Comte, 1966).

The critical theory of society, at least in the 20th century with Lukacs (Jacoby, 1971), Korsch, and the Frankfurt School (Connerton, 1976, Wellmer, 1971), has been locked in a polemical dialectic with the heirs of Comte's social positivism (Kellner, 1975-76). According to Max Horkheimer, the demand that the positivists make that sociology must conform to the "facts" is similar to the demand in the medieval society that theories conform to religious dogma. According to Horkheimer (1971:91):

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

In trying to explain why people in modern society worship science and technology as they once worshipped Gods, Marx looked at the sociological organization of labor in the capitalist society. He found that in capitalist society, labor is so organized as to make work involuntary for the vast majority of the population. They were wage workers or wage "slaves" who had to work in order to eat. Marx was trying to make the point that work in a capitalist society is essentially forced labor. According to Marx (1963:125):

"The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labor. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague ... the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person.

"We arrive at the result that man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions--eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and personal adornment --while in his human functions--creativity and craftsmanship--he is reduced to an animal."

The reality of alienated labor under capitalism is more than a simple issue of economic exploitation or the "cheating" of the worker out of some of the value of his/her labor time. It is fundamentally a degradation of human life, of the qualitative inequality of the worker's exchange of her or his life energies for the things necessary merely to survive. In capitalist society, human beings are alienated from their social nature as species beings (Marx, 1971) and the liberation from this alienation is the historical problem of human existence.

Critical theory was first developed by Karl Marx (1963) in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. In the work of one North American exponent of the critical theory of society--Trent Schroyer (1973)--it is called the Critique of Domination. Other scholars have referred to the

critical theory of society as Hegelian/Marxism, or dialectical Marxism (Klare and Howard, 1971). Having located the historical context within which the critical theory of society was first articulated, we will now trace its development in order to briefly contrast it with modern scientific technology.

C. THE REDISCOVERY OF CRITICAL THEORY. After its formulation in the era of the class struggles of 1848, critical theory lay dormant and undeveloped until the eruption of the European revolutionary social movements around 1917, when it was revived by Georg Lukacs in his History and Class Consciousness (Lukacs, 1971). Lukacs was appalled by the barbarism and depravity of World War I and inspired by the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the Hungarian Commune of 1919 (of which he was the deputy commissar of culture). At the time that he finished his major contribution to critical sociology History and Class Consciousness, Marx's economic and philosophical manuscripts were gathering dust in Moscow, unpublished and unnoticed for nearly seven decades.

In the aftermath of the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness and Karl Korsch's Marxism and Philosophy (Korsch, 1970, an historical attempt to explain the development of Leninism from marxism) were subjected to intense criticism from both the Social Democratic and Communist Parties of Europe. At this point, Lukacs compromised with the Marxism of Stalin. He eventually recanted the critical concepts in History and Class Consciousness, thereby becoming another (if not the most articulate) apologist for the bureaucratic elite in the Soviet Union. Under fire from his former comrades, Korsch left the German Communist Party to independently continue his polemics against the "mechanical materialism" of Lenin and the Communists and Kautsky and the Social Democrats. He taught sociology at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, and for a while, he taught Marxism informally to the playwright Bertolt Brecht. He died in Massachusetts in 1961. Lukacs again became active in political struggle and critical theory in his later life, participating in the Hungarian Rebellion of 1956 against the Stalinist Bureaucracy of the Soviet Union.

Beginning in Germany, a tradition has extended and enriched the critical theory of society which includes the persons associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research--Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Neumann and Habermas, among others (Jay, 1973). The rise to power of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany nearly destroyed the Frankfurt School. It was only by leaving Germany that they survived.

Walter Benjamin, thinking he was about to be captured within occupied France, resisted by committing suicide--a tragic casualty during one of the greatest human catastrophes of all times. The Frankfurt School, as it is most often called, is historically traced in Martin Jay's book, The Dialectical Imagination. While Jay's treatment suffers from having been originally developed within the academic constraints of a Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard, it is nonetheless an excellent history of the school.

Critical theory has two goals: to bring to consciousness the awareness of capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic domination; and to create a popular demand for liberation--a demand, desire, and need for a better world. Critical theory is critical in two senses: it brings to our consciousness oppression of which we may or may not have been aware, and it calls for "criticism of life" to resist and change the existing system of domination and exploitation. Some versions of Marxism are critical theory and some are not: other theories are used critically from time to time such as phenomenology, psychoanalysis and existentialism.

In Herbert Marcuse's analysis of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, the connections between the Frankfurt School's critical theory and the Hegelian humanism of Marx are perhaps most clear. It is also clear from this exposition by Marcuse that the old Marx who wrote Capital and is the scientist and economist par excellence, developed his scientific categories for the analysis of capitalism from philosophical foundations.

According to Herbert Marcuse (1973), the critical theory of the young Marx already contained

revolutionary praxis- "The theory in itself is a practical one; praxis does not only come at the end but is already present in the beginning of the theory." Praxis is the philosophical basis of the theory presented by Marx, which includes a demand for the overthrow of the capitalist social relationships involved in production (like wage work and capitalist investment and profit) by an economic and political struggle of the working class (people who work for wages or salary).

The critical theory of Marx implies much more than just a political revolution, and certainly it does not imply an authoritarian tyranny of state capitalism. It does imply a revolution in the very being of humankind. Marcuse quotes Marx as follows: (1973:5):

"This communism ... is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man--the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution."

Marx criticized the categories of political economy because those categories were posed as the "scientific" explanation of the economy which exploited and oppressed people through forced wage labor, economic exploitation, and the commodification of social relationships into exchange relationships. Capitalist economic relations required misery, hunger and toil. The oppression that people feel in capitalist society is not caused by naturally-given "laws" of capitalism which can be discovered scientifically, but by political and social structures which were created by human beings. What humans have created, humans can change, not simply "discover." According to Herbert Marcuse (1973:5-6):

"This kind of political economy scientifically sanctions 'L-,he perversion of the historical/social world of man into an alien world of money and commodities; a world which confronts him as a hostile power and in which the greater part of humanity ceases to be anything more than abstract' workers (torn away from the reality of human existence), separated from the object of their work and forced to sell themselves as a commodity."

Attempting to follow Marx's methodology in criticizing the "Natural Laws" of capitalism, the critical theory of society conceives of itself as critique (Howard, 1971). Rather than accepting the categories of social being as they exist in the East or West, critical theory posits the possibility and potential of a freedom which has yet to be realized. The rapid standardization and bureaucratization of the Communist countries and the rise of consumerism and mass society in the capitalist countries make the Frankfurt School demand for critique in the tradition of Hegel's dialectical logic a rational theoretical means to the negation of a status quo which has, while proclaiming the rationality of its own system, actually "eclipsed" reason and established irrational domination. Therefore, much of the work of the critical theory of society has been generated from a critique of the established practices of contemporary social science.

Both positivist sociology and classical political economy are grounded in a faith in the scientific method, or in the "episteme" of Western rationalism (Foucault, 1970). The critical theory of society, as a moment of self-reflection of western culture, achieves its most progressive intellectual insight with its criticism of the Enlightenment (Goldman, 1971), and of the Western concept of reason and rationality from which scientific ideology develops (Marcuse, 1964). The advances of technology and science have themselves undermined the humanistic roots of science. Science and technology are today "alien creations" out of popular control or understanding. They are ideology--the new God which, combined with the State's power, appears to be "omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient" like the God of Moses. The social sciences, in an attempt to appear as powerful and true as science and technology,

have attempted to adopt their methods and rules of verification. By developing a philosophical critique of science, critical theory unravels a hidden essence of capitalism--the system of "rational" domination. The ideology of science is a means to this hierarchy of domination which is then perpetuated in the social sciences, as we will discuss in a moment.

II. A CRITIQUE OF SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM.

A. THE THEORY OF POSITIVISM. Sociological positivism was originally systematized by Auguste Comte in reaction to the French Revolution of 1789 as an alternative to the "anarchic force of purely revolutionary principles." By renouncing the legacy of transcendental philosophy and subordinating the imagination to observation, Comte's positive philosophy hoped to concern itself with "facts", not speculation; with scientific laws, not fanciful contemplation; "with organization and order instead of negation and destruction," (Marcuse, 1941:345).

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

Social and natural reality are conceived by the positivist as "objectively" quantifiable and measurable. What appears on the surface is conceived as the full extent of reality, in opposition to a critical conception of essence and appearance which understands the necessity of qualitatively new forms of being continually coming into existence. Critical theory and critical sociology, as we elaborate them, are concerned with the theoretical examination of social structure--kinship, economic structure, political structure and class structure--guided not only by a theory of society but also by a critique of the established social reality including the taken-for-granted assumptions about these social phenomena. By comparing the existing kinship, economic, political and class structures with alternative possibilities present within the status quo, sociology can be a force for social change rather than technical resource for bureaucratic administration and capitalist domination.

There is one key difference between Nature and History and that is that human beings have created one, but not the other. That which humans have the power to make, they have the power to change. These are key insights into the nature of society which first emerged in Western Europe during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789, a revolution in social thought as well as in political power. This important insight, however, was cut short by the sociological positivism of A. Comte and his followers (Zeitlin, 1969), perhaps best exemplified today by the standard "high science" or mathematical sociology which is characteristic of the majority of the articles in the American Sociological Review, the major sociological journal for positivists in North America.

The early positivists like Comte attempted to equate the study of society with the study of nature and tried to discover laws of societal development on a par with the structural principles of human anatomy in Biology. Comte even went so far as to compare families, social classes and political structures in society with cells, tissues, and organs of the human body (Comte, 1966:Vol. II). Such simplistic organismic analogies soon gave way to a neo-positivism which eclipsed social theory altogether. Positivism has today been reduced to the gathering of statistical information about fragmentary aspects of social reality by using the precise procedures of natural science. The modern neo-positivists argue for the necessity of gathering "facts" to either construct (Stinchcomb, 1967) or to test (Chavetz, 1977) "sociological theories" without allowing a reflection on or examination of the social theory which

defined and constituted the "facts" in the first place.

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

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

On the level of method, Aaron Cicourel and others have pointed out that the human beings who label social reality with numbers are themselves making judgments about the reality they quantify. In Method and Measurement in Sociology, Cicourel develops a critique of Ithiel De Sola Pool's reliance on the common sense of the coder (the technician who gives numbers to human relationships) (1964):

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

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

The refusal of positivists to comprehend themselves and their work as subject to examination helps shield them from ethical considerations. Their attitude seems useful because it may keep the work of social science out of the danger of conflict with authoritarian governments and exempt from the ethics of responsibility for the support of genocide, as in Pool's participation in such policies in Vietnam. Superficially then, social science becomes "value-free", but it certainly does not explain the changing nature of society as a whole, as sociology originally intended, and its "freedom" exists only within the values of the status quo. "Objective" social science can operate on a grant from the U.S. State Department to do an "objective" study of class consciousness among lower class workers in slums in Chile and indirectly give the results of the study to the CIA through professional publications (which are also "objective and value-free"). These sociologists do not see the relationship between themselves

and the murder and torture of people under the fascist dictatorship which overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Chile in 1973 with the aid of the CIA. Hundreds of social scientists were involved in Project Camelot gathering data about numerous underdeveloped countries and computerizing their findings in a form only accessible to government agencies. The assumptions and methodology of positivism contain within them additional practical repercussions which merit further discussion.

B. THE PRACTICE OF POSITIVISM. Fundamentally, positivist knowledge is knowledge alienated from both the social scientist and the society studied. The relationship between the positivist and the social world they study has often been termed a "contemplative stance." The only role that is acceptable for the positivists to play is one of contemplating the world they study. Their information can be given or sold to the powers that be and used for administration of anything from welfare to "criminal justice," but the role of sociologist can only be that of observer of the given reality. Positivist thought is called "one-dimensional" by Herbert Marcuse because positivist sociology is reduced to the contemplative observation of what is, and the ethical impulse to judge the social world and transform it into one in which humans may be free of domination is suppressed by the positivist concept of knowledge. As Emile Durkheim (1938), the French positivist sociologist, said, "social facts are things." This statement expresses the attempt of positivism to commodify knowledge and to reify or "thingify" social reality which is actually composed of changing living human relationships.

. The term reification literally means "thingification". It means that positivists treat the concrete flux of social experience as if it were reducible to their abstract models of it. Soon empirical experience becomes little more than an excuse to "test" an abstraction, or to use a sophisticated mathematical model such as "path analysis" or the various types of "systems analysis." Sociological positivism, at its most sophisticated, becomes abstract, reified objectivistic idealism. Positivism hides from the social world it claims to study, in the relative security of cumulative statistical obscurity. Furthermore, all system's analysis and statistical sociology operate on the assumption that what appears to exist is the extent of reality. The model of the system's analyst has no room for "new variables" and conceptualizes reality from the point of view of the status quo. The very categories of analysis are developed under the assumption of the existence of reality as it is, not as it could be. This is a built-in bias to system's analysis which the technicians and theorists (Horkheimer, 1972) alike do not question.

Is positivism merely an ideology designed to justify the practice of corporate monopoly capitalism (U.S.A.) and bureaucratic state capitalism (U.S.S.R.) or does the "knowledge" of the positivist really have a use value in the technology of domination? Both the work of liberal positivists like Blalock and "scientific" Marxists like Louis Althusser (Althusser, 1971) are shaped by this framework of objective idealism. They both reduce knowledge and philosophy to a contemplative stance from which to gaze upon the world, eliminating praxis from the realm of thought, and philosophy from the realm of politics. Both the liberal positivist professor and the Communist party intellectual are free to pursue knowledge in the university or in the Party, but the direction of society and social life is left to the authoritarian leadership of the "democratic" or "Communist" government. Such governments legitimate themselves to the general population through symbolic plebiscites (elections) and social welfare programs (socialized medicine, food stamps, etc.), all administered by a technocratic elite. The meaningful participation of intellectuals, to say nothing of popular participation, is eliminated from social reality in both theory and practice by the "scientific" methodology.

In short, although the interest implicit in positivist social science is the technical control of human behavior, the effect is also ideological, since the method eclipses popular power and justifies the legitimacy of scientific experts. But when, as in Vietnam, the vast majority of people refuse to submit to the power of technocratic domination, the impotency of mobilizing material resources without moral justification becomes clear. Over half a million U.S. troops, untold billions of dollars, and more bombs

than were used throughout all of World War II could not defeat the power of the people in Vietnam.

Although the positivists set out to explain and control the social world, they actually take a back seat to the people who control the social wealth and the social relations of production--the Rockefellers, Morgans, DuPonts and the rest of the monopoly capitalist class (Domhoff, 1967; Mills, 1956) in league with the Pentagon and the White House--a structure which composes The Power Elite. The people whose interests the positivists serve are the owners of capital or corporate stock, the Generals in the Pentagon, the President and the managers of the corporate capitalist state apparatus. In order to continue their work within the society they study, social scientists must preserve, both through the topics studied and the methodology employed, the power structure of the status quo. This mode of producing knowledge then becomes all the more ideological and dogmatic "truth."

If a critical sociologist were to raise the issue of the illusory nature of value neutrality to a sociological positivist, and to point out that objective value-free knowledge is being used by the CIA and the State Department to help suppress popular democratic governments in Latin America, the sociological positivist might declare that such a question itself is "political" and not "sociological". Sociology from the positivist viewpoint treats only scientific questions which can either be verified or be subject to disproof by operationalized measures, and has no room for ethical statements about the propriety of democracy, exploitation, hunger or torture. In reply to this bias, a critical sociologist might suggest that the ties of sociologists in Latin America and Vietnam to American imperialist domination and hegemony can indeed be empirically demonstrated, measured and quantified. In short, it finally becomes clear even to these scientists that the ideology of "value-free" science serves as a mask for complicity with the powers that be, that "value-free" science is a value-laden operation.

American anthropological studies of Native Americans on "Indian reservations" and British anthropological studies of black Africans in "Bantustans" and Australian aborigines in "game preserves" also provide examples of social science's complicity with colonial and racist powers. In these cases, as in the case of sociological studies of internally colonized peoples such as the Blacks or Chicanos in North America, the social scientists are members of the imperialist oppressor nation and cultural grouping while the object of study is the oppressed community (Harris, 19). Without any self-reflexive critical perspective, these studies simply describe and therefore legitimate the oppressive power relations of the status quo. Sometimes it seems that only a fine line can be drawn between sociological positivism and counter-insurgent espionage posing as "value-free science." These sorts of abuses occur from within a methodology which refuses to reflect on the social position of the agents who employ it, focusing solely on the "rules of procedure" for attaining "truth" and "knowledge."

The demand for a critical sociology is the demand that people who engage in the study of society stop serving the forces of imperialism, genocide, and colonization, and become a force for positive social change and the dignity of human beings--a demand that they refuse to work for Fascist governments in Latin America (Chile, Brazil, etc.), Africa (South Africa, Rhodesia), Asia (South Korea), and the Mideast (Iran), and to define a public or historical constituency in whose interests they can ethically and responsibly act. Otherwise, sociology, in a long term historical perspective, might appear to be little more than an intelligence arm of a repressive capitalist state apparatus.

During the period in which this [essay] is being written, fascist organizations in the United States such as the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan have organized and demonstrated in cities all across the country. In Southern California, the KKK has organized and recruited from within the police departments and Marine Corps bases. They have defaced the residence of one of this book's authors with a white cross in response to a public position taken against him. The Frankfurt School's landmark studies of the fascist character during World War II helped in the struggle against Fascism then, but seem inadequate today the task of resisting fascist tendencies within the North American social structure (Adorno, et al., 1973). The study of the authoritarian-submissive personality structure as an attitudinal prejudice does

not illuminate the ideological mechanisms of dissemination and acceptance of fascism or the face-to-face processes of recruitment and organization of fascist movements. It is the immediate task of North American critical sociology to overcome these inadequacies and to understand fascism as a contemporary social tendency. In countries such as Greece and Chile, fascist dictatorships have banned sociology as an academic discipline because of its critical potential in undermining their regimes.

C. WHAT IS A FACT? Sociological positivism bases the verification of its knowledge on a notion of facts as irreducible units of truth which are to be discovered by the social scientist. But facts do not fall to us from heaven. They are a constructed part of the society and the intellectual context within which we live and work (Berger, 19). For the positivist, some fragments of reality are "facts", others are "values". Who decides what is what? This problematic of sociological positivism--that is, the collection of assumptions, suppositions taken for granted, and factors omitted (or critical sciences)--is seldom if ever examined by the positivists themselves. The positivists are content to elaborate their rules of methodology, either ignoring the social theory on which they are based or refusing to admit that they have a theory. The assumption behind the technocratic facade of "high science" sociology is the claim of the scientific method to a cognitive monopoly on truth (Habermas, 1971). This is an essentially religious or dogmatic claim of truth, not an enlightened and open pursuit of truth. Positivism's claim to truth is most often expressed in the ideology of "value-free" social science.

The claim to be value-free is one of the more value-laden defenses given in response to social scientists who question the fundamental rationality of the academy and society in the modern world. Especially in an era when more than 50% of the sociology Ph.D.s work for the federal government, it is inaccurate to discuss the idea of a value-free science of society in practice, let alone in theory. The claim to value-free sociology depends upon adherence to a dogmatic belief in the objectivity of "facts."

One of the things that unites all of the various types of positivists in both the social and natural sciences is the taken-for-granted intersubjective agreement on the "factual" nature of reality (Horkheimer, 1972:208). Horkheimer calls it "traditional theory":

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

The separation of value and fact, made credible when the sociological positivist ignores the origin of his/her facts, the consequences of theory, and the context of sociology in society, serves to protect university professors by giving them a safe zone in which to protect their narrow specialty, "free" from ethical questions and social struggles. The organization of sociology embodies the organization of the monopoly capitalist division of labor of which it is a part. Horkheimer suggests this (1972b:191):

"The assiduous collecting of facts in all the disciplines dealing with social life, the gathering of great masses of detail in connection with problems, the empirical inquiries, through careful questionnaires and other means, which are a major part of scholarly activity, especially in the Anglo-Saxon universities since Spencer's time--all this adds up to a pattern which is, outwardly, much like the rest of life in a society dominated by industrial production techniques."

There are many disagreements among traditional sociological theorists about methodological procedures. For example, there are disagreements about the best way to gather facts--such as the

experimental method versus the phenomenological (Cicourel, 1964). There are general disagreements between the positivists who consider themselves primarily "empiricists" (Homans, 1964), and those who consider themselves primarily "theorists" (Parsons, 1951). Furthermore, there are disagreements between "grand" theorists (Parsons, 1951) and "middle range" theorists (Merton, 1954). Such disagreements concern inductive versus deductive methods, quantitative versus qualitative, micro versus macro, and questions of scope and range, but there is essential implicit agreement on the "factual," empirical or verificational nature of theory itself. According to Horkheimer (1972b), traditional theory is anchored in the view that theory is the conglomeration of propositions and "facts" about an object ordered in a form (usually mathematical forms are given the highest prestige as in the natural sciences), such that all facts may be deduced from a few basic postulates.

No matter which system of traditional theory we may consider, their common belief in the systemization of "facts" belies a fundamental objectivistic idealism. As T.W. Adorno puts it in Negative Dialectics (Adorno, 1974):

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

As a systematization of the "facts," traditional theory relies, as Marcuse (1964) points out, on the "facticity of the given." The main problem with neo-positivism from a sociological point of view is that it assumes that the social world is given as a fact of nature, just like mountains or the ocean, and ignores the "historical" character of the social world which is created by human actors, some with great resources in power and wealth, some very much at the mercy of men, police, and other agents of the status quo...all in social interaction with cultural symbols to which they themselves give significance.

The social world did not spring out of nowhere. It is the historical product of human beings and should be understood and criticized in its historical and cultural context, not simply described in a "factual" manner. The most obvious flaw of traditional theory is that it is ahistorical. The objects we find in our social environment--cities, towns, fields and factories--are not simply given to us by Nature, they are historical products of human labor.

Not simply "reality in itself," but also the way in which we perceive reality is historically conditioned. Horkheimer notes this insight in the following phrases (1972a:200)

"The facts which our senses present to us are socially performed in two ways through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity, and yet the individual perceives himself as receptive in the act of perception."

The individual perceives "facts" in a passive way since the humanly and historically produced society that we live in is an alienated one, as we have described it above--one which is essentially out of control of the ones who produce it. The social relationships of modern society are founded directly on oppression and exploitation, and therefore appear to us as objects not of our own making, but as given natural phenomena.

For example, in Southern California the decisions about how to plan and develop the cities of San Diego and Los Angeles were not arrived upon by the members of the whole communities in a democratic way. They were not planned by artists, architects, and city planners working for the people of those communities. Giant multinational corporations, bankers, and developers made all of the important decisions about how the "given facts" of Southern California were to be produced, and they made these decisions as prisoners of the dictates of increased profits and capital accumulation.

Moreover, the workers whose labor actually builds the Jack-in the Box and MacDonald's hamburger joints lining the streets with garish neon and who build the little boxes of privatized social isolation called condominiums, have no power to determine what housing will look like, who will live in them, and where they will be located. These aesthetic atrocities which desecrate the beautiful coasts of Southern California with corporate blight in no way respond to the needs and desires of the people who eat, live in, and build them. They are built solely according to the dictates of maximum profit, as any capitalist developer will cheerfully admit. The automobile, the smog, the freeway, the oil slicks, billboards, and neon signs complete the physical presence of the corporate state.

A sociologist's "objective" description of such an affront to the human need for beauty and ecological harmony as a "fact" of urban sociology, rather than as an historically produced form of uncontrolled capitalist expansion, is comparable, on the theoretical level at least, to Samuel Huntington's call for and description of the effects of saturation bombing of the countryside of Vietnam as "urbanization" (Slater, 1970). The napalming of villages in Vietnam, the development of pellet bombs by U.S. multinational corporations such as Westinghouse, Honeywell, Texas Instruments, and others as specifically anti-personnel devices designed to mutilate the human body and "tie up the medical resources of the enemy" and even the saturation bombing of Hanoi by U.S. B-52's on Christmas Day, 1972, can be evaluated by the positivist in "factual" terms; body counts and equipment losses become the exchange equivalents of capitalist genocide (Sartre, 1967).

On the Nature of a Social Fact: Two Views.

POSITIVISM	CRITICAL THEORY
1. Fragments of reality	1. Social and historical totality.
2. Appearance of the Present	2. Essential nature of 'What Appears.'
3. Only what exists	3. New qualities continually developing.
4. Objectivity	4. Human Values

In many ways, being able to define the "facts" is a precondition for power over reality. There are distinct differences between positivism and critical theory in their responses to the question "what is a fact" which the chart above summarizes.

It should now be clear how different are the critical theories of society and sociological positivism. Positivism merely describes the "facts" of the given reality in order to "explain" and maintain it. Critical theory understands "facts" and reality as the historical products of human beings in the hope that the species might become conscious of its social products and achieve conscious control over them. In an era in which the development of science and technology have given the human species power to dominate and destroy natural and social reality on a level far beyond any previous historical era, a critique of the limits and distortions of science has been developed by the critical theory which transcends the dominant socio-political schism of world powers between "Capitalism and Communism."

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