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Perspectives

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Message from the Chair:

Sociological Theory and Empirical Research

Gary Alan Fine, Northwestern University

The primary responsibility of the chair of our section is to organize an exciting series of sessions for the Annual Meeting. It has become a tradition that the theory section organizes a "mini-conference," a tradition to which I will adhere. Once again the section, having over six hundred members, will have four sessions (plus time for a business meeting and a set of roundtables). I have set aside three of our sessions for a mini-conference on the theme of "Sociological Theory and Empirical Research."

I selected this topic out of my concern with claims that I consider misguided - at least in the way that they are usually applied. The first is that "everyone does theory" and the second is that only "a very few do theory." Both claims have some validity, but both are misleading, and they are misleading given a confusion about the relationship between sociological theory and empirical research. While some measure of generalization and conceptualization is evident in every sociological research project, not every project attempts to link concepts in a fashion that permits others to build on

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The Revival of the Social in Philosophy

John R. Shook, Director, Pragmatism Archive, Philosophy Department, Oklahoma State University

Several areas of philosophy have lately been invigorated by questioning individualist assumptions. Challenges to the Cartesian ultra-individualistic paradigm do periodically arise, and historians of the social sciences can identify crisis moments of vigorous debate between the individual and social standpoints (see Farr 1996 and Valsiner & van der Veer 2000), most recently during the 1920s and 1930s. But positivism, physicalism, behaviorism, and liberalism prevailed and remained dominant for most of the rest of the 20th century. This dominance is now challenged anew; of special interest to scholars at the intersection of sociology and philosophy are surprising developments in political philosophy, epistemology, and philosophy of mind and language. Some highlights of the past 25 years of philosophical debate are mention-

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 ed here (see James 1985 for a broader perspective); works are selected for their interest to sociologists and guidance to further reading.

on the exclusively personal good, describes anything remotely like the real life of most people. Defenders of individualistic liberalism have replied that liberalism is a *normative* theory protecting valuable

The proper compromise, Pettit argues, is holistic individualism: the intentions of persons are sufficient to explain the causes of group behavior, and the existence of higher-order intentions depends on social

If the conception of “personal self” requires essential links with others, then the “community” is in some sense necessary for the self.

Political philosophy, a neglected backwater of American philosophy since John Dewey's death, was invigorated by John Rawls and subsequent discussion of his libertarian principles and social contract theory. The “new communitarians” – led by Charles Taylor (1979, 1989), Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), and Michael Sandel (1996, 1998) – have questioned, as Allen Buchanan (1989) recounts, liberalism's devaluation of the community and the political involvement required to sustain community. Most significantly, communitarians have complained that liberalism in its usual form (following Hobbes and Locke) assumes that political justification rests on each person's rational consent and thus tends to strip from our conception of the “personal self” the very social relationships composing genuine communities. Rawls, for example, relies on a conception of the independent self that is only contingently involved in social relations, such as membership in a family, religious denomination, or ethnic group. Communitarianism, along with varieties of feminism (see, e.g., Okin 1994) and pragmatism (see Singer 1998), question whether the ideal of the asocial self and its notion of political justification based

personal moral rights. However, this reply only begs the question: whether people do or should completely separate what is good for themselves from community goods in which they share. Complete separation is achieved by the Hobbesian egoist and the Humean amoralist, who notoriously require justification to their personal best interests to legitimate any social order. Just as notorious is the failure to date of formulating any sufficient justification; the chasm between subjective self-interest and community good is as wide as ever, as revealed by the tragedy of the commons and the paradox of the prisoner's dilemma.

If the conception of “personal self” requires essential links with others, then the “community” is in some sense necessary for the self. Ontologically, this can be denied, if the self is simply identical with the body; but such identity can be questioned in a variety of ways. It is not necessary, as Philip Pettit (1993) points out, to use the ontological stance to combat the “collectivist” notion that social structures, mechanisms, and laws are required to explain group behavior over and above just the intentional behavior of individuals.

relations, especially those grounding language and thought. Pettit's ultimate aim is showing how holistic individualism would support a republican conception of responsible liberty (akin to Sandel's). Susan Hurley (1989) also takes aim at the reigning subjectivist notion that personal preferences can be specified as conceptually prior to values. Her holism (see also Hurley 1998) tries to explain how rational conflict resolution can occur where individuals can be sub-units of a collective group having its own higher-level agency. Thus the justification of collective action need not depend on what each person ought to do, taken separately. Hurley defends democracy as a cognitively valuable process of conflict resolution for all in light of a social conception of the good life, and not as a way to maximize individual preferences. Renewed interest in republicanism and “deliberative democracy” has also pursued this sort of holism, exemplified by Joshua Cohen (1989), James Bohman (1991, 1996, 1997), and Judith Green (1999); their concern for the community good and responsible participation echoes Dewey's own seminal work (see Caspary 2000). Other pragmatists have defended methodological holism, most notably George Mead, and Charles Peirce contributed to the study of social objectivity and deliberation (see Misak 2000).

Another remarkable manifestation of the social in theories of rationality is the emergence of social epistemology. To some extent inspired by Frankfurt School critical theory and the “sociology of

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What is being taught in the name of theory to graduate students in sociology? How do instructors really feel about training in classical theory? Contemporary theory? Theory construction? Science? What messages about theory are they passing down to the next generation of scholars in our discipline? We spoke with 71 instructors of required graduate theory courses in the nation's top 50 departments of sociology, asking these and other questions. This is the fourth and final installment presenting some of the basic results. The project was supported by a small grant from the American Sociological Association. Assistance was provided by Christopher Barnum, Cynthia Estep, Will Kalkhoff, John Knapp and C. Wesley Younts. Readers are encouraged to send comments to the editor and/or to the author at barry@sc.edu

Theory Training in Sociology

Barry Markovsky, University of South Carolina

Part 4: Views on Sociology as a Science.

The first installment in this series looked at instructors' perceptions of their own graduate theory training. Part 2 dealt with their attitudes toward classical, contemporary and formal theory. Part 3 focused on important messages about theory they pass along to students. Here we focus on some questions pertaining to respondents' views on sociology as a science. The two questions cross-tabulated in Table 1 were "Based on its published work, would you say that Sociology qualifies as a science?" and "Do you think Sociology should be more scientific, less so, or is it fine as is?"

Table 1 - Sociology Qualifies as Science?

| Should Sociology be more/ less scientific? | Yes | Mixed | No | Sum |
|---|-----|-------|----|-----|
| More | 14 | 3 | 6 | 23 |
| Fine as is | 15 | 3 | 5 | 23 |
| Mixed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Less | 1 | 0 | 7 | 8 |
| Sum | 31 | 8 | 21 | 60 |

Another question pertaining to this topic was "When you teach theory, would you characterize your approach overall as being relatively favorable toward science, neutral, or somewhat negative?" The same type of question was asked with respect to formal theory, arguably a more scientific approach to theorizing than non-formal modes. The number and proportion of responses in each category are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Teaching Orientation Toward....

| | Formal Theory | | Science | |
|----------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|
| Positive | 14 | 21.9% | 36 | 52.2% |
| Neutral | 27 | 42.2% | 25 | 36.2% |
| Negative | 23 | 35.9% | 8 | 11.6% |
| Sum | 64 | | 69 | |

Don't forget to renew your section membership when you pay your ASA dues!

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knowledge" movement led by Barnes and Bloor (1982), social epistemologists have rejected traditional epistemology's obsession with grounding knowledge of the world upon the individual's subjective experiences. Knowledge states and processes are social, and so are certifications of knowledge production. The range of work reflects disagreement over the degree of objectivity to which science might aspire. Extreme social constructivists and relativists in the tradition of Feyerabend discard normative epistemology altogether (granting to the sociologist a complete victory over philosophical considerations), but they may, as Steven Fuller (1988) argues, have rashly assumed that no normative replacement for subjectivism exists. Social epistemology seeks normativity at the holistically social level, formulating an empirical and pragmatic fallibilism claiming progressively expanding warrant for both normative rules of evidence collection and criteria for theory evaluation. Other notable researchers besides Fuller include Larry Laudan (1984), Philip Kitcher (1993), Alvin Goldman (1999), and Miriam Solomon (2001). Feminist epistemology often supportively overlaps social epistemology's concerns; see Nancy Tuana (1989), Helen Longino (1990) and Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993). An allied epistemological standpoint is contextualism, defended in various forms by Keith DeRose (1992), Susan Haack (1993), David Annis (1996), and Mark Timmons (1999).

The renaissance of interest in the manifold kinds of holism has perhaps provoked the greatest controversy in philosophy of mind and language. The repudiation of holism has recently been led by Jerry Fodor (Fodor and Lepore 1992). Fodor defends an "atomic" view of conceptual meaning against the holistic notion that the meaning of a term is bound up with all of the believed propositions (and hence the other terms in those propositions) that use the term. Some terms must simply denote *for each person* their proper

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the conclusions. Admittedly the line between “theory articles” and others outside the boundary are unclear. There is some truth in what we might label as the “institutional” or “constructionist” theory of theory: that theory is what gets published in theory journals or that theory is what self-proclaimed theorists publish. Yet, there must be an obdurate reality of theory. This obdurate quality involves self-consciously building on a *theoretical tradition* and involves using the explication of trans-situational concepts as a primary goal of the analysis.

Some suggest that theorists represent a tight, elite, or arrogant club - traditionally an “old boys club.” This view suggests that to be a theorist requires the ability to recite Gumpowicz or Schmalenbach - in the original German if possible, endlessly explicating the nuances of their thought (and good thought it is, too). Some of us can do this passably or excellently, but theory does not depend on being endlessly erudite about dead theorists. Nor does theory require speculation separate from worldly observations. Theory is an act committed by sociologists, not a specialized tongue. Even pure theorists reside within an impure world, and learn from it.

My topic, “Sociological Theory and Empirical Research,” is designed to remind sociological theorists that our work does not require an unbreachable chasm between research and social thought. Most sociological theorists are also empirical researchers: Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Homans, Goffman, Bourdieu, Habermas, and our most esteemed contemporary American colleagues as well.

These three panels are designed to allow social theorists to demonstrate how their

empirical investigations are linked to their theoretical advances and to allow these scholars to speak more generally to the linkages between ideas and data. While not every sociologist aspires to make these connections explicit and while no sociologist can wholly escape the linkage between ideas and realities, it is the ability of many sociological theorists to recognize that concepts are grounded in observations, and descriptions depend upon our ideas of how the world is structured.

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I am also organizing a special invited session on the contributions to sociological theory of Phillip Rieff, the author of *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* and *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. Phillip Rieff was one of my theory instructors when I was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, and I hope that members of the section will not see in this a case of special pleading. If I see being a social theorist as being a particularly noble and inspiring enterprise - a craft of men and women who aspire to enlightenment - it is not because of the model of those Pennsylvania scholars such as Erving Goffman and Digby Baltzell, in whose domains I find myself toiling - but because of Rieff who provided a model of a disciplined teacher of ideas. The fact that I always found myself profoundly unworthy in his socratic seminar, never

prevented me from knowing that I must attempt, as best I could, to strive to become worthy.

I believe that Phillip Rieff is one of the most creative and insightful theorists of the latter half of the Twentieth Century: a disciplinary teacher and a public intellectual. However, perhaps because of the decline of psychoanalysis, an approach that Rieff is so identified with (not as a partisan, but as a balanced - and some-

times caustic - critic), his prominence may be eclipsed. It is our responsibility to insure that our theory colleagues are not swept away in the undertow of his-

tory. It is my hope that each year a special session is devoted to the contributions of one of our significant colleagues. For a section that does not present a lifetime achievement award, we have a special responsibility to keep alive our essential theoretical traditions.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Douglas Heckathorn as the Past Chair for organizing a very successful set of sessions and for running the section smoothly. Doug's theme addressed the relationship of sociological theory to neighboring disciplines. I would also like to thank Margaret Somers and Mustafa Empirbayer whose terms as members of the council ended this year. We hope to hold the torch high to continue the traditions that we have inherited.

Theory Section Mini-conference Roundtables

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Open Paper Session on Social Theory and Empirical Research

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objects, lest all terms depend on the associated beliefs which as a body must be inherently unstable and variable from person to person. Holism therefore must conclude that no two people could ever share the same concept or belief, which for Fodor is unacceptable. The holist's reply argues that language, concepts, and beliefs are indeed more vague than precise and can never be simply fixed by the world, as argued by enthusiasts of the later Wittgenstein on language games and meaning-as-use (see Canfield 1996 and Williams 2000), Wilfrid Sellars (see Brown 1986), and proponents of the theory of concepts as metaphors (see Johnson 1999).

The most fundamental premises of Cartesian individualism are thus exposed by the question, How can the existence of mental states that play a role in reasoning processes ever be identified? Either social relations are required for identifying them, or a person simply knows them by his own introspective powers. But if the latter were true, how could a person prove their existence to another without using social relations of some sort? (Imagine trying to justify an act of stealing without using any communication.) Of course, most experiences are private in the sense that only one person can ever have them; this is a trivial consequence of the fact that experience is perspectival with a person's nervous system at one focus. At issue are cognitive states and processes, which are used in rational justification: the workings of the *mind*. Cartesian subjectivism supposed that one has internal cognitive states, infallibly knows that one has just those cognitive states without confusing them with others, and then uses language to refer to these states to communicate their existence to another person who can never have any good reason (due to the dualistic chasm between minds) to accept their existence. This has been the condition

of mainstream Anglo-American philosophy for eighty years, as social psychology was deliberately eradicated from philosophy departments.

Cognitive psychology has split over this individualist/holist debate, while renewed interest in social psychology has enriched philosophy of mind.

Heightening the irony is that the dominant metaphysics of physicalism for all these years has defended Cartesian internalism and infected naturalism with the very dualism assumed to be moribund. Physicalism identified the mind with the brain (or portions thereof) and thus all mental states must be individual and internal; a person's belief that P, for example, is just a particular electro-chemical state of some set of neurons in that person's brain. The "new externalism" has strongly challenged this internalism with what appears to be knock-down arguments (or as close to that as philosophy permits) by Hilary Putnam (1975, 1999) and Tyler Burge (1979, 1993). An extended critique of internalism is provided by Wilson (1995), while Nelkin (1996) defends physicalist internalism. In brief, because two physically identical people would have different beliefs provided that the social context was different, it follows that a belief's existence is contextually dependent on both brain states and social relations. The impact of this new externalism is gaining momentum as more philosophers examine the natural and social ecology of a wide variety of cognitive mental states in addition to beliefs (see Bilgrami 1992), including attitudes, motivations, intentions (see Bratman 1999), valuations, and moral judgments (see Flanagan 1991 and Clark, Friedman & May 1996). The possibility of a naturalistic approach to mental states without eliminating them or reducing them to objectively physical entities is attracting attention (see Searle 1992). Philosophers are also slowly returning to the

social context of cooperative practice, first stressed by the pragmatists, for discovering the origin and function of mind. Language as the active medium of practice may be the ground of reasoning, not static semantic mind-world reference (see Brandom 1994); and the very normativity of reason and other social rules appears to be imbedded in our shared goal-directed lives, not Platonically a priori forms (see Searle 1995 and Baier 1997).

Cognitive psychology has split over this individualist/holist debate, while renewed interest in social psychology has enriched philosophy of mind. "Methodological solipsism" in cognitive science is still defended by Fodor (1994) even while it is rejected by those seeking an alternative to mechanistic and formalistic models of cognition. See Reed's (1996) elaborations of J. J. Gibson's ecological psychology and Gillespie's (1992) overview of contextualism's renaissance. The theory of social cognition (in a double sense, as defined by Kunda 1999 as the study of the origin of our social judgments, and as the notion that all cognition is irreducibly social), is renewing the promise of Baldwin, Mead and Vygotsky to re-unify philosophy of mind and psychology through the medium of social interaction. If reflexive consciousness – the ability to consider one's own thoughts – is the foundation for all higher powers of reasoning and judgment, and if reflexive consciousness emerges from social cooperation, then sociality is mentality, and vice-versa. Furthermore, as Radu Bogdan (2000) explains, this theory of social consciousness is supported by understanding why the human brain's higher cognitive functions evolved under intense pressures of social life over millions of years. Bogdan's exciting work should be read in conjunction with similar research at the intersections of the social sciences,

Election Results

New Section Officers Begin Terms

Linda D. Molm was elected in this year's elections as chair-elect. She will begin a three-year term with successive one-year terms as chair-elect, chair, and past chair. Robin Stryker and Edward J. Lawler were elected to three-year terms as members of the council.

LINDA D. MOLM

Present Position: Professor and Head, University of Arizona (1988-present). She has served as co-editor of *Social Psychology Quarterly* (1996-2000). Recent publications and professional accomplishments include co-author with Takahashi and Peterson, "Risk and Trust in Social Exchange: An Experimental Test of a Classical Proposition," *American Journal of Sociology* (2000); Winner of the 1998 Theory Prize for *Coercive Power in Social Exchange*, Cambridge University Press (1997).

ROBIN STRYKER

Present Position: Professor of Sociology and Law, University of Minnesota (2000-present). Recent publications and professional accomplishments include serving as President, Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (2000-2001); "Legitimacy Processes as Institutional Politics: Implications for Theory and Research in the Sociology of Organizations," *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 17 (2000); Co-Author with Martha Scarpellino and Mellisa Holtzman, "Political Culture Wars 1990s Style: The Drum Beat of Quotas in Media Framing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991," *Research in Stratification and Social Mobility* 17 (1999); Barrington Moore Award for Best Article, Section on Comparative and Historical Sociology, 1997 for "Beyond History vs. Theory: Strategic Narrative and Sociological Explanation," *Sociological Methods and Research* 24 (1996); "Rules, Resources and Legitimacy Processes: Some Implications for Social Conflict, Order and change," *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1994).

EDWARD J. LAWLER

Present Position: Professor of Organizational Behavior and Sociology and Dean of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. His areas of research are group processes, social exchange, sociology of emotions, and negotiation. He has developed and tested a theory of relational cohesion (with Jeongkoo Yoon) that offers an emotion-

al/affective explanation for the development of commitment in exchange relations and a more general "affect theory of social exchange" (forthcoming in *AJS*). His current research (with Shane Thye and Jeongkoo Yoon) examines how and when dyadic ties within a network generate group formation at the network-level.

We Are Interested in Your Ideas!

Members of the theory section and others with an interest in social theory are encouraged to submit ideas for essays to be published in *Perspectives*. Essays are usually 1000-1500 words in length and can contain references.

Email inquiries and essay suggestions to the editors:

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ASA Theory Prize 2001

by Richard Swedberg, University of Stockholm

The 2000 Theory Prize Committee consisted of Carol Heimer, Noah Mark, Linda Molm, Guillermina Jasso and Richard Swedberg (Chair). Twenty four articles were nominated for the prize. All the members agreed that the winner was "Culture and Cognition" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 1997) by Paul DiMaggio, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University.

The main thrust of the winning article is that the study of culture can be substantially improved by drawing on recent research in cognitive psychology and social cognition. This is particularly the case when it comes to some of the presuppositions of cultural sociology. There is also the fact that recent research in cognitive psychology and social cognition fits very well with the current tendency in cultural sociology away from viewing culture as a coherent whole of values to be internalized, and towards a view of culture as a toolkit or repertoire of resources. The role of schemata is especially highlighted. It is noted, for example, that people are more likely to perceive information that is germane to existing schemata and also to recall this type of information more quickly and more accurately. People may even falsely recall events that fit their schemata but which never took place. Areas where insights from cognitive psychology and social cognition can be usefully applied in cultural sociology are indicated, as well as key problems in the study of culture and cognition that need to be addressed.

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exemplified by the essays in Baltes and Staudinger (1996) and by Schulkin (2000). The continued revival of the social will hopefully further entice philosophy back into cooperation with the other social sciences.

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ASA Theory Prize 2002

The theory prize recognizes outstanding work in theory. The 2002 prize will be awarded by the ASA Theory Section to a book published in the preceding four calendar years (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001). Nominations are solicited from members of the American Sociological Association. Send nominations to the Committee Chair by February 15, 2002: Jane Sell, Theory Prize Committee Chair, Department of Sociology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4351; j-sell@tamu.edu. Five copies of the book must subsequently be sent to all five committee members by March 1, 2002.

Stevens Wins Graduate Student Prize

Denise Anthony, Dartmouth College

Theory Section Shils-Coleman Award for Best Paper written by a Graduate Student Committee members: Denise Anthony, Chair, Michael Macy, Sigi Lindenberg, David Sculli, John Skvoretz. The committee received nine very strong submissions for the award, and selected an overall winner as well as one Honorable Mention.

The Shils-Coleman award goes to Christopher Stevens of the University of Virginia, for his paper titled "The Predictable Nature of the Balinese Cockfight." In this paper, Stevens uses Donald Black's theory of partisanship to make predictions about the behavior of participants in Clifford Geertz's description of the Balinese cockfight. For example, since the theory explains that partisanship is a function of the social status of the adversaries, Stevens predicts that the betting, and indeed the cheering, will be highest when the social status of the opposing cock owners is highest, and the least betting will occur in the opposite case, when the social status of the owners is lowest. Stevens uses Geertz's description as evidence to support his predictions. He then uses this application and test of theory to argue that one can employ a general theory to predict and explain cultural phenomena. His use of Geertz's work is, of course, delicious irony because as Stevens notes, Geertz himself, is "one of the foremost protagonists of the view that culture is immune to science." And so, Stevens states, "the importance of this paper is not to demonstrate the predictable nature of the Balinese cockfight, per se".... but rather it is to illustrate the promise of "social science to predict and explain any aspect of social life, including that which is viewed as impossible to explain."

We also wish to congratulate Scott Harris of the University of Oregon for an Honorable Mention for his paper titled "The Social Construction of Equality in Everyday Life" which can be found in the journal *Human Studies*. In this paper, Harris uses the interactionist perspectives of Herbert Blumer, Alfred Shutz and Harold Garfinkle to begin to explain the interpretive and experiential aspects of equality, a concept we usually take as given or self-evident, or rather its absence, that is inequality, which we typically think about and measure as an objective quantity. He also incorporates the work of John Dewey to propose how we might think about pragmatically (in real life) and in research "the social construction of equality."

This preview shows page 4 - 7 out of 8 pages. 1. Empirical research methods; sociological theories; and critical thinking. ii. What are the differences among positivist, interpretive, and critical approaches to theorizing? 1. Positivist approaches stem from the natural sciences and have an interest in objective explanation and prediction. 2. Interpretive approaches focus on understanding "the ways people come to understand themselves, others, and the world around them." 3. Critical approaches explore the role that power plays in social processes, the reason why some people's understandings of Practice sociology seeks to overcome the ingrained academic division of labour between blind empirical research without theory and "scholastic" theory that immunises itself against being empirically... The micro-sociological challenge of macro-sociology. Towards a reconstruction of social theory and methodology. In Idem & A. Cicourel (Eds.), *Advances in social theory and methodology* (pp. 1-48). London, New York: Routledge. Google Scholar. Latour, B., & Woolgar, S. (1986).