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The History and Politics of Recent Sociological Theory

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The essays in this volume reflect major tendencies in social theory today. They are open, pluralistic, innovative, and full of energy. There is no dominating orthodoxy or even a hint of one—no hegemonic theory, no mandatory method, no ideological straitjacket, and no ruling clique. This pluralism has its own historical causes, but quite apart from its origins, I think it is a healthy condition for social theory. In this respect, my view is closer to Ritzer's than to Turner's (both in this volume), although the latter's position, given its premises, is certainly well-argued.

Before considering the essays in this volume, both in relation to the past and in relation to each other, I will first discuss the historical trends that led to the present situation in theory. Next, the advantages of the present pluralism will be considered. And finally I will look briefly at the near future, examining the possibilities of some new hegemony against the alternative possibility of a continued multiplicity of language games.

THE PRESENT AS HISTORY

To get a sense of tendency in theory it is useful to take a systematic look at the past. I have previously described the history of American sociology as the rise and fall of two dominating points of view: that of the Chicago School in the 1920s and early 1930s and that of Parsons-Merton, Harvard-Columbia functionalists, in and around the 1950s. The periods before, between, and after these two hegemonies are "interregnums," during which there were no hegemonic points of view (Wiley 1979; 1985, 1986). The three interregnums are interesting in their own

right. According to Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific history, a paradigm falls because it is replaced by a new one (Kuhn 1970). That scheme does not allow interregnums. Admitting that sociology has not had the well-developed paradigms of the natural sciences, this field's interregnums—and, for that matter, those of the other social sciences as well—are decidedly un-Kuhnian. This will be discussed later.

The first interregnum, or "pre-regnum," extended from the formal beginnings of American sociology in the 1880s until around World War I. During this early period American sociology was in formation in two senses: the birth of the field—the definition and legitimation of the discipline—was still being established; in addition, the first quasi-paradigm, that of the Chicago School, was being readied to fill the niche.

In my view, W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920) completed both tasks, the "founding" and the "filling."[1] For these authors, the entry concept was meaning, or the symbol, both as it exists in the human subject ("attitudes") and in the social or cultural structure ("values"). This founding contrasts with Durkheim's earlier creation of the discipline around the notion of "structure," itself rather similar to Thomas and Znaniecki's value realm. Both contrast with Simmel's founding around the concept of interaction (Levine 1989). The relations among these three, and possibly other, foundings have not been looked at in social theory, despite Durkheim's call for examining the origins of institutions.

Thomas and Znaniecki attempted to fill the newly legitimized disciplinary niche with a particular vision of how attitudes and values (or "agency" and "structure") are mutually causal. This attempt was not completely successful, although the current theory of "structuration" —found in Anthony Giddens (1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1989), and Roy Bhaskar (1979), among others—is rather similar to the argument of *The Polish Peasant*.

The distinction between niche and occupant, space and content, foundings and fillings is another problem for Kuhn's theory of science, since this distinction, like the concept of interregnum, has no place in his scheme.

The second interregnum, extending from the mid-1930s until the rise of the functionalists after World War II, had a different, less originary quality than the first. The disciplinary niche was already present, so there was no need to again construct the discipline out of nothing. The genesis of the second quasi-paradigm was more ontogeny than phylogeny, the former, as Durkheim pointed out, decidedly not "recapitulating" the latter. The move toward the new paradigm was not virginal, but was a response to the fall of the old: to its anomalies, its loss of

elective affinity with the times, and its decline in control of the means of intellectual production (mainly jobs, research monies, publication media, and the teaching curriculum). The second interregnum involved a lot of "dirty hands," if only because power was now being lost and gained. This process was zero-sum and conflict was unavoidable.

When the functionalists declined in the late 1960s, the third interregnum began. This one too has unique qualities, particularly its longevity and lack of movement toward a new, and third hegemonic, paradigm. Instead there has been continued diversity and theoretical competition, without any of the theoretical fish getting big enough to begin swallowing the others. The essays in this volume reflect the peculiarities of this current interregnum.

If we date the present interregnum from the late 1960s until the present, twenty years is a long time for a discipline to be without any dominating "center." It is not easy to analyze these twenty years historically, since we are so close to them, but in a tentative and exploratory spirit, I will propose three stages, so far, in the present interregnum: 1) the fall of functionalism; 2) the positivist bid for hegemony; and 3) the resurgence of European social theory.

The Fall of Functionalism

The decline of the functionalists was a complex process, its effects extending over a number of years. This decline had already begun by the mid-sixties, thus producing some overlap in the rough periodization I am working with. I will focus on intellectual attacks, although historical changes in American and world society were also important factors. History produced three reversals for the functionalists, all weakening their fitness for or elective affinity with the times. These were 1) social protest in the 1960s, 2) the rise of feminism and women's interests by the end of the decade, and 3) the decline in the capitalist world economy, including the American leadership of that economy, in the early 1970s. All three of these events were difficult to explain in the functional style, i.e., by way of needs and the nested attitudes-norms-values that fill the needs. The functionalists had used the concept of "strain" to explain protest and conflict (for example, Smelser 1962), but there was simply too much strain, and the times called for a totally different theory.

The intellectual attacks were to some extent based on the three historical anomalies, but in and of themselves they constituted a separate problem for the functionalists. The most noticeable group of attacks on the functionalists was from the macro conflict positions,

themselves quite diversified, but all gaining from the flow of the times. They included Marxists of various kinds, conflict-oriented and left Weberians, the semi-institutionalized conflict position of Ralf Dahrendorf, and the functional conflict position of Lewis Coser. If the conflict people had won the fight and become the new hegemony, they would have had a difficult time deciding which conflict position was to lead.

A second group of attackers were the qualitative, micro-based positions. These included symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, and ethnomethodology. This grouping too would have had trouble deciding what they were had they won. Some of these qualitative micros were using recent ideas, foreshadowing the much more recent resurgence of European theory, although at the time—the mid-sixties to early seventies—these micro positions were weak, disunited among themselves, and without strong European backing.

A small number of thinkers criticized the functionalists on both macro and micro grounds, thus having a foot in each of the critical groupings already mentioned. Leading representatives of this position were Randall Collins and Anthony Giddens.

There was yet a third segment of opposition. Some of the the leading quantitative positivists were originally allied—loosely—with the functionalists. This interrelationship was symbolized and led by two particular alliances: that of Samuel Stouffer with Parsons at Harvard and that of Paul Lazarsfeld with Merton at Columbia. During the functionalist hegemony, the positivists, subordinate to the functionalists, supplied the nuts and bolts of method along with much of the empirical research. But the positivists slowly and quietly uncoupled from this alliance, doubtless emboldened by the advent of the computer among other things, and they eventually became a third point of attack on the functionalists.

This attack was primarily based on the philosophy of science and the logic of explanation, for the "functional explanation" of the functionalists and the "causal explanation" of the positivists were never really compatible in the first place (though *see* Stinchcombe 1968, 80–101). Once the working alliance stopped working, it was easy, particularly for logicians, to point out this incompatibility. Perhaps Ernest Nagel's critique of Merton's "Manifest and Latent Functions" paper (Nagel 1956), given, ironically, at the request of Merton and Lazarsfeld, was the earliest move in this direction. Nagel's paper, originally presented in 1953, showed that functional explanation could be reduced to the causal, without significant remainder (*see also* Hempel 1959; Bernstein 1976, 27–28). I am not sure the functionalists ever understood the force of the logician's critique. As recently as 1977 Merton was to remark, informally, that "the Nagel formulation in particular only

reinforced the heuristic value of functional analysis. The claim is that functional analysis leads heuristically to hypotheses which do not emerge from an exclusively causal perspective. Subsequent reciprocal translatability is all to the good, doing away with a make-believe dualism" (personal letter from Merton to Wiley). But some people thought the translatability was only one-way: positivism could explain functionalism but functionalism could not explain positivism. The logical critique of functionalism would gradually give the positivists the issue they needed to uncouple from the alliance.

Finally there was the attack from George Homans and exchange theory. This was a micro position, but it was not qualitative and certainly not kindred with the micro critiques previously mentioned. It was closer to the Nagel-Hempel critique, though it was not positivist in the same way. It was a second form, based on positivist action theory, and it would never quite assimilate with the classic positivism of the natural science analogy. The divisions within positivism would later become more significant and troublesome.

The first stage of the current interregnum ended with the functionalists settling into a decline, but with no clear replacement. All of the attacking positions gained something, but none gained hegemony itself. The winner was neither the conflict grouping, even though it had the best explanation for the times. Nor was it the insistent micro positions. The closest thing to a winner was the former allies, the positivists themselves.

The Positivist Bid for Hegemony

While the functionalists were declining the positivists were gaining, partly—but by no means completely—at the expense of the functionalists. The most dramatic gains were in the means of production: university positions, government monies for research, control of graduate school curricula, and space in key journals. The positivists also began to send out feelers, especially through the influential writings of H. M. Blalock (1968, 1969, 1979), toward declaring themselves the new dominant theory, by arguing that method can replace theory.

In the early seventies, overlapping with the first stage of this interregnum, the positivists seemed to achieve a near-hegemony. In other words, the new situation looked like a hegemony to some, but it turned out not to be. Their dominance was noticeably uneven, much stronger in empirical research then in theory itself. The great power base was in the means of production, which gave this grouping an increasingly dominating presence in empirical research. Theoretical ideas were much

harder to attain, for the philosophy of science to which the positivists were committed was incompatible with the construction of general ideas.

During the period of positivist partial reign, there began a variety of new attacks, now on the positivists themselves. These critiques were reminiscent of those directed at the functionalists, for it was again the "outs versus the ins." In addition, the attacks came largely from the groupings that had attacked the functionalists, but gained only slightly from their fall: the conflict positions and the qualitative micros. There was a certain tactical ease in criticizing the positivists, for they had invested so heavily in methodology. In contrast to the largely theoretical critiques of functionalism the new round of attacks could be trained parsimoniously on method.

The method employed by the positivists required pluralities of events, preferably in large numbers. Infrequent events were hard to approach, and one-of-a-kind happenings completely elusive. Accordingly, the macro conflict positions, often drawing on the historicism of Max Weber, argued that positivism could not explain the major events and turning points of history. To get enough cases for statistical analysis—enough revolutions, for example—it was necessary to water down the concept and include minor cases. The central tendency of the enlarged sample would be different from that of the major events themselves. In addition, the temporally embedded, "world-historical" (Skocpol 1979, 19–24) process would be lost in the trivialization and detemporalization of the sample.

A second criticism came from the Marxist end of conflict theory. Change, and therefore causation, was not mechanical, it was argued, but praxis-based and dialectical. Praxis and dialectic, in fact, supplied the appropriate logical model—as opposed to statistical analysis—for the explanation of one-of-a-kind cases.

In contrast, the qualitative micro positions concentrated their criticisms at the levels of self and interaction. Positivism, it was argued, could not reach the subjective fact as it is intensive, intentional (in Husserl's sense), and reflexive. To treat the meaningful contents of self and interaction as linear magnitudes, comparable to length and breadth, was an obvious fallacy to these people.

Even the recently demoted functionalists, including the neofunctionalists, were critical of their former allies. Jeffrey Alexander (1982, 30–33) spoke for this position in extolling the advantages of postpositivism; the "post" in this expression refers to all the recent and telling critiques of positivism, launched from the philosophy and history of science.

During their heyday in the 1970s, the positivists also encountered

tensions and problems from within. One problem was the lack of convincing statistical findings. The coefficients of correlation and the combinations and derivations thereof were very low. Too much went unexplained. The positivist method did not deliver the empirical explanation it promised. Status attainment research was the major empirical failure of positivism, for despite dozens of studies and generous financial support from the federal government, the problem was left pretty much as it was found. Status attainment, formerly and less tendentiously called social mobility, was due to a complex mixture of both merit and "ascriptive" causes, and the method did not deliver a noticeably better picture of the mix than was already available. In addition, a profound and historically embedded concept from Max Weber was reduced to a demographic variable. Finally, with the economic doldrums of the 1970s and 1980s, people lost interest in status attainment as such—more serious problems had arisen—and the research dribbled off inconclusively.

A second internal problem was the development of several distinct kinds of positivism. At one level all varieties of positivism seem to be alike, but at a level somewhat closer to practice there are several versions (Parsons 1937, 70–81, distinguished four). I will give my impressions of the current splits within positivism, basing this not only on differences in method but also on the theory groupings that underlie these differences.

It was statistical positivism, based on the notion of samples, that produced the status attainment research. Then there is an action theoretical variety—action theory in James Coleman's, not Talcott Parsons', sense—based on the notion of a rationalizing, hedonistic actor. The latter falls easily into methodological individualism; the former does not. The statistical approach could be called epistemological positivism, akin to the Vienna Circle's principle of verification. The action theoretical approach might be called practical or praxiological positivism, for here the interest is not in the blind relation of cause and effect, but in the conscious directing of means to ends.

Both versions use a natural-science analogy, and both are "scientistic." Statistics uses physics as a model, whereas action theory uses biology, specifically evolutionary biology, where evolution is nature-as-maximizer. This metaphor was used in both classical and neoclassical economics and in behavioristic psychology, two disciplines which acted as models for the use of the metaphor in sociology. Within social theory, exchange theory and rational choice—two somewhat competing approaches—were pursuing a distinctive version of positivism. Throughout the 1970s the praxiologists were gaining on the statisticians, the latter slowed down by the status attainment boondoggle, creating a certain imbalance within positivism as a whole.

A related split opened between statistics and network or structural mathematics. Again, these are both forms of positivism but they go in different directions. Perhaps the most clearly disputed problem in the statistics-network split was over the nature of contemporary capitalism. The statistical approach has a cognitive affinity with the structure of a non-oligopolistic market economy. Oligopoly is the same kind of methodological threat as revolution, i.e., both are one-of-a-kind, qualitative-historical events, inaccessible to statistical treatment. Not only status attainment but the economy as such tended to be viewed as a market. In contrast, the network approach had the mathematical tools for analyzing small numbers of cases, including oligopolies. In addition, the network people could study a single case, finding the relations among its parts, in ways the statisticians could not.

The three-part split—statistics, action theory, and networks—did not go unnoticed by the critics, for a separate and distinct line of attack was soon mounted against each of the three branches of positivism.[2]

By the end of the 1970s, which concluded the second stage of the interregnum, the positivists were losing the appearance of hegemony, both from external attacks and internal difficulties. Most of the material base—jobs, curricular control, and access to key journals—remained, but research monies, due to the poor economy, were diminishing. What was more noticeable was that the spirit was gone. The attacks could not be adequately refuted, the product (those coefficients of correlation, etc.) was embarrassingly modest, the splits were getting worse, and the money itself—the oil that made the machine run—was getting scarce.

In my opinion, the main thing that stopped positivism from gaining hegemony was the inability to create theory. If theory without research tends to be "empty," research without theory tends to be decidedly "blind." In particular, the measurement implications of positivism have opposite effects for theory and empirical research, easily facilitating a version of the latter, but constituting an epistemological obstacle to reaching the former.

By the 1980s the positivists had lost their bid for hegemony. They were settling into a series of specialties, united only by a quite generic philosophy of science. Though they were certainly not dismantled, as the functionalists had been, neither did the attacking positions gain much ground. Instead something rather unexpected happened to sociology in the 1980s, as the current interregnum realigned itself into still a third stage.

The Resurgence of European Social Theory

In the early eighties ideas started wafting in from Europe, particularly from the continent. Paris, Frankfurt, and Oxford/Cambridge were becoming the newest centers for social theory, first slowly and then with a growing pace. Not only had American positivism become uninteresting from the standpoint of world sociology, the critics of positivism had become uninteresting. In fact, the whole American system of sociology and social theory became uninteresting, under the burden of being slightly old-fashioned. The excitement and the "action" simply began to go elsewhere, and the Americans, of whatever stripe, were increasingly viewed as provincial and unimaginative.[3] I am not suggesting that European ideas have a hegemony in sociology, or even in social theory. Rather this approach is beginning to be the most noticeable beneficiary of positivism's theoretical failure, somewhat as positivism itself gained when functional theory declined.

The role of British social theory is important in this latest stage of the interregnum, for these theorists received the continental ideas first—often in the original language—and acted as brokers of these ideas to the Americans. Anthony Giddens' *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976) and *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), for example, rendered the new ideas into terms that Americans could understand.

But the British also supplied ideas of their own. The left cultural studies of Stuart Hall, the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens, the conflict theory of Perry Anderson and Michael Mann, and the linguistic ideas of the Wittgensteinians had an impact that was distinct from the continental turn. The British were becoming a new force in sociology, both as original thinkers and as links to the continent. During the earlier functionalist period the British had been following American styles, including conflict theory, as well as functionalism and positivism. When they broke from American influence in the 1970s, their orientation shifted largely to the continent. At the 1985 American Sociological Association convention Jennifer Platt, then on leave from England, told me, "When I first came here in the fifties, I was one of many. Now I'm still turned American because of my research, but I am among the few. Most are turning to the Continent."

The British influence on American social theory is, if anything, increasing, as British sociologists, largely for logistic reasons, have taken jobs in the United States. In very recent years this list includes Stephen Lukes (Columbia), John Heritage (UCLA), Perry Anderson (the New School), Gianfranco Poggi (Virginia), John Hall (Harvard), Michael Mann (UCLA), and Anthony Giddens (Santa Barbara), among others.

Another way the European, and especially continental, influence is noticeable in the eighties is in neighboring disciplines in American universities. Literary criticism has been quite taken with continental theory, including phenomenology, critical theory, hermeneutics, and especially French structuralism, post-structuralism, and later spin-offs. In a major university literary criticism in turn affects several departments, such as English, classics, comparative literature, French, Slavic languages, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, linguistics, and speech communication. Continental theory is also now important in anthropology, of growing importance in philosophy and women's studies, and even making inroads into history and political science. Sociology departments have now been encircled, almost administratively, for universities are bustling with European theory, even though sociology itself has been slow to recognize these ideas.

I have now brought the historical sketch up to the present. Before continuing, let us consider some interim conclusions.

1. The history of American social theory has moved, stepwise, from an emphasis on interaction (the Chicago School) to social structure (functionalism) to culture (the continental turn). Each of these three is a distinct and important sui generis level in human life, but they are also interconnected. As we shall see, the theoretical integration of these levels is both a problem and an opportunity for current social theory.

2. Kuhn's theory of science does not work for the history of sociology. His approach cannot explain our paradigm space, paradigms, or interregnums. There is also a unique kind of "anomaly" in sociology's history; for Kuhn, anomalies were systematic empirical or theoretical problems that a given theory could not solve. But in addition to these systematic problems, sociology has had one-of-a-kind historical problems that come out of the blue to defeat theories. The Great Depression was such a problem for the Chicago School, itself too centered on interaction to be able to theorize this collapse in social structure. Unrest in the 1960s and economic stagflation in the 1970s were similar historical anomalies for the functionalists. The vagaries of history have a tendency to betray social theories, periodically giving them at best a hegemony of ten to twenty years. The social sciences need to understand the dynamics of their own histories, and for this to happen they need a separate historiography.

3. Lacking this historiography, it still seems plausible to say sociology will not have another dominating school of thought, either in the United States of worldwide, for the indefinite future. The theoretical stalemate of the last twenty years suggests this prediction, although I will return to this question in the last section of this paper.

Perhaps as long as world capitalism remains unstable and, so to speak, downwardly mobile, none of the social sciences will have clear hegemonies. In particular, the field of economics will probably not settle, theoretically, until world capitalism falls into a clearer pattern, whether for better or worse. Sociology does not depend directly on economic theory very much, and in some respects this field has always defined itself in opposition to economics. But this very opposition is important to sociology's self-definition. In addition, economic theory tends of formalize state policy, and sociology must work within the parameters of this policy.

4. Finally, the present situation in social theory—a kind of rolling and dynamic pluralism—has been around for enough years to show some signs of institutionalization. University departments are beginning to adjust to this principle to some extent. In addition, a sort of balance-of-power process is setting in, whereby any group or coalition of groups that starts moving ahead is met by a newly formed coalition of "outs," who resist the move.

THE ESSAYS AS HISTORICAL

These essays come right out of the historical flow. They group into waves, which themselves have causes and meanings, as I have tried to show in the first part of this essay. The wave of "former glory" carries two riders: the symbolic interactionists, who draw selectively on the Chicago School theory, and the neofunctionalists, who draw similarly on 1950s functionalism. Old paradigms don't die in sociology (another problem for Kuhn); they just drop their weakest concepts, readjust their alliances, slim down, and keep fighting. As Ritzer notes in this volume, both symbolic interactionism and neofunctionalism are feisty, upbeat, and surprisingly successful comebacks from old paradigms.

The protests of the 1960s launched another historical wave. The essays on feminism and Marxism are the most "sixties-ish" papers, although both show the continuous development of these positions right up to the present. Ethnomethodology is in some ways also a product of the 1960s, although Garfinkel's major theoretical innovation preceded that decade. Still, the unmasking theme in Garfinkel fit the sixties mood. Conflict theory is also a great unmasker and a product of the 1960s. Marxism criticizes capitalism, but conflict theory—at least in Collins' version—criticizes all positions (all the "grand narratives").

A third wave is that of positivism, pictured as weak and barely hanging on in Turner's essay, but obviously alive, well, and expansive. This wave contains about three and a half essays. Those on exchange

theory, rational choice, and Turner's own history are squarely positivist, although in different ways. The one on conflict theory by Collins is about half positivist. Collins often tries to use the positivist style on problems that have been considered inaccessible to positivism. In particular he has attempted to decompose ritual processes—drawing on Durkheim and Goffman—into positivist, cause-and-effect underpinnings. I think he actually departs from positivist logic and slides into other modes of explanation in these interesting forays, and that is why I score him only half.

Then there is the European wave, solidly represented in several essays and full of its own newness. Kellner on postmodernism and Lemert on post-structuralism—each creative in its own way—are thoroughly European. Antonio on Marxism is in this wave too, for the Marxism Antonio is tracking is highly responsive to the European intellectual climate. The essay on culture, by Wuthnow and Lamont, is partly concerned with French thought, but a less "continental," more nearly empirical variety.

The paper on feminism by Lengermann and Niebragge-Brantley is not very concerned with continental thought, although feminist scholarship itself is. This paper, however, lays out a great challenge to continental theories of culture in its provocative discussion of gender and epistemology.

Boden's essay on ethnomethodology also belongs in this batch. In retrospect, Garfinkel was a "scout" for the current European invasion, the ideas of which are a later version of what Garfinkel was importing from Europe in the fifties. Boden makes this point by showing how the central themes of ethnomethodology have resonance with similar themes in continental thought.

Finally there is Ritzer's essay on the micro-macro issue, connecting them all. Why is this issue so important right now? This question used to be considered meta-sociological and quasi-philosophical, but it is now clearly open to empirical investigation as well. Theories that are confined to one level, e.g., micro or macro, are reaching for the other levels. This can be done by stretching concepts across levels or trying for syntheses with theories at the unavailable levels. A sought-after prize in these essays is network theory, for both Collins on conflict theory and Cook, O'Brien, and Kollock on exchange are trying to coalesce with it.

More generally, some of the cross-level moves in social theory are attempts to reduce one level to another, constituting a kind of "levels imperialism." This creates backlash. For example, both Althusser and, in a less self-conscious way, Parsons tended to dissolve the individual in the social structure, thus creating an imperialism of structure over

"agency" (DiTomaso 1982). The same sort of imperialism is present in post-structuralism and postmodernism, although here it is the culture that dissolves the individual.

Perhaps an underlying reason for the currency of the micro-macro issue is the economic malaise of the last twenty years. The world economy, both capitalist and communist, is experiencing downward mobility. This condition has a delegitimizing effect on all of the political ideologies, right, left, and center, for they are all based on the promise of material progress. To maintain legitimacy in the face of stalled and declining living standards, states have a strong temptation to "colonize" the micro world, i.e., the ordinary beliefs of the "natural attitude." The political purpose of this colonization is to make populations think they are better off materially than they actually are. At least this is how I interpret Habermas' critique of contemporary capitalism, and it gives another reason why the levels question is a hot issue. In this case the reason is "self" defense and resistance to the iron cage.

MOVES TOWARD SYNTHESIS IN THE ESSAYS

Shifting now from history to systematics, some of these essays fall into clusters or local syntheses, as Ritzer points out in his introductory comments. These syntheses are still in process and not yet clearly successful, although they do represent an important tendency in the volume. The two strongest attempts are among the positivist and the European-influenced essays.

The Positivist Synthesis

Earlier I spoke of splits within positivism, distinguishing statistical, praxiological, and network branches. The two praxiological or "action" essays in this collection are those on exchange and rational choice. The former derives partly from behavioristic theory in psychology and partly from the rational actor of economics; the latter derives solely from economics. Both of these positions are primarily micro and both are trying to establish more presence at the macro level. The exchange essay makes contact with network's macro theory, and the rational choice essay of Friedman and Hechter attempts to picture the macro level as itself a rational structure.

Both moves to macro are expansive for these theories, but there are associated problems. For one, there is the awkwardness of the partial

overlap between exchange and rational choice. Why two theories? One could say that there is a lot of synthesis between the two, but one could also ask why there need be two in the first place, since they cover much the same ground with similar premises. A second problem is that network theory is in large part critical of economics, both in the rational actor and the market. If exchange theory connects itself to this macro position, it will weaken its increasingly economic micro position. This problem would be even greater in a synthesis of rational choice and network.

Turner's provocative history of American sociology is also part of the positivist synthesis, or attempt at synthesis, in this volume. Turner's position encompasses both statistical and praxiological positivism, the former being largely a macro structuralism and the latter a micro interactionism. His structuralism, however, is not the network structuralism that exchange theory is eyeing. His, like Blau's, is based on populations and their distributions, whereas network theory is based on the relations among "nodes." The plurality of approaches to structuralism among the positivists creates troubles for their synthesis.

Collins' semi-positivism does not fit the positivist synthesis well either. He wants to connect his version of macro conflict theory—which is neither network theory nor the Turner-Blau population structuralism—with a micro theory. But Collins' choice of micro is neither rational choice nor exchange. Instead it is the semi-positivist semiotic or ritualism which he has created on his own.

What we have here are five positions—exchange, rational choice, Turner's positivism, network structuralism, and Collins' semi-positivism—all maneuvering to get as much as they can of the positivistic intellectual space. The result is a strong effort at synthesis, but given the clashes and contradictions, there is also something of a centrifugal, dissipating effect, continuous with the positivists' earlier, unsuccessful bid for hegemony.

The European Synthesis

As mentioned earlier, this grouping includes the essays on postmodernism and post-structuralism, and to some extent those on Marxism, feminism, and culture. The lodestone of this cluster is recent French thought, especially structuralism (e.g., Saussure and Levi-Strauss), post-structuralism (e.g., Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida), and postmodernism (e.g., Baudrillard and Lyotard). Other kinds of recent trends in European though have tended to get caught up in debates with the French. This is true of critical theory, including Habermas'

version, forms of phenomenology that survived Levi-Strauss' attack on Sartre, various kinds of hermeneutics and the closely associated semiotics, and Wittgensteinian linguistic theory.

This bundle of ideas has given us what I called stage three of the current interregnum. If there is a single theme cutting across these ideas it is that of the linguistic model, both in the strong form—that social reality is basically linguistic—and in the weaker, more analogical form—that social reality is structured "like" a language.

This cluster is full of novelty for social theory. Number, the great model of the positivists, is pretty much demoted. Instead language is the preferred epistemological model. And, as positivism has always resonated with the physical sciences in universities, this cluster has increasing resonance with the humanities.

One weakness of this cluster, however, is the emphasis on culture to the neglect of the social structure, including the class system. Some of the new European thinkers—especially Bourdieu, Foucault, and Althusser among the French—are quite concerned with social structure and conflict, but this is not the dominant position. The essays by Kellner and Antonio are at great pains to try to bring the continental discussion back to considerations of social structure, especially the class system. This seems a useful corrective to the continent's heavy emphasis on culture.

Another weakness of this cluster is that its central concepts have not yet settled down into clear, examinable premises. Its key ideas have all the flux and ambiguity of the too-new. For example, let us look at two terms, decentering and narrative.

The French have used the term "decentering" in many—perhaps too many—senses. It started with Sartre's "Transcendence of the Ego" paper ([1936–1937] 1957), where he did a kind of decentering of Husserl's concept of the ego, showing it to be "nothing" at its core. Levi-Strauss introduced a second kind of decentering in separating mythical and other structures from selves, although allowing for a collective, unconscious self. Foucault, Barthes, and Althusser pushed Levi-Strauss still farther by historicizing the self—i.e., by showing how it allegedly came to be from historical causes—and by eliminating the collective self. Derrida went in still another direction by arguing that all sets of meanings are without logical "centers," and that texts should be decentered from their authors. Finally Lacan, returning to Sartre's focus, gave another internal decentering of the self, although this time the argument was based on linguistics, not phenomenology.

This is a rather diverse batch of meanings to place on the word "decentering." I think it is entirely possible to systematize and clarify this concept, although it would not be in the spirit in which the

concept has grown, and in any case this systematization is yet to be done.

"Narrative" is another term that has come fast, at least in sociology, and in several guises. The term was made popular by Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), in which he argues against the continuing viability of the "grand narratives." He defines these narratives primarily by enumeration as Hegelianism, hermeneutics, critical theory, Marxism, and neoclassical economics (xxiii). In contrast, Lyotard advocated little or first-order narratives, which he identified with Wittgenstein's language games. These are not the same as Merton's middle range theories, for in principle Merton allowed the possibility of a grand theory that would unite them all. But Lyotard introduces so many qualifiers to the game analogy that the result is a less than clear concept.

Before Lyotard introduced this term, it was already being used in other disciplines, especially history and literary criticism. The historical discussion, which began in the early twentieth century with Croce, heated up in the 1960s (Thompson 1984, 207). Here the term is a humanistic one (e.g., against Hempel 1942), used to interpret the historical enterprise in an anti-positivist way. History as story or narrative was depicted as including the human subject, not only as topic but also as author and audience.

In literary theory the term was used by various kinds of structuralists, their purpose often being anti-humanist and anti-subject. For example, Levi-Strauss' analysis of myths depicts them as narratives which lack both authors and subjects, except for the collective subject. The dominant position in the field of "narratology" portrays discourse of all kinds as lacking an author and existing independently of human subjects (Mitchell 1981; *Modern Fiction Studies* 1987).

The use of the term narrative in the present essays, drawing on Lyotard, but also on the two somewhat contradictory scholarly traditions, has too many overtones for precise theoretical usage. In particular the term has not yet been systematically contrasted to more conventional terms such as "theory" and "ideology."

Nevertheless, Lyotard's essay has been extremely influential, and there is a sense in which the grand narratives are indeed in disrepute in social theory, the current lengthy interregnum being characterized by precisely that fact. Like the positivist cluster, the European grouping has its share of weak spots, and only time will tell how much is style and how much substance.

Ethnomethodology and Symbolic Interactionism

In principle, both of these lines of qualitative, micro theory are open and kindred to the European wave, Garfinkel, in fact, having paved the way for it. It is striking that ethnomethodology did not wither away, despite a relatively inhospitable response from the rest of sociology. Spin-offs from Garfinkel, as in the works of Aaron Cicourel, Harvey Sacks, and John Heritage, have also become a force of their own. While American support for ethnomethodology has been modest, European support has been much stronger. Ethnomethodology has also established links with other disciplines, such as linguistics, artificial intelligence, and cognitive theory in psychology.

Symbolic interactionism too, as Fine's essay shows, has had a noticeable persistence in the theoretical competition. I think this is partly because the ideas of classical American pragmatism and early interactionism are such a strong patrimony. The symbolic interactionists have leaned heavily on George Herbert Mead, despite conflicts of interpretation. But pragmatism still has unexploited resources in the works of James, Dewey, Baldwin, Cooley, and Peirce, among others. The overall social theory, or family of theories, embedded in pragmatism has never been worked out, and the symbolic interactionists could deepen their position by looking more closely at their patrimony.

Such an examination could also strengthen the symbolic interactionists' connection to the European wave, for pragmatism was one of the early sources for this wave. In particular, Husserl borrowed heavily from William James, Lacan appears to have done the same from Baldwin, and contemporary European semiotics draws heavily on Peirce. Symbolic interactionism could deepen its articulation to the present by better mining its past.

Neofunctionalism

This grouping has inherited the earlier critics of Parsons-Merton functionalism. Those criticisms had come from exchange theory, the qualitative micro positions, the macro conflict positions, and the logical wing of positivism. The neofunctionalists in the United States, in contrast to the increasingly influential Niklas Luhmann in Germany, have downplayed the concept of "function" (Turner and Maryanski 1988), thus evading some of the criticisms. But the neofunctionalists have, if anything, leaned more heavily on the notion of moral causation, via norms and values.

This shift in emphasis creates two problems. For one, social theory at large has moved away from the moral toward the cognitive, linguistic, and meaningful. This gives the neofunctionalists a somewhat out-of-date aura. In addition, it is difficult to ground morality without functions. If morality is based on functional need, it has a clear, causal foundation. If functions are discarded, morality becomes relativistic and loses much of its explanatory force. If morality is not based on function, then one cannot but ask about its cognitive and meaningful foundations. The neofunctionalists might have to choose: either to return to function as the basis of morality (toward Luhmann), or to soften the emphasis on morality and turn in a more semiotic direction (toward continental theory).

Nevertheless, the neofunctionalists are making an important impact on contemporary theory. They are exploring connections with neighboring positions, including those of the earlier critics. In addition, they are producing a large number of important works, especially in cultural sociology. Jeffrey Alexander, in particular, has become established as a major social theorist and a highly competent group leader.

THE ADVANTAGES OF PLURALISM

Contemporary sociology has differentiated itself into a number of points of view, both empirical and theoretical. So far I have been talking about the history and systematics of this pluralism. Now let me shift to its possibilities for theoretical progress.

1. *Competition.* Pluralism implies competition, and without being a tunnel-vision capitalist, one can say competition has its strengths. During sociology's take-off period, from the late nineteenth century until World War I, theoretical competition prevailed, not only in the United States, but more importantly in Europe. The competition was to some extent expressed as nationalistic rivalry, leading toward World War I, but still it was productive for theory. The great patrimony of social theory dates from that period. This includes not only the works of Durkheim and Weber, but also those of Marx and the Marxists, a little earlier, and John Maynard Keynes (Wiley 1983) a little later. In addition, the great American contribution to micro theory, extending from Peirce and James to Mead and Cooley came from that period. If sociology had been centered, worldwide, around a dominant point of view during that time, there would not have been the creative flowering that issued from such competition.

Early sociology was trying to understand the great transformation into capitalism, urbanism, and democracy. Today we are at the other

end of modernization, trying to understand and theorize what appears to be another transformation, into a new institutional and cultural pattern.

It seems to me that the worst imaginable way of trying to theorize the contemporary experience is to narrow the intellectual options. In particular, a changing system requires wide-open qualitative analysis, preferably from many points of view. If there is a problem here with the present pluralism, it is in the inadequate attention paid to the "hard" social structure. In this paper the term "structuralism" has come up in about a half dozen different ways, but too many of these are not getting at the historically embedded structure of armies, economies, and nations. The essays most concerned with the new transformation are those by Collins, Antonio, and Kellner.

2. *Cause and Meaning.* Another strength of the present pluralism is that social theory has a better chance of providing adequate and comprehensive explanations. Both Weber and Durkheim respected the broad positivistic goal of causal analysis, but they also thought explanation required something more. Weber was quite explicit about wanting both cause and meaning. Durkheim was a little fuzzier about what he would add to cause. In the *Rules of Sociological Method* he added function, but in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he moved closer to the Weberian formula, that of cause and meaning.

The present diversity in theory is well adapted to pursuing the Weber-Durkheim formula for adequate explanation. The causal side has been deepened by the computer, new statistical developments, and the energy of the positivist groupings. The meaningful side has been strengthened by semiotic and linguistic models, by new theories of meaning, and by a variety of other European innovations.

At present, these two approaches to explanation are operating independently and in relative isolation from each other, but there are little signs that this may be changing (e.g., Giddens 1984; Jasso 1988; Fararo 1989). Theorists are beginning to try to integrate the two aspects of explanation, some signs of which appear in the present collection.

3. *Mediating the Natural Sciences and the Humanities.* Social theory's capacity for combining causal and meaningful explanation is related to its strategic, mediating position between the natural sciences and the humanities.

Human beings are at the crossroads of the material and non-material worlds, for they combine physical bodies with selves. The natural sciences can study the bodies and the humanities can study the selves and their cultural products. These two approaches find aspects of the truth, but they also tend to pull the problem apart, for they split human nature into two unintegrated parts. The social sciences, despite the

historical vagaries of their origins, have always had the strategic opportunity of studying human nature and the social as totalities. Causal explanation tends to be based on the body and meaningful explanation on the self. A complete theory of human life requires both kinds of explanation together, as Weber and Durkheim sensed. Such an explanation fulfills sociology's potential as mediator between the natural sciences and humanities, a crucial role for integrating universities as well as bodies of knowledge.

4. *Theoretical Diversity and Ideological Freedom.* Social theorists are always engaged in ideological disputes with each other, even if only implicitly. Ideological closure, always the bane of social theory, ends the competition and creativity. Hitler and Stalin were examples of this closure, although there are plenty of less dramatic examples.

There is no way to decree ideological tolerance in social theory, although the general principle of intellectual respect seems to help. At present there is a relatively healthy state of tolerance in theory, a circumstance conducive to pluralism and diversity. Creativity is partly the result of the clash of ideologies, as the beginnings of sociology illustrate, and pluralism fosters this sort of clash. I do not think a theoretical hegemony is necessarily an ideological straightjacket, but it is nevertheless easier for states to impose ideologies under these circumstances. In fact, states decree scientific hegemonies—as Hitler and Stalin did—to facilitate ideological uniformity.

I have listed a series of advantages to the present diversity in social theory. These work together toward creative and comprehensive explanation. The present period in world history seems especially ripe for theoretical progress, for there is an elective affinity between this relatively open, reconstitutive period in time and the similarly open situation in theory.

POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR SOCIAL THEORY

It goes without saying that the future of social theory depends on what happens in world history. World war or a sharp ideological change in world politics would have massive effects, and the near-future of the world economy, including the American role therein, is an obvious contextual force. Even such a specific factor as which political party holds the American presidency affects theory. In particular, the continental turn in the humanities seems to be unpopular with recent Republican administrations, and given the federal control over the means of intellectual production, this could eventually affect the growth of these ideas. But if we suspend these elective affinity questions,[4] the

best prediction is probably to extrapolate the present into the future, i.e., to expect continued pluralism, despite continual bids for hegemony.

Let me approach this by a process of elimination. I see three alternative scenarios to continued pluralism: 1) a methodological hegemony, either all-positivist or all-interpretive; 2) a break-up of sociology into two separate disciplines; or 3) a new hegemony, which combines both causal and meaningful explanation.

A methodological hegemony seems most unlikely, even though some of the essays in this collection seem to favor such an outcome. The historical precedent argues against this, at least in the United States. Both previous hegemonies—those of the Chicago school and functionalism—were methodological hybrids, combining quantitative and qualitative elements. In addition, these overarching, methodological terms are little more than ritualistic labels. Both the quantitative and qualitative wings are internally divided into sharply competing approaches, and I do not think either one could ever find enough internal unity to "rule." Finally there is an epistemological "blind spot" in both methods, requiring each to seek out the other.

The second option—the internal break-up of sociology into two "differentiated" disciplines—also seems unlikely, if only for reasons of material security and logistical survival in universities. Such an eventuality would not strengthen sociology but would seem more likely to mark its resorption into the same neighboring disciplines from which it emerged in the first place.

The more likely option would seem to be a new hybrid hegemony, based on some creative merger of positivist and interpretive ingredients. I have been examining this scenario throughout the paper, however, and it simply does not look like a serious, near-term possibility, either historically or systematically. There *are* little signs of this possibility in the essays; for example, exchange theory's interest in symbolic interaction or ethnomethodology's interest in artificial intelligence, but they are just too little—hardly more than glints in the essayists' eyes.

I return, then, to my prediction of a continuation of present trends. This condition not only has the advantages listed earlier; it is also consonant with the postmodernist argument—overstated as it is—that the grand narratives are dead and middle-level language games are the discourse of the future (I would add "for the time being"). Coalitions will be explored and hegemonies will be sought after, but the strength of social theory today lies in the multiplicity of its tools and perspectives.

The essays in this collection, and the highly successful conference

on which they are based, were intended to capture the main trends in each theoretical field. I think they do so with amazing fidelity, and I can think of no better place in which to look for finding out what is going on right now in social theory.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Turner in the present volume argues that *The Polish Peasant* was not so much based on the replacement of instinct, as I have argued (1986), as on the replacement of evolution and organicism in general. He further argues that *The Polish Peasant* opened the way for the more precise measurement of mental processes, specifically attitudes. I am unconvinced on both counts.

By the time of *The Polish Peasant*, the macro theory of evolution, as a competitive process among and within species, had already been considerably moderated and softened in sociology. What remained as an obstacle to sociology's disciplinary emergence was the micro notion that individuals were biologically determined—that the physiological processes alone produced thought and affect. It is significant that the theory of instinct, as an explanation of individual behavior, was by then the argument of the discipline of psychology, not biology. As Znaniecki put it, retrospectively in 1950, the purpose of the concept of attitude was to eliminate "naturalistic explanations of individual conduct in terms of biological 'instinct,' innate 'drives,' etc."

The subsequent move toward the measurement of attitudes, initiated by Thurstone (1928), deflected Thomas and Znaniecki's project away from its phenomenological orientation. The deflection was not back to instincts again, but nevertheless to another kind of positivism.

In this paper I cannot go into the difference between the theory of *The Polish Peasant* and that of the 1920s Chicago School, the two being similar but not the same.

2. Some varieties of systems theory, including the influential version of Niklas Luhmann, could be considered a fourth kind of positivism. The nature, causes, and consequences of the splits in positivism have never been adequately looked into, despite Parsons' promising beginning in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937, 70–81).

3. I deliberately emphasize the novel aspects of European social theory. In addition, the Europeans are pursuing some more conventional lines, including the development of ideas from Mead, Goffman, ethnomethodology, and Parsons.

4. Obviously you cannot really "suspend" these questions. They are too big, and they give a fundamental "uncertainty," in the Keynesian sense, to sociology's future. As Keynes put it:

> By "uncertain" knowledge, let me explain, I do not mean merely to distinguish what is known for certain from what is only probable. The game of roulette is not subject, in this sense, to uncertainty; nor is the prospect of a Victory bond being drawn. Or, again, the expectation of life is only slightly uncertain. Even the weather is only moderately uncertain. The sense in which I am using this term is that in which the prospect of a European war is uncertain, or the price of copper and the rate of interest twenty years hence, or the obsolescence of a new invention, or the position of private wealth-owners in the social system in 1970. About these matters there is no scientific basis on which to form any calculable probability whatever. We simply do not know. (Keynes 1937, 213–214)

?. Ibid., pp. 269–272.
81. Hekman, *Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 4–12.
82. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 41–53.
83. Murphy, "Phenomenological Social Science"; see also John W. Murphy, "Postmodernism and Social Research," *Social Epistemology* 2.1 (1988), pp. 83–91.
84. Perelman, *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, pp. 48–50.
85. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 505–524.
86. John W. Murphy, *The Social Philosophy of Martin Buber* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 35–68.
87. Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 353–355.
88. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 273–274.
89. De Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, pp. 97–98.

by Murphy, John
Postmodern Social Analysis and Criticism

4 Order and Discourse

CARTESIANISM AND SOCIETY

The traditional renditions of order have not been immune to Cartesianism. Order is portrayed in a dualistic manner by both classical and a host of modern theorists. Similar to Descartes' search for an indubitable ground of certainty, most sociologists view order as emanating from an inviolable source. Because subjectivity, or human action, is believed to be capricious, a basis for order is sought that is untrammeled by interpretation. In other words, standards must be available that are unaffected by personal motives, or society will devolve into what Deleuze calls "associative chains and non-communicating viewpoints."[1] A type of Newtonian "oasis"—an absolute foundation—is believed to be required for society to survive. A perfect spatial domain is reserved as a basis of order.

As a result of this Cartesian influence, Niklas Luhmann writes that sociologists have exhibited a propensity for conceptualizing order as "centered."[2] By this he means that a single, intractable referent is invoked to legitimize norms. When the common present required for interaction is established in accordance with the assumptions of dualism, order is guaranteed. Consistent with Cartesianism, the knowledge used to organize society is touted as the antithesis of subjectivity, and thus order is associated automatically with reason. In a manner of speaking, society embodies reason, while persons are passionate, misguided, and continuously threaten order. Reality, therefore, is not subject to definition, but represents a comprehensive system that is able to control individuals. When passion is juxtaposed to reason in this way, Herbert Marcuse argues, society becomes invulnerable.[3] After all, how can useless passion have any significant impact on reason? Reason, in fact, is given the power to suppress passion.

When conceived dualistically, society is provided with indisputable justification. For if persons are to act rationally, conventional wisdom suggests, they must look outside of themselves to find guidance. Society, accordingly, is the only source from which this guidance can originate. Durkheim writes that morality is possible only on the "condition that society be always considered as being qualitatively different from the individuals that compose it."[4] In effect, self-denial becomes a prerequisite for order, as individuals are rendered subservient to an idealized version of society. Morality, as Durkheim states, must be free from "sentimental subjectivism."[5] Yet with individuals so thoroughly impoverished, how can norms ever be seriously challenged? Mounting a protest would involve persons in criticizing the source of their identity. This sort of activity, however, requires the autonomy individuals are denied. Because persons are immured by norms, with regard to orthodox portrayals of order, postmodernists charge that traditional social science is very repressive.[6] Society, simply put, is nothing but an agent of control. As imagined by Hobbes, social reality is a grand intimidator.[7] Reality constitutes a "collective force."[8]

MODERN RENDITIONS OF ORDER

Two approaches have traditionally been adopted to conceptualize social reality. Using medieval terminology, these are usually referred to as ontological nominalism and realism. Realists, sometimes called holists, contend that society has its own existence, removed categorically from the realm occupied by individuals.[9] Society, stated differently, is greater than the sum of its parts. In terms of modern sociology, Durkheim declared that society constitutes a "*reality sui generis.*" Auguste Comte made a similar point when he argued that through the use of positive science, a universal body of knowledge, dubbed "public opinion," could be established to sustain order. Moreover, Herbert Spencer adopted an organismic analogy, while Talcott Parsons introduced the concept of the social system. In each case, order was said to stem from a source that is disassociated from interpretation. As Durkheim remarked, society represents truth that is irrepressible.[10]

Additionally, according to realism individuals obtain their identity from the social whole. As described by writers such as Spencer and Parsons, for example, individuals are merely components of a much larger social system. Each person, moreover, is assigned a job that contributes to the survival of society. A person's raison d'être, therefore, is determined by the social system. Questions pertaining to the meaning of life are answered in terms of how well individuals perform their duties. Deviance, health, and illness reflect standards associated with various institutions, rather than personal

or collective judgments. Actually, the strictures imposed by society delimit the boundaries of reality. Yet realists such as Durkheim applaud this view, because social order cannot be jeopardized by psychological idiosyncracies.

Nominalists, on the other hand, claim that only individuals are real and that society is fictitious.[11] They reject the existence of a so-called macro level of order. Key to this position is the claim that individuals are free to pursue their own aims, and that as a result of this activity, order emerges. Nominalists believe that order can be established on the basis of individualized preferences. Throughout the history of social thought, however, justifying society in this manner has been viewed as dubious, even by nominalists. According to Deleuze, the nominalist viewpoint treats persons as "sealed vessels." Moreover, it is quite a leap of faith to assume that individual greed will enhance the common weal.[12] After describing individuals as monads, for example, Leibniz introduced the notion of "preestablished harmony" to explain how they are organized. In a similar vein, chaos is averted at the marketplace, according to Adam Smith, through the intervention of an "invisible hand." Modern supply-side economists acknowledge that something they refer to generally as the market regulates trading. In each instance a non sequitur is made. Specifically, a force that is superior to the individual is given the latitude to control behavior; the perpetuation of reality is again taken out of human hands.

As with realism, individuals are not responsible for their destiny. Instead of a "reality *sui generis*," a style of reason or logic nominalists accept unquestioningly as valid underpins cognitive activity and, ultimately, interaction. Those who depart from this ideal, as might be suspected, are labelled as aberrant. Social mores are not a topic for debate, for these rules serve to differentiate reason from madness. Besides, how can the principles that make order possible be suspended? Without the insight imparted by reason, interaction would at best be undisciplined, and at worst completely disorganized. Economic exchange, for example, would be highly violatile, unless price signals are evaluated similarly by traders. Nonetheless, as should be seen, nominalists also deprive persons of autonomy.

As Buber has pointed out, moral order has been considered a product of either individual or collective demands. Yet morality is depersonalized in each case, in that both personal autonomy and social responsibility are undermined. In nominalism, individuals who are absolutely reasonable are the focus of attention, while social concerns are of secondary importance. According to realists, individuals are associated intimately with the collective, yet the element of personal choice is undermined. In neither approach are human action and social order united. The implication, then, is that moral order and freedom are incompatible. Postmodernists maintain that this conclusion is very problematic, since order inevitably becomes inhospitable:

the needs of society are satisfied, regardless of the desires voiced by individuals.

Luhmann charges that society is typically assumed to be centered. Lyotard reviles the work of Spencer, Comte, and Parsons, because they describe society to be a "unicity."[13] These thinkers consider society to be a natural fact or object, waiting to be discovered by anyone who is sufficiently scientific. Accordingly, readers should not be surprised that the use of structural metaphors is so prevalent among mainstream sociologists. For the separation of consciousness, or subjectivity, from the knowledge base of society is thought to be entirely justified. Doubtless, Descartes set the precedent for this gambit by distinguishing *res cogitans* from *res extensa*. Although order can be secured in this way, postmodernists contend that it reifies society. Thus, contrary to traditional imagery, they compare society to a "rhizome."[14]

THE POSTMODERN CRITIQUE OF THE "CENTERED" SOCIETY

In terms of Western metaphysics, existence has often been compared to a tree with deep roots. The metaphor implies that because these roots are deeply buried and removed from everyday events, society has a firm foundation. A rhizome, on the other hand, appears to grow in an almost unlimited number of directions, and thus has no center. The point Guattari and Deleuze are raising by adopting this imagery is quite simple. They are questioning the appropriateness of Cartesianism for conceptualizing any phenomena, particularly society. Can the belief be sustained that order extends from a single locus, unaffected by situational contingencies? By using the rhizome as an example, the implication is that order emerges from within itself, rather than from principles that are protected from scrutiny. According to Gebser, the center of society in the postmodern world is everywhere.[15] Derrida reaffirms this point when he declares that philosophers are consigned to working at the periphery (or "margins"), instead of in the core of reality.[16] Social existence is thus decentered by postmodernists. The source of order, contends Derrida, must be a "non-center."[17]

Further, postmodernists charge that the speculative social ontologies perennially used can no longer be theoretically supported. Simply stated, the success of Cartesianism depends on a defunct philosophical démarche. How can persons leap beyond the realm occupied by interpretation, in order to discover the pure knowledge coveted by Descartes? For if knowledge is mediated by language games, how can the impersonal truth, sought by Descartes and modern social philosophers such as Durkheim, possibly be

captured? Rather than constrain persons, speech acts establish order. Institutions, accordingly, are not the pillars of society, but embody the interpretive process they are supposed to repress.

Implicating institutions in language use marks a noteworthy departure from the past. Usually institutions have been portrayed as unencumbered by opinions, or by any other situational factor that would limit the applicability of norms. Institutions have been divorced from persons for a simple reason—to maintain social control. Institutions are given almost unlimited authority; this is accomplished by restricting symbolism to specific areas of society. "Symbolic energy," as Barthes labels it, is not permitted to flow freely throughout a culture.[18] Symbolism is defined as something personal, while social organizations are public. Insisting on maintaining this dichotomy provides institutions with the freedom from restraint required to enforce norms. Symbols are privatized and unable to affect reality.

With institutions mired in language, critics of postmodernism argue, society is plunged into anarchy. For example, René Wellek contends that postmodernism poses a serious threat to institutional and pedagogical practice. Traditionalists believe this philosophy encourages "apocalyptic irrationalism," "cognitive atheism," and "dogmatic relativism."[19] Clearly, mainstream social philosophers and sociologists have reason to fear the thesis advanced by postmodernists. Deprived of an ahistorical framework, theories such as functionalism, structuralism, and cybernetics, for example, lose their appeal. And if social theorists are unable to employ structural metaphors, their status as scientists may be jeopardized. Nonetheless, does the loss of an ultimate *archē* mean that society must be inevitably destroyed? Because order must stand in the midst of language, are social relationships impossible to establish and perpetuate? As a result of emphasizing the "undecidables" indigenous to language use, opponents of postmodernism contend that culture is eviscerated. Indeed, postmodernists are thought to delight in undermining society. Yet is Terry Eagleton correct when he states that only ~~Justice~~ can be forthcoming from a society based on postmodern philosophy?[20]

This charge, however, is not difficult to understand. As might be expected, postmodernists do not accept the centered version of society. Such impetuousness worries realists. Nonetheless, Lyotard goes further: he announces that consensus is an outmoded concept, and that social laws are impossible to know.[21] What is the uninitiated reader to make of such pronouncements? The conclusion reached by many critics is that postmodernism collapses under its own demands. For if social contracts cannot be enacted, laws cannot be enforced. Order is not only impossible, the ideas expressed by postmodernists can be neither comprehended nor implemented. Idiosyncracies, these

critics charge, are simply not sufficient to sustain a community. Therefore, advocates of postmodernism are thought to court political disaster.

Advocates of realism and nominalism contend that no other conclusion is warranted. With the element of interpretation given such importance, they claim, all standards of culture must be abandoned. If one interpretation of events is as good as any other, reality vanishes. Nothing is available to dictate when particular actions are appropriate and others are not. Relativity reigns, thus creating chaos. If every behavior rests on a value judgment, anything is possible at any time. Considering this a dismal state of affairs, critics sometimes label postmodernism as nihilistic. Reminiscent of the early critiques of Nietzsche, postmodernists are thought to invite the degeneration of morality. A never ending cycle of re-evaluation culminates in personal immobility and a complete lack of social direction.

POSTMODERN SOCIAL IMAGERY

In order to understand the postmodern conception of society, a couple of key ideas must be remembered. First, Lyotard was a member of the "Socialisme ou barbarie" movement, while various other postmodernists are advocates of what has come to be called Western Marxism.[22] These writers are not necessarily calling for the complete elimination of order; they merely reject the view that a bureaucratic state is a rational form of social organization. What they are criticizing specifically is the reification of society inaugurated by Stalin. Consistent with what Claude Lefort has to say on this issue, postmodernists understand bureaucracy to be a philosophy and not simply a form of management.[23] Bureaucracy creates the illusion that certain social arrangements are "ahistorical," and thus invulnerable to critique. As a result, society is thought to operate according to rules that are scientific and fair. Vast amounts of information and persons can be processed efficiently and with expediency; yet dehumanization becomes prevalent.

Bureaucratization requires the separation of substantive and formal rationality, notes Weber. With intepretation removed to the periphery of an organization, the illusion is created that decisions can be made without bias. In order to enforce this belief, behavior is standardized, communication is regulated, authority patterns are explicitly defined, and the type of knowledge that is introduced into the decision making process is extremely restricted. Rather than simply an increase in organizational size, the key to bureaucratization is formalization. Every activity is accomplished by mastering a particular technique, while decisions become increasingly mechanistic. The aim of formalization, as might be expected, is to allow organizations to be scientifically designed and operated. In fact, developing

bureaucracies was thought to be a rational approach to eliminating waste and corruption. This original appraisal, however, has proven to be extremely naive.

The end product of bureaucratization is a symbol-free *mise en scène*, where judgments are made on the basis of facts, without interference from extraneous influences. To use the example provided by Benjamin, the "aura" is stripped from any phenomenon that is encountered.[24] Because knowledge is materialized, events can be easily manipulated. Hence managers become technophiles, who rely mostly on analytical methods when evaluating policy options. In point of fact, so-called "soft" data, such as those derived from direct experience, are often cited as promoting faulty reasoning. Primacy is given unquestioningly to "calculative rationality." Yet this uncritical acceptance of instrumental reason has dire consequences. Most important, the way knowledge is conceptualized may alter irreparably the organization of society.

With the logic of an organization standardized, efficiency will almost certainly increase, at least initially. Politically, however, the bureaucratization of society is disastrous. Power becomes extremely concentrated, usually in the hands of a few technocrats.[25] These functionaries are believed to possess the education and skills required to make scientific or rational decisions. Because knowledge is not widely disseminated, the political process begins to collapse. The average citizen is unable to make informed choices, while those who have knowledge become increasingly indispensable. What some Marxists call "etatism" is the eventual result of bureaucratization. In other words, society is transformed into a elitist system, which is monolithic and impenetrable. Foucault remarks that when a society is bureaucratized, power no longer assumes the form of brute force.[26] Actually, this sort of display seems almost infantile. Power is exerted, instead, through the use of classificatory schemes and criteria for judging behavior that are believed to be thoroughly rational. A management science that is unquestioned, for example, contributes to the disenfranchisement of citizens. Accordingly, the political process becomes nothing more than administration. Persons may actually request to be assessed by these standards, as is the case when they volunteer for psychiatric or medical examinations. To counter this terrorism, Lyotard calls for the development of "flat" organizations.[27]

Second, researchers must appreciate that Lyotard was influenced by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas, in addition to the Hasidic masters. The paradoxical statements made by Lyotard will most likely be misconstrued, unless the role played by these authors in the formation of postmodernism is recognized. While making reference to Hasidism, Lyotard is loath to base society on a set of prescriptions.[28] Also consistent with his critique of bureaucracy, establishing rubrics that differentiate absolutely reality from

illusion will surely lead to trouble, especially if personal freedom is valued. Lyotard's statement that laws cannot be discovered simply means that no imperious authority can be introduced to legitimize order. Because the claim is not justified that particular standards are ultimately rational while others are irrational, conformity need not be the result of apprehending reality. Order is not necessarily jettisoned, but merely the social imagery whereby normalcy is equated with adjustments to societal expectations.

Most relevant about Hasidism in this context is that knowledge is believed to reside within language and truth is sought among everyday activities. According to Hasidic teachings, salvation is associated with social justice. God is thoroughly worldly, and thus religious escapism is discouraged. Moreover, Buber describes the development of society as synonymous with linguistic invention. In general, like postmodernists, the Hasidim oppose realism. Ultimate principles, in short, are thought to dwarf the human side of reality. Yet the realm of the interhuman is where life unfolds. The Hasidim argue that ignorance of this dimension can destroy what is sacred about society. Life should not be transformed into a lifeless Golem, as a consequence of worshiping idols and eternal truths. Institutions exist between persons, write the Hasidim. With knowledge tied to experience, how can absolute political proposals be given credence? The Hasidim, in short, consider a hierarchy to be absurd.

As noted earlier, Lyotard recommends the formation of "flat" organizations. His point is that social institutions should not be approached as if they are autonomous, and thus condition human experience. Due to the pervasiveness of language, organizations must be viewed as primordially linguistic. Instead of specifying the parameters of reality, institutions are a product of the pragmatic impetus of language. This is why some postmodernists refer to society as an embodied polity.[29] Order cannot be severed from the human presence, because social life is held together by the desire persons exhibit to make their lives meaningful. In short, an abstract universal cannot be derived from interaction.

With their corporeal social ontology, postmodernists want to avoid "totalizing" society.[30] For when this is the case, they argue, spontaneity is replaced by security. Society, in a manner of speaking, becomes a straitjacket that insures uniformity among persons. De Man, for example, uses Kleist's *Marionettentheater* to characterize modern society.[31] Persons, he writes, have become mere puppets, tethered to a political and economic system that they no longer understand. As in the castle described by Kafka, the source of authority cannot be found, yet laws are everywhere. In order to enliven social life, postmodernists claim that order emerges from the realm obscured by both nominalists and realists. Buber, for instance, calls this place the "in between," a domain devoid of the highs and lows of traditional

metaphysics.[32] Recently, another author referred to this place as the "dialogical region."[33]

What nominalists and realists overlook is the space between persons. Because this region is obviously replete with interpretation, traditionalists warn that society could not possibly be erected on such a flimsy foundation. Buber utilized appropriate imagery when he called this area the "narrow ridge."[34] He suggested that winds whirl around anyone who resides there, thus limiting a person's vision. This is not to say that certainty cannot be obtained, but that knowledge must be extricated from the flotsam left behind by history. Rather than being immaculately conceived, order emerges from the maelstrom of claims that compete to dominate everyday life. Truth, in other words, is buried deep within social concerns. Lyotard, therefore, writes that society is comprised of institutional "patches." Described in this way, postmoderns feel, order is no longer ominous.

Lyotard uses Plato's ontology to exemplify what he wants to avoid. Like the Hasidim, Lyotard believes that Plato envisioned society as an eternal idea.[35] Once this version of order is given credence, everyday life is eliminated as a source of ethical and moral values. Plato, along with most Western philosophers, had little positive to say about opinion. Yet as Buber recalls, fleeing from daily experience and repairing to a cloistered environment renders life meaningless.[36] Striving to fulfill the requirements of abstract laws may provide an individual with the promise of security, yet the resulting behavior occurs in a vacuum. The price paid for this salvation consists of the values, sentiments, and commitments that serve to organize a person's existence. Further, as Erich Fromm remarks, ethereal ideals tend to undermine the human condition.[37] The more expansive these ideals become, the relevance of human action becomes less important. What could be more alienating?

Again like the Hasidim, Lyotard wants to sanctify the world of everyday activities. To use Paul Tillich's terminology, what "concerns" persons "ultimately" is assumed to exist within the dialogical region.[38] Because of the emphasis that has been placed on identifying structural imperatives, this simple idea has been overlooked. The "in between" is no longer thought to be holy, because the mystery of how order is established is currently obscured by technical operations. For example, merely formalizing relationships is believed to optimize interaction. In a bureaucracy, explicit lines of interaction and clearly defined rules of logic are identified as leading naturally to improved communication. Technical competence is thus deemed sufficient to guarantee the success of discourse. Rather than being a set of technical procedures, postmodernists maintain, language gives rise to society. Communicative, instead of technical, proficiency is central to the survival of order.[39] As in postmodern epistemology, the key to a postmodern

social ontology is intersubjectivity, more accurately known as linguistic pragmatics.

ORDER AND DISCOURSE

Postmodernists recognize that successful communication does not necessarily result from mastering the form or structure of language. Instead, linguistic pragmatics sustain order. The language game that people play must be grasped, before their intentions can be anticipated with any regularity. De Man uses the phrase "double rapport" to describe this mode of engagement.[40] As noted in Chapter 3, linguistic comprehension occurs when a reader enters the world deployed by an author's use of language. Clearly, grammar and logic miss this side of communication. Interpersonal discourse is possible only when the "polysemic" nature of language is realized.[41] In other words, once a person appreciates that a sign may convey a variety of meanings simultaneously, the need to preserve a person's world through interaction can be demonstrated. Interlocutors can begin to live at the boundary of their respective interpretations of reality, so that the presence of other linguistic worlds can be recognized.[42] Dialogue demands that persons work "at the limits of what the rules permit," states Lyotard.[43] The linguistic "moves" that constitute one of these new worlds can then be adequately evaluated. Sartre describes this process in terms of reading a book: "Each one [reader and author] trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself."[44] The social world is thus mediated by the reflexivity inherent to reading.

Obviously this portrayal of order is different from that provided by Parsons, with respect to his notion of "double contingency."[45] He assumes that roles are structurally linked, and thus offer a cohesive and stable system. The reduction of complexity necessary for interaction to succeed results from persons not violating their assigned roles. Moreover, a postmodern order is not the product of persons "taking the role of the other," as described by G. H. Mead and, later, symbolic interactionists.[46] One of Foucault's most controversial claims explains why this cannot be the case. Stated succinctly, Foucault says that there is no self that subtends an author's work or, accordingly, a person's identity. No atavistic or collective psyche, for example, can be found. Foucault's position is that an individual's self-concept is comprised of nothing more than discursive practices that have been internalized. Considering that postmodernists abandon dualism, consciousness is not pure but linguistic. Therefore, adopting the role of the other is impossible.[47] Mutual understanding depends upon the willingness of persons to acknowledge linguistically inscribed identities that may be different from their own. Language must be explored until a common

ground is discovered. Only language piled upon itself can serve as the basis of order. The phrase "discourse-figure" best conveys the identity of social reality.[48] In other words, reality is based on discourse that assumes a fragile form.

The resulting order should not be referred to as a system, according to Jean Gebser. When society becomes known as a system, an all-encompassing mechanism is thought to be available to reconcile divergent points of view. Instead, in a postmodern world, order is envisioned to be a "systase."[49] Systasis means that various elements are directly integrated, without an intermediary. No abstraction is involved in this process. Luhmann transforms Gebser's idea into more social terms when he suggests that through the recognition of difference, discourse can be initiated.[50] By this he means that persons who do not adhere to a similar reality can successfully interact. Accordingly, avenues of accessibility must begin to connect realities that were formerly considered to be irreconcilable. This is what Lyotard has in mind when he writes that postmodernism "refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable."[51] Social reality, in this sense, consists of a myriad of differences, none of which is inherently superior to the other.

A concrete universal unites a postmodern society—that is, accessibility to the other. Organized diversity is the hallmark of a society based upon postmodernism. Borrowing from Proust, Deleuze declares that "transversality" allows for order. By this term he means that "unity and totality are established for themselves, without unifying or totalizing objects or subjects."[52] The fundamental moral principle at this juncture is that the integrity of the other—his or her difference—must be guaranteed at all times. Derrida writes: "There is no ethics without the presence of the other."[53] Lévinas refers to this as an ontology without metaphysics, whereby persons encounter one another "face-to-face" in a non-reductionistic manner. Individuals are treated as valuable in themselves, and not as a means for some other end prescribed by either God or the state. Society embodies a whole, but not one that dictates how persons must conduct their affairs. In fact, Lyotard labels those who transgress the language games played by others as "terrorists."[54] Obviously, order is not a consensus, because persons are not necessarily oriented by similar ideals. However, rejecting consensus is not the same as advocating anarchy or nihilism.

Critics of postmodernism are correct when they charge that both God and man are undermined by this philosophy. Yet order is not cast aside, but only the "reality *sui generis*" that is usually retained to legitimize social arrangements. In a sense, postmodernists radicalize contract theory. In addition to certain folkways, they negotiate the entire framework within which discussions about norms are undertaken. Accordingly, fundamental to the

maintenance of society are "flexible networks of language games."[55] While criticizing the dogmatism of Parsons and other functionalists, Luhmann observes that reality is sustained by "contingency formulae," rather than by an ultimate reality.[56] The basis of reality is thus "localized." Further, the *sensus communis* resides at the nexus of two or more language games. The social bond, Lyotard observes, consists of a linguistic game "agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation."[57] Accordingly, social stability results from certain linguistically inscribed meanings coming to be accepted as real. Social order, in other words, is organized in terms of discursive practices that are momentarily not questioned. As Lyotard explains, the "social universe is formed by a plurality of language games without any one of them being able to claim that it can say all to the others."[58]

Nonetheless, the relationship of the "I" to the "other" is not a natural condition. A causal mechanism or some other form of determinism does not unite persons. In fact, the "we" that is a community can be revealed only through choice. Through an authentic act, one that is self-inaugurated, a specific behavior is enacted with respect to other possibilities. Actually, if an act is stimulated by a so-called external source, the horizon of options that accompanies volition is irrelevant. Behavior understood as a response cannot contribute to a sense of community. In other words, without freedom social relations would be impossible to envision. For outside of the implicative structure that sustains choice, the "I" and the "other" cannot be understood to exist.

POSTMODERNISM AND A RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY

Hence persons are not agents of socialization when they instruct one another about the ways of the world. They speak for no one but themselves; they are not surrogates for some higher reality. Institutions are fragile, because these organizations merely record the choices that have been made pertaining to how society shall operate. Therefore, according to postmodernists, institutions are revealed only through their deformations. This is another way of saying that reality bears the imprint of judgments, and thus no longer has the status required to restrain passion. While alluding to Kant, Benjamin notes that historical institutions have a purpose that is not imposed by structural imperatives.[59] Like a *flâneur*, society meanders according to a self-imposed aim. An order is left behind that is meaningful, yet devoid of dogmatism. Humans are thus "fateless," writes Benjamin, for fate exists in an ahistorical context.[60] For this reason, a postmodern social ontology is one of danger. Obligation is secured through action, rather than

necessity. According to de Man, Hölderlin's words are truly relevant: "We are our conversation."[61] In this regard, Lévinas comments that persons encounter one another without intermediary or without achieving communion. There is no solitary individual or absolute We. Persons must risk security constantly to encounter others.

Lyotard refers to this version of order as a "self-managed" society.[62] Self-management is a theme that has become quite popular in recent years in various Marxist societies, particularly in Yugoslavia. Basic to this idéa is that jobs are meaningful only when workers are able to establish an intimate relationship with the means of production. This requires far more than allowing workers to participate at opportune times in planning the labor process. More important, the entire organization of work must reflect human needs and desires. The workplace must not regulate work; instead, the producers must design their jobs. As a group of Yugoslavian Marxists note, this requires that factories no longer be viewed as autonomous entities.[63] Rather, the "being" of these organizations must originate from human action. Order is thus legitimized through the "autonomy of interlocutors involved in ethical, social, and political praxis," as described by Lyotard.

A self-managed institution is different from a bureaucracy in several crucial respects. While authority and rules still exist, order is not imposed upon workers. Also, because workers embody the workplace, power is not something that is used, for example, against line staff to secure advantages for a select group of managers. And finally, decisions are not made in secrecy by a few experts. Organizations that are self-managed are sometimes referred to as organic, because they are flexible and responsive to social and not simply managerial concerns.

Conceived in this way, a self-managed society is responsible because order embodies the vox populi, rather than abstract imperatives. How can such an organization ever gain the autonomy necessary for it to turn against and to repress its creators? With the subversion of dualism, institutions can never acquire this much power. There is no justification for assuming that a particular form of reason, body of knowledge, or set of norms is undoubtedly real, and thus deserves to dominate the social scene. For this reason postmodernists depict society as a patchwork of contrasting positions, with the integrity of each one protected. According to Lyotard, society is a process of striving to reach a consensus that is never achieved. He argues that persons are always working at the limits of their language games, thereby constantly reinventing reason and reformulating relationships.[64]

Some writers, such as Hayek, refer to this as a "spontaneous" order.[65] Yet do postmodernists understand the formation of order to be this

capricious? Certainly not. Order is not an afterthought, resulting from the accidental confluence of idiosyncracies. Although order is not contrived, discourse is not random or haphazard. Those who want to interact work within language, through critical reflection and iteration, until a variety of mutually acceptable discursive practices are identified. Once this procedure is satisfactorily completed, a provisional government exists. Although this is a "non-empirical" order, society is not based on chance.[66] Barthes is correct when he remarks that long-forgotten beliefs substantiate both reason and order.

POSTMODERNISM AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE PHILOSOPHY

Critics claim that postmodernists are conservative and promote merely a laissez-faire approach to managing economic and other social affairs. Some writers, such as Jameson, Eagleton, and Said, suggest that postmodernism is compatible with Reaganomics and the trend toward increased deregulation of the marketplace.[67] Yet because they reject the idea that society is an abstract system, does this mean that postmodernists are proponents of the "tooth and claw" morality extolled by Herbert Spencer and most capitalists? Or, in line with Hayek, do postmodernists assume that individualized preferences are somehow brought into harmony because all rational traders are guided by similar motives? If postmodernists could be considered advocates of a laissez-faire outlook, they would probably be closer to Adam Smith than anyone else. And would Smith condone the sort of unrestrained or undisciplined economic activity that has been recently witnessed? The Scottish philosopher was careful to note that unfettered trading could easily result in barbarism, unless certain moral principles were prevalent throughout society. Shared by laissez-faire economics and postmodernism is the belief that social life is underpinned by human action. Nonetheless, these two philosophies part company on many other crucial issues.

In one respect, postmodern thinking is similar to that of Adam Smith. Postmodernists do not consider the formation of order to be ancillary to the pursuit of individual gain. Therefore, postmodernists disagree with supply-siders on a variety of key points. First, postmodernists do not focus on the individual, but on the relationship between persons. Second, rather than being spontaneous, order emerges through discourse. Third, postmodernists make very clear that legitimate discourse is non-repressive or non-coercive. And fourth, abstract factors, such as "market forces," cannot be invoked to explain either aberrations or stability at the marketplace. In general, postmodernists differ from conservative economists with regard to how

individuals, or traders, are conceptualized. According to postmodernists, persons are not ahistorical and apolitical; they are not atoms somehow brought into alignment through their desire to interact (that is, to trade).

To counteract the influence of supply-side or conservative economists, Lyotard introduced the idea of "libidinal economics."[68] He suggested that ahistorical equilibrium models are inappropriate for examining economic activity. Trading, instead, should be viewed as corporeal, whereby decisions to buy and sell are understood to reflect the various contexts in which economic actors find themselves. How persons interpret power, reason, and, as Max Weber says, their "life chances" determine the trading gambits they will make. In fact, Lyotard may be considered quite radical, for he recognizes these crucial elements of economic exchange that supply-siders choose to ignore. What could be more rarefied and stifling than a model of trade that excludes the situational exigencies noted by Lyotard, which relate to class interests?

THE SOLIPSISM OF POSTMODERNISM?

Fredric Jameson declares that subsequent to the onset of postmodernism, "Alliance Politics" is no longer possible.[69] His point is that collective action is precluded, due to the emphasis postmodernists place on individualism. This is the same criticism that is lodged against sociologists who concentrate on studying how symbolism shapes reality. These writers are referred to unaffectionately as "micro-theorists" and are assumed to be incredibly naive. Allegedly, they are oblivious to the social factors any competent analyst must concede influence daily life, such as power. Yet are persons characterized as solipsistic or asocial by postmodernists? Is the individual depicted as only remotely connected to social considerations?

If postmodernists were Cartesian in their orientation, a collective response to a problem would be impossible. The dualism attendant on Descartes' position prevents persons from coming into contact with anyone outside of themselves. Moreover, are individuals the "windowless monads" described by Leibniz, who are indirectly related to one another? According to Lyotard, "even before he is born, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course."[70] Persons face each other immediately, in other words, as "addressee" and "referent." For "no self is an island," writes Lyotard.[71] What Lyotard, and postmodernists in general, argue is that subjectivity is simultaneously intersubjectivity. Essential to postmodernism is that persons are recognized as open to the world, or, as Buber suggests, as always acting in the presence of others. In point of fact, language games are not described as self-contained, for any move influences how other gambits are planned.[72]

For postmodernists, as with Wittgenstein, private language games are impossible. Every linguistic maneuver presupposes the existence of others that are not immediately visible. Nonetheless, each move has a countermove. And as anyone knows who has ever played a game, an adequate defense cannot be formulated when offensive strategies are randomly generated. Moreover, plans that are merely reactive, according to Lyotard, are easily integrated into the future gambits of an aggressor. Pre-emptive actions are necessary to thwart an attack. In order to make a surprise move, however, the realm of possibility imagined by the offense must be understood. What is needed to describe social interaction, claims Lyotard, is a "theory of games which accepts agonistics as a founding principle."[73] Persons who pursue their own goals, and happen to come into contact with one another, are not playing a game. According to postmodernists, a game is an interactive endeavor.

Clearly, postmodernists are not advocates of solipsism. They are holistic, without reifying patterns of social discourse. Foucault and Derrida, therefore, are able to discuss the exercise of power, even class relations, while refusing to speak in systemic terms. They argue that systems do not cause repression, but rather discursive formations that are treated as absolute. Only on rare occasions nowadays are entire systems witnessed attacking their inhabitants. As Foucault suggests, such an officious mode of social control tends to antagonize persons.[74] A more efficient means of regulating citizens is to convince them that they are all part of a comprehensive system, which is well integrated, fair, and created to benefit everyone. Further, this system is rational, while all challenges to it are irrational. If the members of one class are able to manipulate symbolism in this manner, any attempt to undermine their hegemony can be easily diffused. This does not mean simply that certain persons have access to information while others do not. More important, through the use of language, those who are in power can implode reality in such a way that their position is viewed as justified, and even necessary.

Postmodernists abandon the view that power is metaphysical, or derived from history or the property owned by a particular class. Rather, power is enacted through discourse that occurs between persons, whereby one group is able to "inferiorize" another.[75] Stated differently, primacy is given to a specific form of reason, which is then accepted as distinguishing normal from abnormal social relations. "Dominant significations," according to Guattari, ravage the soul of the masses and transform these persons into sycophants, who gladly implement the policies of their oppressors.[76] Thus social control does not have to be manifestly violent or spectacular. On the other hand, however, liberation does not result from equally abstract causes, such as a zeitgeist, or professional revolutionaries. Activists must

expose the limits of reason, so that the symbolism adopted by an unpopular government can no longer stifle thinking and revolt. Emancipation occurs when persons are not intimidated by their own use of language; when the excesses of language are not repressed. Accordingly, the range of discourse will not be prematurely truncated, simply because a course of action is classified as deviant by scientists or other professionals who represent the state. Once reason is not limited to a specific segment of society, or style of language use, experimental modalities of discourse can proliferate. In sum, postmodernism is not solipsistic and thus should not be viewed as apolitical.

POSTMODERN ETHICS?

Is ethical action defunct, in view of the outlook espoused by postmodernists? Traditionally, correct action is presumed to be deduced from non-contingent standards. The early Greeks thought that Justice was a cosmological principle. In the manner recommended by Durkheim and later, functionalists, ahistorical structures are essential to insure that interaction among persons is fair and just. Nonetheless, recourse is blocked to these imperatives, because of the ubiquity of language. Due to the unavailability of a reality *sui generis*, a framework for ethics is thought to be missing from postmodernism. While it is true that postmodernists have not as yet developed a system of ethics, fragments of a theory are available.

Again, it must be remembered that postmodernists reject Cartesianism. Their concern with maintaining the integrity of praxis, therefore, does not mean that social life is obscured. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, language games intersect, thus preventing solipsism. This is what Derrida means when he says that a postmodern ethics is based on the other. As a result of recognizing intersubjective pragmatics, postmodernists have at their disposal a context for analyzing ethical behavior. What critics must mean when they assert that postmodernists consider ethics unimportant, is that behavioral mandates are not proposed. Actually, postmodernists loathe prescriptions. Yet as in all other facets of social existence, postmodernists explain ethical action with reference to the "in between." And ethical absolutes cannot be propagated within this domain.

Consistent with Buber, postmodernists argue for an ethic based on interpersonal respect.[77] Because language games are finite, no game can legitimately dominate others. In fact, according to postmodernism, repression results from the belief that select games are infinite, and thus can rob others of their integrity. Frantz Fanon, for example, explains that this is exactly how colonization is enforced.[78] Specifically, the linguistic or cultural game of those who are oppressed is disallowed. In this way, social control is

maintained. What can justify this sort of "symbolic violence"?[79] With all forms of knowledge originating from interpretation, domination such as this is not legitimate. Persons, instead, must approach one another as "I and Thou." Because others are not necessarily ancillary to a person's actions, and there simply to be manipulated, their desires must be considered when the impact of a behavior is evaluated. As Buber writes, a person is neither the individual described by Kierkegaard nor a member of a mass society.[80] Rather, persons always act in the face of real persons, who must be recognized.

Postmodernists alter Kant's maxim slightly when they suggest that only universal propositions should be given serious consideration.[81] As opposed to Kant, however, they are not referring to abstract standards, but are maintaining that acts which impugn or transgress the language games of others are invalid. Universal, in this sense, means transsubjective, rather than ahistorical. Due to the linguistic nature of reality, behavioral demands must be issued between persons, whereby the "I" and "other" are co-constituted. Barthes, for example, claims that readers are immoral when they fail to take into account the world conveyed by an author in a text.[82] Likewise, persons act irresponsibly when they make plans without recognizing the presence of others. Lyotard, accordingly, writes that justice consists of "preserving the purity of each [language] game."[83] In a postmodern world, behavior is ethical when the linguistic realm of others is recognized and preserved. Proposals that do not include the "Other" as a "Thou" are, by definition, illegitimate.

Justice, therefore, is not an eternal principle that integrates competing claims. According to postmodernists, a society is just if it fosters pluralism. In order to realize this aim, however, discourse that both protects and refutes oppositional views must be encouraged. In this sense, postmodernists are quite radical: they do not stress individualism, ignore power, or assume that order is a product of nature or some other abstract force. Because the self and the other are intimately related, this association must be integral when planning behavior, and not simply an afterthought. Therefore, justice transpires interpersonally, or within the dialogical region, and nowhere else. While their ideas are far from complete, postmodernists have embarked on a trek that demands a grounded or embodied view of ethics. Yet as should be recognized, postmodernists do not give persons a license to do whatever they please—contrary to the opinions of opponents of this philosophy. Only behavior that is sustained intersubjectively is legitimate. Therefore, postmodern philosophy disallows the rapaciousness that motivates behavior in the modern world.

POSTMODERNISM AND CORPOREAL INSTITUTIONS

As should be noted, institutions are not necessarily anathema to postmodernism. Postmodernists are not restricted to addressing simply "micro" issues, related to the pursuit of personal pleasure. Mechanisms for insuring long-term interaction among persons can also be proposed and analyzed. These institutional arrangements, nonetheless, cannot reflect so-called "aggregate demands," or be legitimized by metaphysical principles such as "social forces."[84] Typically, institutions have been viewed as satisfying deep seated needs based in human nature or society. In either case, personal or collective praxis is usually superseded by institutional requirements. The locus of order is thus externalized, in the form of what Parsons calls functional prerequisites. Institutions, accordingly, serve merely to perpetuate the rules they enforce. Stated differently, institutions are concerned primarily with their own survival.

As might be suspected, when self-preservation is of primary importance to managers, the resulting organizations gradually become socially insensitive. Modern bureaucracy is currently cited as the epitome of this trend toward more rational, yet unresponsive, institutions. Questions related to format, technique, and procedure overshadow more substantive concerns. For example, debates over the relevance of institutions are treated as disruptive. According to postmodernists, however, organizations cannot be divorced from language games. To ignore the pragmatic thrust of an institution represents a serious, possibly fatal, mistake. For bureaucracies, as will be shown in Chapter 5, stifle creativity and innovation. As a result, productivity suffers.

Postmodernists contend that technical changes alone will not remedy the flawed structure of a bureaucracy. Much more important, these institutions must be provided with a human ground. Postmodernists suggest that institutions should be established in terms of the dialogue that unites persons. In this way, a workplace, for example, can never be reified to the extent that it dictates how a job shall be undertaken. A variety of attempts have been made recently to conceptualize and to implement "self-managed" institutions that are consistent with the intent of postmodernism. These can be characterized as "organizations without control," for their purpose is not to regulate behavior, but to respond quickly and effectively to human desires.

What postmodernists want to reform is the view that social existence inherently constitutes an abstraction. They insist that society is not an impersonal body, governed by eternal laws. Rather, social relations originate from dialogue, although in the modern world this claim has come to be trivialized. In today's "Corporate Society" persons are commodities, while

morals are nothing more than platitudes expounded by crooked politicians or television evangelists. For too long, according to Jean Baudrillard, persons have been envisioned as a "silent majority," fulfilling the demands of society.[85] In fact, virtue has come to be identified with acting in ways that are socially prescribed. Yet postmodernists demonstrate that persons can forge their own identity, without sacrificing society. Personal desire, in other words, can be united with the common weal.

Postmodernists work well within the tradition of the French *moralistes*. The issue of "moral order" is paramount to both groups. Postmodernists, nonetheless, do not create a system of absolutes to guarantee the perpetuation of society. A postmodern order is predicated on openness, rather than the denial of liberty. According to postmodernists, freedom is not a threat to order. Even more to the point, postmodernists argue that freedom and order must somehow be united in a non-repressive manner, or society will only deteriorate further.

NOTES

1. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, pp. 98–101.
2. Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, pp. 353–355.
3. Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Negations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 88–133.
4. Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, p. 37.
5. Ibid., p. 67.
6. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 11; see also Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, pp. 24–44.
7. Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 75–131.
8. Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, p. 55.
9. Werner Stark, *The Fundamental Forms of Social Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1963), pp. 4–5.
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