I

The Role of Philosophical Discourse in Social Theory

Introduction

Philosophical Discourse in General

At the dawn of history there were but two forms of discourse, the sacred and the profane, myth and ordinary speech. With Greek philosophy theoretical discourse (*logos*) broke off from *mythos*. And so with Aristotle all theoretical inquiry fits under the heading "philosophy." Since then one branch of theoretical discourse after another has split from philosophy. Natural philosophy gave way to the various natural sciences, political philosophy begat political science, economics, and sociology, and in our own day linguistics has arisen from the philosophy of language. It would seem that these inquiries have divided up the world among themselves, each discipline selecting some particular area to investigate. What, if anything, does this leave as a subject matter for philosophical discourse?

After all the other disciplines have completed dividing up the world among themselves there remain four types of questions not yet considered. Philosophical discourse is that form of speech in which such questions are considered and answers to them are proposed. First, each of the other forms of theoretical inquiry are directed towards a particular realm of objects in the world. But besides the objects thought, there is the thinking itself. This thinking can be treated as just another object in the world to be investigated, in which case it is psychology that undertakes the investigation. But

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this thinking can also be considered as providing an ultimate framework within which all objects (including thought processes *qua* objects) appear. At the most fundamental level one could attempt to articulate the set of basic categories that makes experience coherent and intelligible (e.g., Kant and, more thoroughly, Hegel). Or one could restrict oneself to a particular discipline and investigate the ultimate categories used in that discipline. A physicist, for example, employs the category "time" with reference to specific physical processes; a philosopher of science (who, of course, may also be a physicist) considers the category "time" in its most general significance. Because the ultimate categories we employ determine what sorts of entities are manifest in the world, we may term this first form of philosophical speech *categorial-ontological* discourse.

One category deserves special mention. In both ordinary speech and theoretical discourse the category "truth" is used. Usually this is done in an unreflective fashion. What are the different meanings of this word? How are they related? When – if ever – is it legitimate to employ it? These questions are discussed in a second form of philosophical discourse, *epistemological* discourse.

A third area of investigation that remains after the other disciplines have divided up the world is that of normative questions. Norms are, of course, present in the world in the form of beliefs held by individuals and cultural standards regulating the life of communities. As such they are objects investigated by disciplines such as psychology and anthropology. But the question of whether norms are valid or not cannot be answered by any empirical discipline. To raise and attempt to answer this question is to engage in a third form of philosophical speech, *normative* discourse.

Lastly, other theoretical concerns focus on a particular realm of the world. It is, of course, possible from the perspective of one discipline to consider the relevance of another discipline to its own concerns. In doing so one is still engaged in the first discipline. But it is also possible to ask how a set of diciplines fit together. For example, both neurophysiology and literary studies teach us about human activity. If we ask how the results of these two investigations can be put together, we are doing neither neurophysiology nor literary studies. From Aristotle through Aquinas to Hegel and beyond, philosophy has claimed this meta level for itself. Here the task is to take the re-

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sults of other investigations and synthesize them into a single coherent perspective to the greatest degree possible. We may term this final form of philosophical speech *systematic* discourse.

Philosophical Discourse within Social Theory

The concern of the present chapter is the role of philosophical discourse within social theory.[1] Social theorists who are also philosophers must regularly confront the question of the nature of philosophical discourse. They must do so in debate with two opposing camps. On one side there are those who feel that philosophy has nothing but obfuscating abstractions to contribute to social theory and that social theorists should concentrate exclusively on empirical inquiries and practical actions. On the other side there are those who feel that merely engaging in philosophical investigations gives philosophers a warrant to pronounce on the social issues of the day. By considering the role of philosophical discussion within social theory I hope to cast some light on the nature of philosophical speech in general. But I also wish to argue against the above two views. Against those who would limit social theory to empirical investigations and practical actions I hope to show the necessity of philosophical discourse within social theory. And against those philosophers who feel competent to pronounce on social issues without a deep and critical appropriation of the relevant facts I hope to show the limitations of philosophical discussion within social theory.

What, then, is social theory? Like other forms of theorizing, social theory can be fixed in terms of the sorts of questions it attempts to answer. Initially we can include under this heading all those disciplines that attempt to answer two questions: How are we to grasp social reality? How are we to transform social reality? All those inquiries concerned with the first question are termed *social science*. All those disciplines concerned with the second question are termed *social policy*. Further reflection establishes the need for a third heading. A divine intellect could grasp all reality at once. But our finite intellects must proceed discursively. A precondition for social science, then, is that we select some limited portion of actuality to investigate. Likewise a divine will could create a totally perfect world at once. But our finite wills must proceed in a more limited fashion.

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A precondition for social policy, then, is that we select some limited goals to attain. Interests and values come into play as preconditions for both social science and social policy, as it is interests and values that determine what portions of reality are to be selected for our investigation and what goals are to be chosen for our action. A third branch of social theory deals with these matters, which we may term *social ethics*.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall consider social science, social ethics, and social policy in turn. Each of these headings will be further subdivided; there are altogether nine branches of social theory (see Table 1.1). For each branch I shall consider the role played by the various forms of philosophical discourse, categorial-ontological, epistemological, normative, and systematic. Various positions in philosophical debates that have arisen within social theory will be mentioned as illustrations. No attempt will be made at this point to prove the correctness of one or another position. My goal here is not to resolve any philosophical issue. My goal here is to outline a complete system of social theory and to derive from this outline a systematic account of all the places where philosophical discourse contributes to social theory. Thus this chapter is itself a proof writ large of the contribution philosophical discourse can make to social theory. *Only* philosophical discourse can show the systematic connections among the different branches and thereby make the whole intelligible.

Table 1.1 The Branches of Social Theory

A. SOCIAL SCIENCE
   1. empirical research
   2. empirical theories
   3. empirical models

B. SOCIAL ETHICS
   4. value analysis
   5. selection of normative principles
   6. evaluations

C. SOCIAL POLICY
   7. normative models
   8. strategies
   9. tactics

Social Science

It is customary to divide up "social science" according to the various familiar empirical disciplines, each of which has a distinct object of investigation (e.g., political science for political institutions, economics for the production and distribution of goods and services, etc.). For our purposes however, it is more helpful to make the principle of division the different questions posed in the course of investigations in the social sciences. In the course of answering the general question, "How is social reality to be grasped?" three more specific questions arise: What are the particular facts regarding social reality? How can we account for these particular facts? What can we know of social structures in general? The three branches of social science answer these questions. They are, respectively, *empirical research, empirical theory,* and *empirical model construction.*

1. Empirical Research

All attempts to collect information regarding what the facts are in society fit under this branch of social theory. Examples range from public opinion surveys to estimates of tonnage of steel production in a given year, from researching diaries left by communities of the distant past to the latest unemployment figures. Here, where social theory is the closest to concrete social reality, a number of philosophical questions arise. While we cannot yet talk of systematic issues, categorial-ontological, epistemological, and normative issues are posed.

Categorial-ontological. The most basic categorial-ontological issue is where, if anywhere, the line between "nature" and "society" is to be drawn, a distinction which involves that between "person" and "nonperson." Because this issue determines the possible scope of any empirical research in social theory, it must be resolved prior (in a logical sense) to any specific research. Once made, this decision is not without further implications for the research. There is a direct correlation between different views on the distinction and the methodologies deemed appropriate for empirical research in social theory. On one end of the spectrum there are those who insist on an extremely sharp distinction between persons and non-persons, society and nature. For them qualitative methods of research alone are legiti-

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mate, quantitative ones being restricted to the investigation of non-persons (ethnomethodology, Garfinkel, Goffman, etc.) On the other end of the spectrum are those for whom the distinction between persons and nonpersons is virtually nonexistent. For them the quantitative research methods that have proven so effective in research in the natural sciences are the only reliable tools for social research as well (e.g., behaviorism). For those who hold an in-between position, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods is appropriate.

Once the division between the natural and the social realms has been fixed, a second categorial-ontological issue arises: What are to count as entities within the social realm? No one would deny that individual social agents are to count as entities. But empirical research in social theory would be pointless and blind if it were restricted to inquiring into randomly selected individuals. For empirical research to proceed intelligently the social world must already have been divided up into various groups. To know, for example, how many individuals belong to a certain class or race is a matter for empirical research. But in order to undertake this research the social realm must already have been divided up according to classes and races. This is a matter of social ontology. A socal ontology must be accepted at least implicitly before empirical research can begin. Likewise the lines separating one class from another or one race from another are not simply given empirically. These too are categorial-ontological matters that must be settled prior (logically) to undertaking specific research (although subsequent research may lead the researcher to modify where the lines are drawn).

Epistemological. What is the cognitive status of a social ontology? Are all social ontologies simply socially determined, that is, relative to a particular culture? Or are they relative to the interests of particular researchers? Or can some ways of dividing up the social world claim a validity beyond this? If so, how can such validity be established? Then there are the familiar epistemological questions regarding the research itself, as opposed to the framework within which the research is conducted. What is to count as evidence? What effect does the presence of the researcher have upon the subjects of the research? How and to what extent can these effects be controlled? And so on.

Normative. It is quite obvious that value commitments shape to a considerable degree the way the results of the empirical research are presented. For example, a defender of the capitalist order will point to the quite sharp rise in living standards for U.S. workers since the recession of the early 1980s. In contrast, a critic of that order will point out that real gross weekly wages after the recession remained lower than those attained in 1972. Two other ways in which values operate in research are more hidden. First, values shape the very categories used in empirical research. The U.S. government, for example, does not include under the category "unemployed" those who, knowing they have no chance to find employment, have ceased to look for work. Those holding a more negative evaluation of the capitalist order than the federal government no doubt would consider unemployed discouraged workers as unemployed. Second, the values of the researcher determine the questions asked in the research – and those that are not asked. For decades considerable resources have been spent in the U.S. researching fluctuations in the money supply. But until quite recently no statistics were collected regarding how many firms have engaged in large layoffs of a hundred or more. Clearly the only way we can explain why the first sort of research was undertaken and the second not is by noting that certain value commitments were made prior (logically) to undertaking the research.

Another area where normative issues arise involves the results to which the research is to be applied. Few ethical theorists would dispute that we are morally responsible for the rationally foreseeable results of our acts. Many of the applications of a researcher's work may not be rationally foreseeable to her or him. But many applications are foreseeable, and for these the researcher can be held morally accountable. Market research devoted exclusively toward learning how best to manipulate subjects to purchase unsafe products presupposes the value judgment that such manipulation is acceptable. This is so even when the researcher never reflects on the connection between his or her research and the subsequent manipulation.

We have seen that social theorists engaged in empirical research must take positions on philosophical issues regarding social ontology, the question of truth, and normative commitments, prior (logically) to undertaking their research. For the most part, however, they are not aware of having done this. Philosophical discourse makes the im-

plicit explicit. It articulates in speech the categorial-ontological, epistemological, and normative decisions that have been made. By doing so, it now is possible for the first time to consider the validity of these decisions in a discourse involving a community of speakers. This points to the profound necessity for philosophical discourse. Philosophy brings to light what otherwise would remain hidden, and it allows views to be discussed which otherwise would be simply presupposed.

The limitations of philosophical discourse here are twofold. First, answering the philosophical issues does no more than make explicit the framework for empirical research. The research itself, of course, remains to be done. Second, the philosopher ought always to be open to the possibility that the results of the research may suggest the desirability of revising this framework. Research in the sociology of knowledge, for example, may suggest that a social ontology defended by philosophers as universal and necessary may be conditioned by the class position of intellectuals within a given social order. This in itself does not refute the philosophical claim. Nonetheless it should set off a process of critical self-reflection on the part of philosophers. It is surely as important that philosophers be open to the possibility of revising philosophical views due to empirical research, as that empirical researchers be open to the necessity of reflecting upon the philosophical views implicit in their research.

2. *Empirical Theories*

How can we account for the results of empirical research? All the answers to this question given by the various social sciences fit under this second branch of social theory. Such accounts are concrete in the sense that they are concerned with individual events or processes, or with recurrent patterns of events or processes. Our discussion of the relevance of philosophical discourse to this branch of social theory can be brief, since philosophy's role here is parallel to that in empirical research.

Categorial-ontological. The categorial-ontological question concerning how to delineate the social realm arises in this second branch of social theory no less than in the first. It affects not only the method of collecting data but also the methodology of theory construction.

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Here too there is a direct correlation between one's answer to this problem and the methodology that one can consistently employ, and here too it is the former that has logical priority. If a sharp gap between the natural and the social is accepted, then the social sciences must construct theories that are radically distinct from the natural sciences. They will, for example, be seen as being concerned with the interpretation of meanings (hermeneutics). If the line between nature and society is seen as being thin to nonexistent, then the model of natural science will be transposed to social inquiry. The goal of empirical accounts will then be to formulate explanatory laws with predictive powers (positivism). If one's way of categorizing the social world is somewhere in between these two poles, then some sort of combination of explanatory and interpretive methods will be seen as appropriate (Marx, Weber). Thus the philosophical issue must be resolved prior (logically) to the actual construction of empirical theories. Usually the philosophical commitments are made without conscious reflection. Here too the role of philosophical discourse is to bring these choices out into the open, where they can be discussed and evaluated.

Epistemological. Another sort of philosophical issue here concerns the cognitive status of the empirical theories of social science. How are we to consider the truth claims made for these theories? Are they to be taken in a realist sense? Or are they purely instrumental? How are the truth claims to be verified or falsified? Here too the social scientist makes claims whose soundness can only be tested in philosophical speech.

Normative. Just as with empirical research, the ways empirical theories are organized and the sorts of questions they answer or ignore are a function of the value commitments of the social scientists. Likewise social scientists share in the moral responsibility for the rationally foreseeable uses to which their theories are put. Even as staunch a defender of "value-free" social science as Max Weber recognized that values play these sorts of roles in social science (1949, passim).

More controversial is the claim that the very categories employed in constructing a theory involve value judgments (Habermas 1970b). Consider the attempt to account for wage contracts in a given capitalist society. In most writings from bourgeois labor economists the theories

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that attempt to account for these events employ the category "choice." Marxist economists point out that wage laborers must as a class sell their labor power to one or another member of the class that privately owns/controls the society's productive resources if they wish to guarantee their subsistence. Marxists therefore use the category "coercion" rather than "choice" in their theories. Here it is fairly clear that the very categories used in the construction of an empirical theory suggest value judgments. And there are few, if any, cases of social science theories in other areas where this is not the case as well. In this sense there are grounds to doubt whether there is any value-free social science. But in another sense Weber was right; social science may be value-free in the following sense. Even if the categories social scientists employ suggest certain value judgments, they are never committed to those value judgments even while they employ these categories. More precisely, they may be committed to the values implicit in the categories they use prima facie. But it is always possible for other factors to outweigh this commitment when it comes time for the social scientists to take a value stand.

Weber himself is the best example of the above. Practically alone among bourgeois social scientists, he insisted that the category to be used in accounting for wage contracts in capitalism be "coercion,"[2] a category as evaluative as it is descriptive. But while this category suggests a negative evaluation of capitalism, in his own social ethics Weber nonetheless defended this sort of system on other grounds. In principle this is fully legitimate. No matter how value-laden the categories used in the construction of theories may be, the social scientist who employs these categories is not ultimately committed to any specific set of value judgments. However, few social scientists are as sophisticated in this regard as Weber. So here we have another role for philosophical discourse. It is the task of philosophy both to explicate the values implicit in the categories used in social science, and to insist on the distinction between employing value-laden concepts and making value commitments.

Systematic. We have considered two branches of social theory thus far: empirical research and empirical theories. When one inquires into the systematic connection between them, one is doing neither research nor empirical theory. Such metalevel inquiry is an instance

of philosophical discourse. Here the main issue involves the notion of "theory-free observation." To what extent, if any, does empirical research provide access to a reality "independent" of the theoretical framework of the researcher? This question, of course, is directly connected to the question of the cognitive status of both the results of empirical research and the results of empirical theory.

It take it as fairly accepted that while there may be a dumb staring that is not informed by theory, such is not true of observation, or at least not of that observation relevant to questions of verifying theories. This premise implies that in a strict sense one cannot consider research independently from theory construction and leads to a systematic point regarding social theory in general. We shall see that no branch of social theory can fulfill its task without being informed by work done in all the other branches. It is important to recognize the distinct problematics defining each branch, the distinct methods each branch employs, and so forth. Fundamental category mistakes result when these distinctions are not kept clear. Nonetheless, it is also true that these branches form a unity. To treat any one branch as if it could be pursued independently from the rest would be most misleading.

3. Empirical Models

Empirical research and empirical theories are concerned with the investigation and accounting for specific events, structures, and processes in the social world. But scientific assertions can also be made at a more general level. Some examples may help here. Social scientists may research and attempt to explain unemployment levels in specific capitalist countries, say in Brazil in 1920s, the United States in the 1950s, etc. But they may also consider what general tendencies regarding employment follow as a general rule given the set of basic institutions that defines a capitalist social structure. The defender of a "free market" will derive an immanent tendency to an equilibrium at which full employment is attained, while a Marxist will derive a structural tendency for a reserve army of the unemployed to be formed. Social scientists who make assertions of this sort cannot limit themselves to empirical research and empirical theories. They must construct empirical models of social systems (or

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parts thereof) and deduce immanent structural tendencies from those models.

Similarily it is possible to consider the particular social transformations that occurred in France or Peru during a specific historical period. But it is also possible to ask to what extent there are general patterns of development in social history. This question too demands a distinct theoretical activity, one concerned with the construction of abstract models. In both cases philosophical issues arise.

Categorial-ontological. The main ontological issue here is that of the status to be assigned to the constructed models. For Weber these models are mere thought entities ("ideal types") made up by the social scientist to aid in the construction of empirical theories. They have no independent existence of their own. Marx, in contrast, makes a much stronger ontological claim. Much of *Capital* is devoted to working out a model of the capitalist mode of production and its general tendencies. In his view this model fixes the essence of capitalist societies, the depth level of the capitalist system that underlies surface level appearances. The speech within which this sort of issue is discussed is philosophical.

Epistemological. In this branch of social science models of social systems and processes are constructed that somehow relate to the historical societies more concretely investigated in empirical research and empirical theories. But if no empirical theory is ever directly refuted or verified by any bit of empirical research, so much more is it the case that no construction of a model of a social system or process can ever be directly refuted or verified by any bit of empirical theory or empirical research. To what degree, then, do empirical theories and empirical research provide a check on the construction of these models? This question is connected with one's views on the ontological status of the models. If one believes with Weber that ideal types are simply tools, the models will be subject to the single criterion relevant to any tool, usefulness. If a model proves helpful in any way for constructing empirical hypotheses and orienting research, then it has been "verified." If, however, one believes that a model of a social system or process ought to grasp the essence of historically existing societies, then more stringent criteria for the adequacy of the model are demanded. It must, for instance, be able to

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give an adequate account of the appearances in those societies. The question of the criteria by which the epistemological validity of models is to be measured is another example of a specifically philosophical issue.

Normative. In constructing models of social systems and processes the social scientist must always abstract from some of the information presented in empirical research and empirical theories. Any principle for deciding how to do this will involve the values of the social scientist. A libertarian, for example, in constructing a model of a capitalist social system will stress those features which make it plausible to assert that an "invisible hand" behind market transactions ensures the common good, and assert that everything else is contingent and nonessential to the system. In contrast, a Marxist will stress those features which ensure the recurrence of class struggle, and assert that everything else is contingent and nonessential. Such differences are inevitable; no models can be constructed without values coming into play in this manner. But it is not inevitable that the social scientist is aware that value judgments are operating here. For this awareness the social scientist must be willing to engage in philosophical discourse regarding normative matters.

Systematic. We have already referred to the feedback relationship between model construction on the one side and empirical theories and empirical research on the other. The materials for constructing a model of a social system or process are taken from empirical research and empirical theories, and the usefulness/truth of a model is somehow measured by the results of empirical research and empirical theories. Conversely, the investigations of researchers and empirical theorists must be oriented by models in order to select what sorts of questions theories should answer and where among the infinite manifold of reality researchers should investigate. To point out that (to coin a phrase) empirical theories and research without models are blind, while models without empirical theories and research are empty, is to engage in neither research, nor theory, nor model construction. It is to take a metalevel stance and engage in philosophical discourse. As we proceed we shall see from this metalevel perspective that model construction is extremely significant in other branches of social theory yet to be considered, especially normative models.

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Social Ethics

We have noted that normative issues arise in empirical research, empirical theories, and the construction of empirical models. We shall see below that they arise in social policy no less than in social science. In a fully worked-out social theory these issues are explicitly confronted. For the first time philosophical discourse is not a mere servant to other sorts of inquiry, as was the case in the first three branches of social science. Instead, philosophical discourse now takes center stage (although, as will be seen, it must share the stage somewhat). The main issues to be discussed under the heading of social ethics can be divided up into three questions: What are the various possible value systems? Out of the various possible systems of values, which should be selected? What specific evaluations of social phenomena can be justified in terms of the selected value system? Accordingly, three further branches of social theory are to be discussed here: *value analysis, selection of normative principles,* and *evaluations.* All are examples of philosophical discourse in the normative mode.

4. *Value Analysis*

The task of social theorists engaged in value analysis is a complex one. They must (1) articulate the various ultimate principles used in normative argumentation; (2) derive the secondary principles that follow logically from each of those first principles; (3) enumerate the values which, while not logically deducible from any given ultimate principle, are logically compatible with it; and (4) list those values which are not logically compaptible with a given ultimate normative principle. In this way the plurality of different value systems is brought to light, along with the inner logical structure of these systems. These value systems can be differentiated according to the scope to which they apply. Ethical principles can have a scope extending to the individual alone, or can be limited to a group, or can extend to a universal moral community.

Categorial-ontological. Two sorts of categorial-ontological questions arise in all the branches of social ethics. While not themselves normative issues, taking a position on them (whether explicitly or implicitly) is a condition of the possibility for engaging in normative

discourse. First, how should the ultimate categories employed in normative discourse be fixed? In formulating the various value systems certain basic terms will be used, such as "obligation," "right," "good," etc. These categories must be defined prior (logically) to constructing the plurality of different value systems with their aid. Second, what is the ontological status of these value systems? Some philosophers (e.g., N. Hartmann and Max Scheler) have argued that these value systems form an ontological realm of their own. Other branches of philosophy (hermeneutics, Marxism, etc.) deny this.

Epistemological. In constructing value systems no special epistemological issues seem to arise. The procedures employed in deriving value systems from basic normative principles and in testing the logical compatibility/incompatibility of other values with a given value system do not differ in essentials from familiar logical tools. But epistemological questions do arise regarding how we come into contact with values in the first place. Answers here range from the naturalism of pragmatists to the transcendental intuitionism defended by certain phenomenologists. Different answers to this question will lead to different views on the epistemological criteria for coming to know values.

Systematic. Value analysis is connected to the other branches of social theory considered thus far in a number of ways. First, philosophers who attempt to explore the plurality of possible value systems would be well advised to include in their studies intensive work in areas such as the sociology of religion. Most philosophers are familiar with but a handful of ultimate normative principles. The sociology of religion makes one sensitive to just how vast the number of ultimate principles people have lived by is, thereby helping the philosopher avoid ethnocentrism.

Second, value analysis has an important role to contribute to the theorizing that attempts to account for the behavior of individuals and groups. Such behavior is often motivated by the belief that the behavior is consistent with ultimate values held by the individual or group. These motivations can serve as causes of the behavior. Any theory that attempts to account for this behavior must acknowledge this causal role. It therefore must incorporate reference to the underlying value systems. Of course, people are not always rational. And

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so the actual behavior will often diverge from that which is logically demanded by adherence to a given value system. Nonetheless, people often enough do act in a fairly rational manner, in which case knowledge of the value system that motivates the action can be extremely helpful in accounting for their actions. And in cases of something less than fully consistent action, knowledge of value systems can help measure the divergence between a person or group's conscious intention and the actual behavior. This is surely relevant to any attempt to propose theories to account for that behavior.

Third, constructing a full model of a social system in the third branch of social theory requires constructing an ideal type of the cultural subsystem. An ideal type of the system of normative principles defining a culture will also rarely have the logical coherence possessed by a value system worked out in value analaysis. Weber, for instance, stressed that the ideal type "Protestant Ethic" includes cultural values that are *not* consistent with the ultimate first principle of the ethic, unconditioned faith in a God who has predestined all. Nonetheless, working out logically consistent value systems can aid in the construction of models of systems of cultural beliefs in that (a) the latter will always have *some* degree of internal coherence; and (b) to the extent they are not fully coherent, the results of value analysis allow the social theorist to measure this divergence.

Finally, value analysis is important for allowing social scientists to reflect on the value stances orienting their own research, empirical theorizing, and model construction. Confronting the plurality of different possible value systems will lead reflective social scientists to greater insights regarding how the specific value systems to which they adhere affect the questions they ask, the categories they use, their acceptance of the foreseeable ways in which their work will be used, and so forth.

5. Selection of Principles

Once the plurality of different possible value systems has been presented, the next task is to select one for the orientation of both social science and social policy. No new categorial-ontological issues arise here.

Epistemological. Perhaps the central issue in social ethics is that of the

cognitive status of a selected normative principle. Can we know that one normative principle has validity and another doesn't? And if so, how? There are three general types of grounds for selecting a normative principle. The selection could be based either on a decision by the individual theorist, or derived from one or another cultural tradition. Both of these views involve epistemological scepticism, as ultimately no cognitive grounds for defending the validity of a normative principle can be given. The third approach asserts that there are cognitive grounds for establishing the validity of a normative principle.

Systematic. Once a set of principles has been selected, it forms the horizon within which social science (and, as we shall see, social policy) take place. The necessity of philosophical discourse in social theory is perhaps nowhere more clear. More hidden from view, however, is the limitation of this philosophical discourse. Social theorists do not act within a social vacuum. They have been socialized within the dominant world views of their day. It is inevitable, then, that their search for ultimate first principles will often initially conclude with the first principles of these world views. Further, their professional lives revolve around employment, promotion, grants and publications, each of which provides rewards and punishments that serve as filtering devices. It is not necessarily the case that these devices simply filter out views that fail to meet sufficiently rigourous academic standards. It is at least possible that they also tend to filter out views incompatible with the world-views dominant in the society. In this case social theorists may tend to select certain normative principles without noticing that the system of rewards and punishments in their field has preselected that choice. To guard against this, the social theorist must make every effort to become informed of relevant social science investigations. This means investigating matters such as how given socioeconomic interests tend to be compatible with some values and incompatible with others; how the organizations within which social theory is pursued can be structured so as to reward those with value perspectives compatible with certain socioeconomic interests and not others; how intellectuals as a class tend to take on a world-view reflecting their position in the social system, and so forth. Even when social theorists take into account

all the relevant findings on these issues, they still may not ever be totally sure their pronouncements are not ideological in nature. But if these findings are not taken into account, it is quite likely that the line between philosophical discourse and ideological discourse will be imperceptible.

6. *Evaluations*

Having selected a specific value system, the next task for the social theorist is to apply it. This is a twofold task. First, the normative principles are to be applied to the ethical evaluation of the general models of the various social systems and processes. This task is central to political philosophy. For instance, models of slave, feudal, laissez-faire capitalist, welfare-state capitalist, bureaucratic socialist, and democratic socialist social systems can be evaluated from a utilitarian, Rawlsian, libertarian, or Habermasian ethical standpoint. Second, the normative principles are to be applied to the evaluation of specific structures or practices that occur within a given social system. This inquiry is termed *applied ethics*.

Our discussion of this branch of social theory can be brief. No new categorial-ontoloical issues arise. But one systematic point must be stressed. Philosophers engaged in this branch of social theory cannot adequately evaluate either specific practices or general models prior to having attained a detailed knowledge of those practices and models. This requires that social ethicists work closely with social scientists.

Another point involves both systematic and epistemological considerations. I have already acknowledged above that there is a sense in which some work in social science may be said to be "value-free." From a systematic perspective it is possible to combine work in different branches of social theory. More specifically, it is possible to combine work in social science with normative evaluations. (This sort of social science is termed "critical social science," and will be the topic of Chapter II.) What is the epistemological status of the resulting synthesis? Can it also claim scientific standing? Or must it be dismissed as mere ideology? Might the answer vary from case to case? If so, what criteria can be used to distinguish one case from another?

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