

Introduction

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I

At the center of the contemporary clash between modernist and postmodernist thinking is a struggle over questions regarding the nature, procedures, justification, and outcomes of scholarly inquiry. Regardless of the stance taken on these questions—defense of modernist aims, resistance to them, the reconstruction of inquiry, or the radical advocacy of postmodernist forms of skepticism—rethinking is the order of the day. It is the motif of the essays in this volume.

Most of the essays are written by and for social scientists, but the issues they address and the arguments they make are pertinent to the interests of scholars across the academy. That it is not only the social sciences that are engaged in the intellectual ferment of our time is amply demonstrated by the inclusion in this volume of essays written by representatives of the humanities and natural sciences. In all, the disciplines represented include economics, English, philosophy, administrative and organizational theory, anthropology, psychology, political science, rhetoric, geography, and computer sciences.

Clearly there is a conversation going on within and across disciplines, however discordant the voices may appear on the surface. While essay themes vary—from method to operations of the mind to the concept of the self, from social responsibility to reason and wisdom—common themes and questions appear throughout the volume: how knowledge should be understood, what the relationship is between values and knowledge, and how knowledge should be pursued, justified, and put into use in practical affairs. The essays are at one in trying to move the conversation in productive ways, and this—as Richard Rorty would have it—is about as much as we could expect or want in these turbulent times.

II

Part I presents general theoretical perspectives. We lead off with McCloskey's broad-gauged assault on the ramparts of methodism. The notion of method takes on different coloration within the various disciplines. In philosophy, it has entailed the dominance of epistemology (the study of the methods and grounds of knowledge) over moral and political philosophy; whereas in the social sciences, as Sheldon Wolin has explained, it has involved the presupposition that "the fundamental purposes and arrangements served by [social science] techniques have been settled"¹ and a consistent effort to separate out or bracket questions of morality and practical action.² According to the "methodist" perspective, the social scientist is a "neutral" observer whose values are kept in abeyance insofar as his or her research is concerned.

McCloskey pokes holes in this still widely accepted view of social science methodology. He argues that the love for demarcating Science (with a capital S) from the rest of culture ought to be abandoned in favor of a looser, less methodologically oriented understanding of what science (with a small s) entails. He argues that the preoccupation with method distorts our understanding of the true nature of science and has created a false barrier between Science and the humanities.

McCloskey's landmark work on the rhetoric of economics has established him as a leading figure in the scholarly efforts to break down this barrier and to bring to light essential commonalities that are shared by all the formal disciplines. It is difficult to assess the impact of this message on the ongoing work of the individual social science disciplines. One obvious outcome of the attack on, and loss of faith in, methodism has been the creation of small pockets of resistance within the individual disciplines. Scholars of resistance, like McCloskey and George Marcus, want nothing less than a complete realignment of guiding paradigms. At present, their efforts have encountered a considerable degree of counterresistance and indifference; and the question of whether or not the social sciences in time will take new and quite different forms remains an open one.

McCloskey also gives us a brief introduction to his candidate for a new guiding paradigm, the notion of rhetoric, which he considers the theory and practice of argumentation. Regardless of discipline, he believes, all scholars argue. This paradigm is closely aligned to Walter R. Fisher's concept of *homo narrans*, which entails viewing all communication, from the informal conversations of everyday life to the highly formal presentation of scientific theories, as instances of narration. As

McCloskey and Fisher indicate, the concepts of rhetoric and narration have attracted wide interest, and a considerable body of new literature which explores their uses and implications has grown up in recent years.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith advances the claim that thought and action are infused with what she calls "the conditionality of value," "all the way down" and without exception. Her position is rightly understood as representing a direct denial of philosophical and scientific claims of absolute neutrality and objectivity. Some believe that a position such as the one that she takes leads us into the abyss of relativism, a charge that she takes some pains to refute.

Insofar as Herrnstein Smith's essay is taken to be a comment about science, it expresses a view that has gathered great force in recent years. A series of studies of how scientists actually conduct their work—beginning with Thomas Kuhn's landmark work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and including David Hull's *Science as a Social Process* and Martin Rudwick's *The Great Devonian Controversy*—have emphasized the extent to which scientific research is a social process in which competing values and interests have a crucial role to play.³ None of these authors is led to adopt a skeptical view of scientific knowledge as a result of their findings, but each does maintain that the rigid view of scientific objectivity must be abandoned.

Herrnstein Smith employs an economic model to explain how values operate, and incorporates the activities of science within a general value framework. Fisher's concept of narration likewise encompasses science within a general framework that includes questions of value. However, while she allows, at best, for the rationality of the individual actor trying to find a sensible way in the vast supermarket of late modernity, Fisher presents narrative thought as a kind of overarching reason. My own sympathies are with Fisher and other thinkers who are struggling to develop a concept of reason that is suitable to the complex times in which we live.

The collection's most direct analysis of fundamental epistemological questions is to be found in Aaron Ben-Ze'ev's chapter on cognitive organization. He presents two paradigms of how knowledge is structured in the mind: the container model, which he associates with John Locke, and the schema model, which he and Helen Couclelis and Michael Arbib claim is the best available general account of what the cognitive sciences are learning about the basic nature of cognitive organization. This approach to epistemology is to be distinguished from the alternative and more prominent one which focuses, instead, upon the question of how "reality" is represented in the mind or, as Rorty has

put it, how the mind can “mirror reality.” Ben-Ze’ev’s analysis of the operations of schema provides the basis for the defense of an epistemological position that he calls “constitutive realism.”

However, his position in the debates between realists and idealists is of less interest to me than two other implications that follow from the line that he is following. First, the cognitive approach establishes a bond of common interest between philosophy and the cognitive sciences. We no longer are limited, as were Locke and Kant, to armchair speculation about the nature of mental processes. Methods for testing and exploring the implications of various models of the mind facilitate the mutual influence of philosophy and cognitive science. These connections are explored further in the chapters by Couclelis and Arbib in Part IV. Second, the notion of schema is consistent with a generally holistic understanding of reality and with theories and methods that are in accord with holistic assumptions.

There is, thus, a strong, familial resemblance between the chapters on schema theory and Charles Taylor’s discussion of the “dialogical self.” Taylor maintains that the modern conception of the “self” as an isolated entity and the reification of “the disengaged first-person-singular self [are] already evident in the founding figures of the modern epistemological tradition, for instance, in Descartes and Locke.” The essay brings to light the extent to which the individualist view of the subject is taken for granted within the social sciences, and advocates a revision of basic social science thought that would take into account the sense in which human action might be comprehended as being of a “dialogical” nature.

From the standpoint of the old epistemology, all acts were monological, although often the agent coordinates his/her actions with those of others. But this notion of coordination fails to capture the way in which some actions require and sustain an integrated agent. Think of two people sawing a log with a two-handed saw; or a couple dancing. A very important feature of human action is rhythming, cadence. Every apt, coordinated gesture has a certain flow.

Taylor, however, is a moral and political philosopher, not a social scientist. From a moral perspective, the replacement of the notion of the discrete and separate moral agent with a dialogical one creates a conception of an “ethical space” that is integrated in such a way as to call into question the individualistic biases that are to be found in many forms of moral philosophizing.

Part II is devoted to three essays by social scientists. Superficially, these essays share very little in common. Their concerns, problems, and basic orientations are those of specific disciplines. Each author, though, makes a very significant break with dominant social science paradigms; and each would agree, I think, that it is much more important for the social scientist to attempt to understand and explain significant social questions in all their complexity than it is for him or her to adhere to methodological orthodoxy.

Donald Schon, a leading organizational theorist with extensive experience as an advisor to large public and private institutions, finds that the "technical rationality" of the social scientist researcher

leads to a dilemma of rigor and relevance. If researchers tilt toward rigor, according to the standards of normal science, they risk becoming irrelevant to practitioners' demands for knowledge that is usable under the pressured and often confusing conditions of everyday practice; if they tilt toward relevance, on the other hand, they tend by the same standards to become unrigorous.

The essay focuses on alternative understandings of the concept of causality. Its application within the paradigm of technical-rationality, he maintains, fails "to provide knowledge usable by practitioners in the everyday world of organizations." This troubling observation leads him to redefine his own role as a social scientist. The task that he sets for himself is that of clarifying the ways in which practitioners employ causal thinking to try to understand and control critical events that occur from time to time in organizational life. This critical shift of perspective has far-reaching consequences. The social scientist ceases to be a strictly disengaged observer, and he or she abandons the assumption that the formal, technical knowledge of the detached, disinterested analyst is superior to that of the practitioner who is immersed in the daily problems of organizational life. This is not to deny the extent to which the posture of the observer, enjoying as she does a certain distance from events, enables her to identify commonalities across individual cases and to construct theoretical generalizations about the significance of these commonalities. However, in the kind of work that Schon is doing here, generalities emerge from the concreteness of experience rather than being imposed upon it.

Concern about the dubious role of the disengaged observer is a central theme in the extended critique of ethnography in anthropology presented by Marcus. He writes, for instance, that the belief that the ethnographer can be a competent translator of the distinctive forms of

life that are the objects of field study ignores “the various blindnesses, evasions, and indeed fictions that had to be created to reap the very important insights that ethnography has produced.” Anthropology, he tells us, is moving toward a conception of reflexive interaction between the observer and the world he is trying to describe and understand.

Marcus’ hope is that

ethnography within anthropology now has the possibility of redefining its position within Western intellectual discourse by freeing itself of its historic identification with the exotic and the primitive, objects of highly dubious empirical and ethical value in the late twentieth century anyway, and by exemplifying a discipline that not only heeds the continuing critique of its practices and discourses but embraces such critique as the very source of its projects of knowledge.

His essay makes an important contribution to our understanding of the difficulties confronting social scientists who adopt a critical posture with respect to their own disciplines. The discussion of some of the strategies available to them should be of interest to social scientists in other fields, and what he has to say might well inform the work of outside critics who often distance themselves from the problems of the researcher to such an extent that their proposals can find no practical application.

The last chapter in this section is written by the research psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi is best known for his creative work in the area of “flow experience.” In this essay, he tackles the notion of wisdom, a very different sort of topic. Now wisdom, quite obviously, is not the sort of phenomenon that can be treated as a clearly defined dependent variable that is the unambiguous result of the operations of other, clearly defined independent variables. In taking up this topic, Csikszentmihalyi is abandoning the classic experimental model in psychology.

He takes leave of that model in other very important respects. Psychologists assume that the aspects of behavior which they observe and explain are both timeless and universal. The particular qualities of their subjects—say the fact that they are young adults studying at an American university—are of no consequence. The method that Csikszentmihalyi employs, what he calls “evolutionary hermeneutics,” takes the historical development of behavior into account. Furthermore, wisdom is by no means a universal human characteristic. Wise people

are few and far between. Nor is wisdom a quality that tends to be encouraged by late modern society, which places so much emphasis on immediate gratification, short-term concerns, and cleverness rather than thoughtfulness. The essay, among other things, constitutes a plea for greater appreciation of the value of wisdom and for an enhancement of its role in our lives.

The primary emphasis in Part III is on values. When viewed from the perspective of knowledge acquisition, values tend to be understood as particular beliefs, needs, and interests that either threaten to or, in fact, do subvert our best efforts to achieve the universal posture of "objectivity." This perception of the matter is consistent with the logical-positivist school of philosophical thought. In fact, the breakdown of the logical-positivist conception of knowledge forces us to reconsider the basic problem of moral philosophy, that being on what grounds, if any, we can justify moral judgments. For instance, rational moral philosophy, particularly the Kantian version, attempts to supply logical justification for universal moral principles. Utilitarianism grounds morality on a single, hedonistic principle, and situational ethics explores modes by which moral judgments can be made when principles or norms are in conflict. The general opposition to Enlightenment rationality presented in this collection applies to values and morality no less, but also no more so, than it does to knowledge. Just as social scientists such as McCloskey, Schon, Marcus, and Csikszentmihalyi are searching for reconstructed conceptions of knowledge and methods of knowledge acquisition, so also are some theorists exploring the question of whether or not it is possible to sustain reasoned discourse about questions of value. The chapters by Jane Flax and Fisher take up this question.

Flax, who devotes the major portion of her analysis to the breakdown of the Enlightenment project, analyzes three principal developments in twentieth-century thought that have contributed to this development. The first of these is Freudian psychology. Freud, she suggests, undermined the rationalist faith in the "mind's capacity to be at least partially undetermined by the effects of the body, passions, and social authority and convention." Second, she maintains that postmodernist deconstruction has shattered Enlightenment conceptions of "mind, truth, language, and the Real." Third, she argues that feminism has begun to delineate the gender qualities of reason.

As a consequence of this analysis, her position with respect to the possibility of basing moral judgments on reasoned argument is entirely pessimistic; in fact, she describes such efforts as indicative of "a refusal to grow up." All attempts to build and sustain reasoned discourse are

constraining rather than facilitative. But how, then, can she justify her own deeply felt moral concerns and sense of moral responsibility? Her answer to this question is that we have no choice but

to firmly situate ourselves within contingent and imperfect contexts, to acknowledge differential privileges of race, gender, geographic location and sexual identities, and to resist the delusory and dangerous recurrent hope of redemption to a world not of our own making.

“Responsibility beyond innocence,” she writes, “looms as a promise and as a frightening necessity.”

In contrast to Flax, Fisher’s aim is to reconstruct our understanding of the nature of reason rather than to escape from its clutches. The need for reconstruction derives from the fact that “the dominant notion of knowledge, which is the legacy of positivism, ill serves questions of justice, happiness, and humanity.” These questions fall under the category of Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom. They are questions involving “knowledge of whether” rather than “knowledge of what.” However, the fact that these are very different kinds of questions should not be taken as a justification for the traditional division between fact and value. To the contrary, they can be encapsulated within a single unified framework, the framework of narration. The narrative view of human discourse (including the individual’s internal ones) encompasses the scientific, the historical, the philosophical, the political, and the religious “insofar as they lay claim to our reason” (Fisher’s emphasis).

Various forms of reasoned discourse should be viewed as “stories” for which their narrators are making “truth claims.” While the Enlightenment version of “truth” is based upon an absolute and timeless standard or criterion is not relevant to their evaluation, the reasonable person can judge them on the basis of the criteria of coherence and fidelity. In this sense, the sorts of communication among scientists that he discusses in the chapter are an extension and formalization of our everyday, commonsense efforts to persuade others of the truth of our beliefs and of our claims about the nature of reality. Thus, whereas Flax argues that the belief in reason establishes false barriers and differential power and privilege among people, Fisher insists that it has the potential for uniting them.

In the final section, we return to the discussion of schema theory that was introduced earlier by Ben-Ze’ev. Couclelis and Arbib argue that the notion of “schema,” while emerging from the cognitive sciences, provides us with a view of reality that enables us to explain psy-

chological and social processes in a new light and to redefine traditional epistemological issues.

The proposed shift from "container" to "schema," Couclelis suggests, may be something which runs a good deal deeper than simply a disagreement among scientists concerning the appropriateness and utility of alternative paradigms. She presents evidence that the image of the "container" may be one that is shared by all members of the human race. This suggests to me that the emergence of the dynamic, developmental, holistic notion of "schema" may be at the cutting edge of a reconceptualization of psychological and social life, not only in academia but also in the human community as a whole.

Couclelis maintains that schema theory enables us to bridge the gap between cognition and knowledge. Rather than depending on a representational view of knowledge, we are able to conceive of schemas

which 'make sense' because they cohere with our accumulated experience of the world, which are meaningful because they elicit dispositions and actions leading to pragmatically successful outcomes, and which are intellectually fruitful because they help connect together disparate pieces of the broader network of meanings, thus leading to ever more appropriate, though ever-shifting, truths.

Arbib, a leading computer theorist and cognitive scientist, adds several other dimensions to the understanding of the notion of schema. He begins by providing the lay reader with a brief explanation of its applications in scientific research. He then considers how it might be usefully applied by social scientists and by policy analysts.

III

If there is any single philosophy with which these essays might be associated, it is probably pragmatism. The breakdown of the distinction between practical and formal knowledge, the integration of knowledge and value, the distrust of "methodism," even something similar to the notion of schema—all these themes can be found in the philosophical work of the leading American pragmatists, C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey.

In particular, one might imagine the giant figure of Dewey presiding over these proceedings. Like the authors of these essays, Dewey opposed the notion of a "purified" realm of "true" knowledge, entirely separate from the needs and activities of human beings. He nevertheless

placed very great stock in the utility of knowledge gained by means of scientific research, and had high hopes for the future of the social sciences.

In *The Quest for Certainty*, which presents, perhaps, the clearest expression of his mature philosophy, Dewey argued that the problem of the relationship between knowledge and value ought to be the central focus of modern philosophy.¹ The most important questions facing modern society, he wrote, are about "conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and evil."⁵ Instead of a morality based on timeless moral principles, he attempted to construct an empirically oriented moral theory that deals with the changing circumstances of human existence and that employs scientific methodology as a means of addressing value questions.

Now, several generations after Dewey's passing, we find ourselves renewing this project. The task is more daunting now than it was then. It encounters a deeply entrenched methodism and the reality of a social science that has not achieved the kinds of results that Dewey anticipated. There is, moreover, a general spirit of skepticism in the air. Yet we might draw sustenance from Dewey's abiding optimism. He maintained his efforts to promote a philosophy enmeshed in the practical problems of human existence, even as other philosophers distanced themselves from them; and he retained his reformist zeal despite the limited success or outright failure of some of his own practical projects. His is not the inflated and unrealistic optimism of the Enlightenment rationalist who believes that all knowledge can be encapsulated within a static framework and that the problems of human existence can be "solved" once and for all. The Deweyan faith is based upon a recognition of the limitations of rational philosophy and an open-eyed encounter with the complexities and constantly changing character of human existence. The fact that the struggles of life are never-ending and that the solutions to the problems of existence are imperfect and transitory do not deter him. Such, I think, is the spirit of this collection.

Notes

1. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," in *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, ed. Martin Fleisher (London: Croom Helm, 1972), p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

3. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); David L. Hull, *Science as a Process: An*

Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Great Devonian Controversy: The Shaping of Scientific Knowledge among Gentlemen Specialists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

4. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, in *The Later Works*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 212.