

“Dialectical Social Science,” from *Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology*, edited by Scott G. McNall (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), pp. 214-231.

Friedrichs (1970: 51-56; 1972b) has hailed the prospect of a dialectical sociology as an alternative to mainstream social theory, and has suggested the possibility of a dialectical paradigm to mediate the split between system and conflict theorists as well as between Marxists and non-Marxists. Although Friedrichs calls for a reformulation of the epistemological basis of sociology, his exemplar (1972a) leaves this necessary foundation undeveloped. Despite the emergence of a radical sociology and anthropology and a parallel post-behavioral movement in political science, no school of dialectical social science has yet found a wide recognition as such. This lack of recognition may be due less to the challenge of a “renaissant behavioralism,” as Friedrichs (1974) recently argued, than to a continued lack of understanding about what theories are found within dialectical social science. The association of “dialectical” with “materialism,” and thus, with orthodox Marxism, may make many academicians wary, as Friedrichs (1970: 326) suggests. A more important source of confusion is the fact that not all theories within dialectical social science are radical, and not all radical or Marxian theories are dialectical. A dialectical social science is not simply an ideological project of the political left. By outlining two approaches to dialectical social science, which share certain assumptions about the nature of human society but have ontological assumptions with vastly different ideological implications, I will show that the concept of dialectical social science encompasses far more than the tradition of critical Marxism and deserves a methodological elaboration in its own right.

Confusion over the status of dialectical social science is evident, for example, in the popular recent work on sociology by Ritzer (1975). He sees it as a multiple paradigm science, but does not acknowledge a dialectical paradigm. Ritzer's analysis is particularly valuable in distinguishing theories from broader paradigms, and in recognizing that the fundamental split in sociology is not between structural-functionalism and conflict theory. Setting aside the problematic application of the paradigm concept in this context, at least two major problems emerge from Ritzer's discussion. First, he chooses to emphasize the arbitrary and irrational elements underlying the formulation of paradigms, taken from the first edition of Kuhn (1962), but he rejects Kuhn's (1972: 174-210) revision, which places added emphasis on the scientific foundations of paradigms. This leads Ritzer away from basing his distinctions of contending paradigms on the alternative epistemological foundations of social science, and he is consequently distracted by the current partisan debates within sociology. The limitations of this approach are evident when one looks beyond the discipline of sociology to the social sciences as a whole. Second, Ritzer's notion of “paradigm bridgers,” including such great figures in the field as Marx, Weber, and Parsons, is inadequate, as it offers only an eclectic rather than a theoretical basis for paradigm reconciliation. Ritzer fails to see dialectical social science in its own right, and he establishes only a residual category for such schools as critical theory.

DEFINITION OF DIALECTIC

Since much confusion exists over the use of the term "dialectic," I will attempt to clarify the way in which it is to be understood in speaking of dialectical social science. Dialectic has a distinguished conceptual history dating back as far as the pre-Socratic philosophers (Abbagnano, et al., 1971). The wealth of significations of dialectic has been indicated by Gurvitch (Bosserman, 1968), Schneider (1971), and Sorokin (1964). Included are immanent change, contradiction, paradox, negation, complementarity, ambiguity, polarization, and reciprocity. Van den Berghe (1963) and Turner (1974; 1975) use dialectic to refer to what is better described as conflict theory, while Gross's (1961) neodialectical approach aims at synthesizing a pluralism of views. To many dialectic is identified with the notorious triad "thesis-antithesis-synthesis," which is, in turn, associated with Marxism, despite the fact that this formula was popularized by Fichte, never used by Hegel, and seldom employed by Marx (Mueller, 1958; Lichtheim, 1970: 7).

For our purposes here, the term "dialectic" will be used to refer to the mutual formative process between humans and society. North American sociologists may be most familiar with this usage in the work of Peter Berger and his associates, who have given a succinct summary of the three dialectical moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 61). This dialectical theory combines what Berger calls a quasi-Weberian emphasis on subjectivity and a quasi-Durkheimian emphasis on objectivity, both "the subjective foundation and the objective facticity of the societal phenomenon" (Berger, 1967:187).

As Berger and Luckmann (1966: 196-201) acknowledge, the social dialectic, which is the essence of man's self-production, was identified by Karl Marx in his early writings. Marx critiqued Hegel's idealism, as in the famous statement in *Capital* that Hegel's dialectic was "standing on its head" and must be "turned right side up again" to "discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (Marx, 1967:20). Yet Marx also distinguished his position from earlier versions of mechanistic materialism in his first and third "theses on Feuerbach" (Marx and Engels, 1959: 204; see also Avineri, 1970: 68-9). Marx's method is dialectical: "As society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him" (Marx, 1964: 137). This understanding of Marx's theory has begun to gain a wider acceptance by sociologists, as exemplified by recent articles by Appelbaum (1978a, 1978b).

The dialectical heritage disappears in the popular stereotype of Marxian social theory as a variety of economic determinism. Although Marx never used the term, the positivistic orthodoxy of "dialectical materialism" was developed by his successors (see Wetter, 1958). Considerable responsibility for the positivistic interpretation rests with the official versions of Marxism propagated by the Second (Socialist), Third (Communist), and Fourth (Trotskyist) Internationals. These variations on orthodox Marxism emphasize a deterministic approach modeled after the natural sciences. One explanation of this deviation is that several of Marx's important works written between 1844 and 1860 were

not published until the late 1920s and 1930s and were thus not available when the various versions of orthodox Marxism crystallized. Other accounts point to a latent positivism in Marx's theory (Wellmer, 1971: 67-119) or to Engels's infatuation with the natural sciences (Hodges, 1965; Coulter, 1971). The development of the dialectical heritage of Marx is found in the tradition of Western Marxism, a lineage that begins with Lukacs's critique in 1923 of Engels's positivist interpretation of the dialectic: "He does not even mention the most vital interaction, namely the dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process" (Lukacs, 1971: 3).

ALTERNATIVE METHODOLOGICAL BASES FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

This definition of dialectic as the mutually formative relationship between humans and society allows us to situate dialectical social science in relation to earlier efforts, overlooked or ignored by Ritzer, to ground a classification system for sociological theories in alternative epistemological bases for social science. Wagner (1963) proposed a grouping of theories into three broad categories. Positive sociological theories approach sociology as a natural science (including neo-positivism, human ecology, structural functionalism, social behavioralism, and bio-psychological theory of culture). Interpretative sociology approaches sociology as a social science as opposed to a natural science (including theory of cultural understanding, interpretative sociology of action and interaction, interpretative social psychology, and social phenomenology). Nonscientific or evaluative social theories (including social-philosophical, humanitarian reform, and ideological social theories) is a category that includes some theories which are covered by the rubric of our dialectical social science.

Wilson (1970) distinguishes between the normative paradigm, based on the natural science model (including social behavior, structural-functionalism, and conflict theories), and the interpretive paradigm, based on a recognition of meanings by the social actor (including symbolic interaction and ethnomethodology theories). The distinctions made by Wagner and Wilson parallel the split between what Radnitsky (1973) terms the "Anglo-Saxon" and "Continental" schools of metascience. Habermas (1972) distinguishes among the empirical-analytic sciences in the natural science tradition of Anglo-American positivism, the historical-hermeneutic sciences in the tradition of Continental idealism, and the critical sciences of the Hegelian-Marxian tradition. Following Habermas, Fay (1975) terms the alternative approaches as positivist, interpretive, and critical social science. Table 1 presents a comparison of several of these systems of classification of social theory, organized to contrast what I would call positivistic and interpretive social science and dialectical social science.

In the systems compared in Table 1, there appears to be a consensus about the character of interpretive social science (Ritzer's social definitions paradigm). On the other hand, whether positivistic theories are best viewed as comprising one positivistic paradigm will undoubtedly remain a subject for further debate. In distinguishing between the social

Table 1
A Comparison of Systems of Classification of Social Science

	Positivist Social Science	Interpretive Social Science	Dialectical Social Science
Wagner (1963)	Positive Sociological Theories	Interpretative sociologies	Nonscientific or evaluative social theories
Wilson (1970)	Normative Paradigm	Interpretive Paradigm	
Habermas (1972)	Empirical-Analytic sciences	Historical-Hermeneutic sciences	Critical Sciences
Fay (1975)	Positivist social science	Interpretive social science	Critical social science
Ritzer (1975)	Social facts paradigm Social behavior paradigm Biologism	Social definitions paradigm	Critical theory

facts and social behavior paradigms, for example, Ritzer appears to be assigning different names to the Continental collectivistic positivist and the Anglo-American individualistic positivist traditions (see Parsons, 1961: 85-97), a distinction that has been elaborated in the case of exchange theory by Ekeh (1974). To clarify the meaning of dialectical social science, I will differentiate two varieties, the conservative humanism of the Berger group and the dialectical tradition of Western Marxism. I contrast these with various theories sometimes termed dialectical, which may be better understood as existing within positivistic social science.

THE CONSERVATIVE HUMANISM OF THE BERGER GROUP

The major theoretical statement of the theory group or cluster (see Mullins, 1973) centered on Berger is the treatise on the social construction of reality as a problem in the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In this work the authors synthesize several streams of sociological thought. Externalization as an anthropological necessity derives from Hegel and Marx. Objectivation as reality *sui generis* is taken from Durkheim. Internalization is analyzed in terms of Mead's social psychology. Weber's concern for the subjective meaning of social action is interpreted via Schutz (see Schutz and Luckmann, 1973); habitualized human actions become

institutionalized through reciprocal typifications. Social institutions require a “canopy of legitimations” ranging from “simple traditional affirmations” to “symbolic universes” of great complexity (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 62, 94-97). For the Berger group a biological imperative for institutionalization and objectivation is outlined in Gehlin's notion of the lack of a specialized instinctual structure in humans; this world-openness requires the stability of institutionalized social structures (Berger and Kellner, 1965). A symbolic universe has the nomic function of ordering the world, thus providing a defense against "anomie terror" and chaos (Berger, 1967: 22-4).

Berger's concern for anomie draws on Durkheim's notion of homo duplex, the split of humans into a socialized self and a passionate, egoistic, non socialized self (Berger, 1967: 83-84; see also Durkheim, 1964). For Berger (1971: 3), “Sociology leads to the understanding that order is the primary imperative of social life.” Little wonder then that objectivation quickly becomes reification, the situation in which people lose sight of the social world as a human production, and that social roles and institutions are taken for granted. “Reification in this way comes close to being a functional imperative” (Berger and Pull berg, 1965: 208; see also Berger, 1966). While his humanistic perspective is debunking, ironic, and relativizing toward the status quo, Berger (1963: 39) is most skeptical of "all kinds of revolutionary utopianism." Distinguishing himself from American "conservatism" (a variety of classical liberalism), Berger (1972) characterizes his political stance, with some irony, as that of one of the last Habsburgian monarchists.

Berger's account of externalization in the service of Gehlen's imperative for order has been challenged by critics who point out its distinction from the Hegel-Marx version of externalization as human practical activity (Lafferty, 1977), or the psychoanalytical assumption of natural human tendencies and potentials (Carveth, 1977). Berger's version of objectivation is disputed by critics who charge that his account of communication and language in the processes of mutual typification and legitimation lacks a sense of the distortions that result from conflicting interests and disparities in power (Lichtman, 1970; Dreitzel, 1970). Berger develops an order vocabulary around the concept of anomie, in contrast to the Marxists, who develop a conflict vocabulary around the concept of alienation (see Horton, 1964, 1966). Berger attacks ideological mystifications in the domain of consciousness, but denies a Marxian concept of alienation that seeks its origins in historical modes and relations of production (Brewster, 1966; Walton *et al.*, 1970).

The theory group around Berger has achieved the most striking success in applying this conservative humanistic dialectical approach to the analysis of a variety of problems of everyday life: marriage as a mutual redefinition of the world through conversation (Berger and Kellner, 1964); the separation of public and private spheres in industrial society and its impact on identity formation (Luckmann and Berger, 1964); psychoanalysis as a technique for identity repair and maintenance (Berger, 1965). Largely on the basis of this work, the Berger group has often been classified, when it is considered at all, within such schools of interpretive social science as social phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology (Mullens, 1973; Ritzer, 1975). Being out of step with both the apologetics for capitalism of American

conservatives and the technocratic elitism of American liberals, the Berger theory group may not develop beyond a small cluster into the wider movement of professional specialization. But if the idiosyncratic stance of Berger is not widely imitated, the work of his associated theory group certainly provides a stimulating introduction to dialectical social science. The Berger group has synthesized several important strands of contemporary sociological theory. Although it holds sharply different ontological assumptions and ideological commitments from the Marxists, the Berger cluster may help bridge the gap between North American interpretive social science and the dialectical tradition of Western Marxism.

THE DIALECTICAL TRADITION OF WESTERN MARXISM

The term "Western Marxism" was first used by Korsch (1970: 120) in 1930 to contrast with Russian or Soviet Marxism; it was popularized by Merleau-Ponty's (1973: 30-58) essay of that title on Lukacs. Such alternative designations as "humanistic," "Hegelian," or "critical" Marxism can be construed more narrowly, and thus give a less satisfactory characterization of the broad tradition than does "Western Marxism." Two anthologies give a representative sampling: Grahl and Piccone (1973) and Howard and Klare (1972), although the latter includes chapters on Della Volpe and Althusser, structuralist Marxists whose work falls more within positivistic than dialectical social science. Only two monographs consider the tradition of Western Marxism, one hostile account (McInnes, 1972) and one mixed assessment by Anderson (1976), which also treats structuralists Della Volpe, Althusser, and Colletti.

An important contribution made by social theorists working within the tradition of Western Marxism has been the explication of the dialectical foundation of Marxism in Marx's ideas of alienation and praxis, an interpretation not popular with orthodox Marxists (see Hoffman, 1976). While social democrats (Bell, 1960; Feuer, 1963) and structuralist Marxists (Althusser, 1969: 51-86) have found common ground in asserting a split between the "young Marx" and the "mature Marx," the contemporary dialectical theorists have pointed out the essential continuity of Marx's concerns (Marcuse, 1941; Petrovic, 1967: 31-51; Avineri, 1968; Meszaros, 1970: 217-53; Ollman, 1971: 290; Bernstein, 1971: 11-83). Although the differences between orthodox and Western Marxism are often put in terms of varying interpretations of the relationship between Marx and Hegel, the question is complicated. The early Marxists most attracted to the natural science model - such as Engels, Plekhanov, and, later, Lenin - also saw themselves as Hegelian Marxists. But as Jacoby (1971: 135) points out, "The Hegel that was important to these Marxists was not the same Hegel important to Lukacs, *et al.*; to the former it was the Hegel of the universal movement of contradictions, of quantity to quality, of the processes of quasi-automatic transformation; to the latter it was the Hegel of the historical movement of consciousness, of the subject-object dialectic" (see also Fetscher, 1971: 40-147).

At a time when the early figures in the tradition of Western Marxism - Lukacs, Korsch, and Gramsci - were forced to work as isolated individuals, the Frankfurt School emerged in the early 1930s as the first major theory cluster within the tradition. The

Frankfurt School has been closely identified with the idea of critical theory. As Lichtheim (1971: 174) summarizes, critical theory “measures social actuality against historical possibility.” According to Schroyer, a leading interpreter of the Frankfurt School to North American sociology, what distinguishes critical from positivistic and interpretive sciences is critical science's “concern with the assessment of the socially unnecessary modes of authority, exploitation, alienation, repression. The interest of a critical science is the emancipation of all self-conscious agents from the seemingly 'natural' forces of nature and history” (Schroyer, 1970: 225; 1973). Critical science exposes the ideological uses of technocratic consciousness: “the scientific image of science has become the dominant legitimating system of advanced industrial society the fundamental false consciousness of our epoch” (Schroyer, 1970: 212-3; see also Habermas, 1970: 81-122).

Efforts to combine the existential and phenomenological traditions with Marxism (on post-war France, see Poster, 1975) show promise of illuminating the analysis of such features of everyday life as culture, the family, sexuality, and work. For Merleau-Ponty (1964a: 134) Husserl's emphasis on intersubjectivity opened the prospect of a social theory that is neither positivistic nor idealistic, but truly dialectical: “Man no longer appears as a product of his environment or an absolute legislator but emerges as a product-producer, the locus where necessity can turn into concrete liberty.” Merleau-Ponty (1964b: 20) brings to phenomenology a sense of the life-world as an historical world: “We are in the field of history as we are in the field of language or existence” (see also O'Neill, 1970, 1972). His triad of existence, language, and history suggests Habermas's triad of work, language, and domination as the three media of human existence, although-with the exception of Marcuse the Frankfurt theorists have been skeptical of phenomenology (see Rovatti, 1973). Sartre's "open Marxism" (1963: 57-67) analyzes the mediations between individuals and social classes, seeking concrete categories to replace abstract universals. The Italian theorist Paci (1972) has been an influential interpreter of the importance for Marxism of the later work of Husserl (1970), which describes the occluded precategorical foundations of the life-world. In North America Piccone (1973) and the journal *Telos* have developed phenomenological Marxism as the most fruitful ground for revitalizing the Western Marxist tradition (see also Dallmayr, 1973; Reid and Yanarella, 1974; Smart, 1976; Reid, 1977).

Another important stream of thought, not identified with a particular theory cluster or group in sociology, derives from Gramsci's analysis of hegemony in Western societies. Williams (1960: 587) summarizes Gramsci's notion of hegemony as “an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations.” Hegemony emphasizes the obtaining of consent rather than the use of force in establishing and maintaining relations of dominance in society. Wolpe (1969: 117) calls attention to the similarity of hegemony as “the set of guiding ideas which permeate consciousness and legitimate the social arrangements” to Berger's concept of a symbolic universe. The ramifications of Gramsci's concept of hegemony are beginning to be studied closely (see Martinelli, 1968; Femia, 1975), and the implications of the concept for sociology developed (Sallach, 1974; Livingstone, 1976). Gramsci's work has been an important

influence on Genovese (1972: 391-422), whose study of “the world the slaves made” (1974) is an exemplar of dialectical analysis in social history.

The perspectives of Western Marxism have informed and influenced a number of writers working within the traditions of North American social science, including Birnbaum (1969, 1971) on the sociology of advanced industrial society, Gouldner (1976) on ideology and technology, and Schwartz's (1976) dialectical analysis of a social movement. Other writers have developed perspectives on dialectical theory through a confrontation of the Hegelian-Marxian tradition with the work of Gurvitch (Bruyn, 1974) or with Schutz's social phenomenology (Rasmussen, 1973).

DIALECTIC IN POSITIVISTIC SOCIAL SCIENCE

This rapid survey of Berger's conservative humanism and the tradition of Western Marxism should be adequate to establish the distinction between dialectical social science and other varieties of orthodox Marxism and conflict theory. Szymanski's (1972, 1973) assertion that Marxism is a version of functionalism and a deterministic materialism with a methodology modeled after the “hard” sciences is clearly a claim to a position within positivistic social science. A similar formulation was made in 1921 by Bukharin (1969) in his presentation of historical materialism as a system of sociology; the argument drew a rebuttal from Lukacs and from Gramsci (1971: 419-72). Outside the boundaries of Marxism, the label of dialectic to describe duality, polarity, conflict, and contradiction in Blau's exchange theory (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1972; Blau, 1972) is not sufficient to remove this school of thought from the positivistic social science. A case in point is the hostile reaction of positivistic exchange theorists (Abbott *et al.*, 1973) to the effort by Singelmann (1972) to develop a dialectical synthesis of exchange and symbolic interaction theories.

One might expect the insights of the developing structural Marxism to make an important contribution to dialectical social science. Thus far, however, adherents of structural Marxism have remained opposed to integrating an analysis of human subjectivity into their theories. They persist in dichotomizing Marxism into expressive and structural approaches (Burawoy, 1978) and maintaining that “a synthesis of 'objective' and 'subjective' components is impossible within the Marxist tradition” (Burawoy, 1977:16). Therborn (1970, 1971) charges the Frankfurt school with reducing science and politics to philosophy, and with severing theory and practice. In general, orthodox and structural Marxists join in dismissing the dialectical tradition of Western Marxism as critical idealism.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted a brief sketch of two varieties of dialectical social science that share certain premises about the nature of human society while holding distinct ontological assumptions with sharply differing political and ideological consequences. Both the Berger group and the dialectical tradition of Western Marxism view the social world as the intersection of active human subjects confronting objective, historical structures. The

conservative humanism of the Berger group posits an imperative for order based on a human need to avoid anomie. The dialectical tradition of Western Marxism seeks emancipation from historically unnecessary forms of alienation produced by a class-structured society. The strands of theory developed by the Frankfurt school, the existential and phenomenological Marxists, and the Gramscians have by no means been successfully synthesized to date, nor have they been fully integrated with the traditions of sociological theory. The Berger group has made an important contribution by synthesizing a dialectical perspective within sociological traditions. Contrary to the assertions of the structural Marxists, the prospect of a synthesis within the dialectical tradition of Western Marxism holds great promise (see Sallach, 1973a, 1973b) for illuminating studies ranging from social history to the analysis of everyday life.

Several recent studies on the methodology of the social sciences, from a variety of standpoints, appear to be converging on a methodological framework for dialectical social science. The revival of a methodological controversy in German sociology (Adorno *et al.*, 1976) and the discussion of the relationship between Marxism and social science in France (Sartre, 1963; Goldmann, 1969) are examples from continental Europe. Fay (1975: 92-110) has elaborated the methodological implications for the tradition of critical theory. Bernstein (1976) considers the contributions of empiricism, language analysis, phenomenology, and critical theory to a dialectical social and political theory. Giddens (1976) offers new rules of sociological method beginning from an interpretive position, while Keat and Urry (1975), beginning from a structuralist Marxist perspective, leave room for a synthesis of subjective and objective theories in positing a realist conception of the philosophy of social science. The differences that remain to be reconciled are many, but the outlook is hopeful. The choice is not "for sociology" or "for Marx," as some would have it, but for an understanding of the obdurate reality of the socially constructed world that can assist human subjects in the transformation of that world.

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