Pure Sociology: Subjectivity at Risk?

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Abstract

Sociology began as a scientific discipline in large part by defining itself by what it was NOT, namely, psychology. This means that within sociology there has always been an uncertainty over whether subjective phenomena, including selves, identities, emotions, consciousness, feelings, or experience, are topics worthy of scientific analysis and observation within the discipline. Some argue that psychology is vital to doing sociology (as an accepted or foundational "first principle"), while others reject it because it falls outside the scope of sociological concerns. In this paper I analyze antisubjectivism in sociology in the form of Donald Black's "pure sociology," as well as the antihumanist network theory of Stephan Fuchs. I conclude by suggesting that if sociologists are serious about achieving their long sought after but elusive "science of society," then the sort of antisubjectivism, antihumanism, and antiessentialism being propounded by Black, Fuchs, and others should receive serious consideration in current and future sociological work.

Keywords: Donald Black; Stephen Fuchs; pure sociology; sociological theory; antihumanism; objectivity; subjectivity; positivism

Introduction

Donald Black (1941-2024) was a prominent sociologist who sustained a long career developing a legalistic framework for sociological and criminological theory which attempted to ruthlessly eliminate persons from theoretical consideration. This antisubjectivism, which sought to protect sociology from becoming simply another version of watered-down psychology, was also deeply antihumanist and antiessentialist. Before filling in the details of Black's theory, one which shares some features with his University of Virginia colleague Stephan Fuchs, it is helpful to summarize Joseph Michalski's history of the development of Black's pure sociology which traces connections all the way back to early American sociologist Lester F. Ward's (1903) own version of pure sociology. This will set the stage for the fleshing out of the details of exactly what pure sociology is and how it poses a threat to subjectivity broadly conceived.

Michalski (2016) notes that American sociology was launched with the publication of Lester Ward's *Dynamic Sociology* (in two volumes) in 1883. Albion Small was named chair of the sociology department at University of Chicago in 1893, and a few years later he was named editor of *American Journal of Sociology*, its first issues published

in 1895. Small pushed a public sociology agenda early on, influenced by developments in both America (especially via the work of Ward, Ross, and Sumner), in France with Tarde's concept of imitation, and in Germany with Georg Simmel, who proposed that pure sociology was the study of social forms (or social geometry). Durkheim (1982 [1895]) also worked with a notion of pure sociology regarding his idea that sociology must work conceptually at the level of social facts and cannot dip down below that level, that is, cannot return all the way back to elemental units of society—people—because this would constitute an illegitimate psychological reductionism. For Durkheim, social facts can only be explained by comparing, contrasting, and correlating with other social facts.

Hence pure sociology was relatively prevalent in the early stages of the development of sociology (1896-1915) but started losing out to a growth in applied sociology afterwards until the resurgence of pure sociology in Donald's Black work beginning in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Reference to the work of Lester Ward constituted the bulk of attention to pure sociology in that first era (Michalski 2016; see Table 1, p. 325). Ward publish a book in 1903, *Pure Sociology*, which was the center of this scholarly attention. (Three years later he published *Applied Sociology*, which signaled a larger trend toward that orientation was looming.)

After functionalism (mainly Parsons and Merton) started losing steam in the 1960s and 1970s, other theoretical orientations competed for attention in the analytical space of sociology. Although Donald Black started his publishing career in the early 1970s, what came to be known as his own version of pure sociology appeared in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Black's antipsychologism and antihumanism seeks to eliminate persons entirely from sociological analysis and explanation, hence there is the behavior of—not people—but law, medicine, terrorism, etc. There are five dimensions of social space—vertical, horizontal, symbolic, corporate, and normative—and persons higher or lower in the five dimensions are subject to (or bearers) of these relational laws. For example, law increases in vertical space (hierarchy), that is, with higher incomes, and decreases with lower incomes (indeed, wealth seems to attract law; this is also why repeat players are much more successful in court than one-shotters). Before his death Black had developed a solid niche following within sociology, but the idea of pure sociology is controversial and has been subject to withering criticisms, some of which will be touched upon in the later discussion. Black was convinced, along with his many students and supporters, of the importance of his work, and he came across at times as not only boastful but narcissistic (see Black's 2015 interview of himself).

For better or worse, Black's pure sociology represents an intellectual movement or orientation within sociology that seeks to purge all psychologism and subjectivism from its explanations. The first part of the paper will examine the pure sociology of Black, while the latter part will turn attention to Stephan Fuchs, who although has

never referred to his own work as pure sociology, nevertheless shares certain affinities with Black's program. In both versions of pure sociology (Black's being the purer of the two), subjectivity is under assault primarily to the extent that objectivity is favored over subjectivity. Yet the assault goes further than this. According to Black, beginning with the classics and continuing on into the modern era, sociology has always been subjectivist. Not only were the early American sociologists subjectivists, so too were Simmel, Weber, and Durkheim. Let us examine Black's argument in somewhat more detail.

Donald Black and Pure Sociology

The first point that Black makes about sociology is that, unlike the natural sciences, sociology has never experienced the kind of scientific revolution (see Kuhn 1970) which would have allowed it to leave its classical roots behind. As Black (2000, p. 344) argues,

> Classical sociology is the model of sociology itself. Moreover, the classical conception of social reality is psychological (a matter of subjectivity), the classical logic of explanation is largely teleological (a matter of means and ends), and the classical subject is largely the person (including a number or group of persons). Social action is individual action.

Modern sociology remains classical, largely because the classics have never gone away. Indeed, within contemporary sociology those who tend to garner the most citations to their work are classical thinkers, including Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, and Du Bois. Classical theory courses continue to be taught alongside contemporary theory courses, and most professional sociologists take for granted the importance and continuing relevance of these classical thinkers for their own work. Because of this, not many challenge the received wisdom embodied in classical writings. But pure sociology is different, suggests Black. It completely rejects the classical and now contemporary assumptions of subjectivism, individualism, and teleology (explaining human behavior as a means to an end).

Pure sociology is what normal sociology is not. The main problem with normal sociology is that it is teleological, imputing that social actors—whether individuals or collectivities—do what they do in order to attain desired ends. But this is unscientific, because goals or purposes are not observable. Black's position, then, is very close to Bruce Mayhew's position on the nonsensical nature of *Geisteswissenschaften*.[1] Another problem with normal sociology is that it is ideological, to the extent that

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[1] Indeed, in a spirited defense of Black's pure sociology against the criticisms of Marshall (2008) and Turner (2008), Michalski (2008, p. 255) stated that "Pure sociologists share Mayhew's perspective in dismissing the individualist, psychological perspective as irrelevant to their intellectual objectives." In his preface to *Das Glücksrad*, a book he never completed because of his untimely death, Mayhew (n.d.) was unflinching in marking a sharp line between science and non-science (or nonsense). For Mayhew, the only way for sociology—or any social science—to be considered a science is to view it as an instance of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). From this *Naturwissenschaft* perspective, sociology is the study of social form, structure, and organization. Anything falling outside of this range of studies is not science. This is the position Michalski is attempting to defend for pure sociology.

sociologists are apt to study topics of deep and abiding interest to them. Because of this, sociologists have remained and continue to remain too close to their subject matter, and may even hold aspirations as to the preferred outcomes of their own research.[2] For example, women study women, Americans study American society, homosexuals study homosexuals, members of minority groups study their own minority groups, and so forth.[3] This makes for bad science, because researchers who are too close to their subject matter, rather than acting dispassionately and objectively toward the objects of their inquiry, are apt to view their "scientific" work as a personal or political matter. Indeed, the feminist dictum "The personal is political" is paradigmatic of the unscientific, ideological, and subjectivist nature not only of feminist theory, but of much of sociological theory and research more generally (see, e.g., Horowitz 1993).

To backtrack a bit, the assertion of "bad science" from the previous paragraph is my own interpretation of Black's position, but this is not necessarily Black's position. Indeed, the idea of "bad science" is a value judgment which in itself may be intolerably essentialistic from Black's (2013) perspective. Yet, Black's position may be unrealistically facile insofar as his claim of successfully untangling values and facts is concerned, the latter of which are preferred in any endeavor claiming scientific status (Hammersley, 2014).

The issue of the solipsistic nature of subjectivity enters here as well. It is noncontroversial to point out that persons in their everyday lives routinely refer to their own states of mind and those of others. The beginnings of psychology as a social science discipline can be traced to the fact that human beings have always held folk understandings, and assumed the existence of, minds, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Once psychology became thoroughly scientized by 1879—the year Wilhelm Wundt set up the first experimental psychology laboratory (Nicolas and Ferrand 1999)—this further reinforced and legitimated lay notions concerning the reality of psychic phenomena. To early American sociologists such as Lester Ward, Franklin Giddings, Charles Ellwood, and others, it would have been unthinkable—from both lay and scientific perspectives—not to incorporate psychological concepts into their theories. Ellwood (1925, pp. 8-9) best articulates this position in a passage worth quoting at length:

> Any situation in the social life of humanity will be found upon scientific analysis to consist of conscious activities, mental attitudes, feelings, beliefs, interests, desires, values, and standards on the part of individuals. Nor is there any social situation left when these psychic elements are entirely taken away. Usage, customs, traditions, institutions, even civilization itself, all alike resolve themselves into elements which

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[2] Too much distance between researchers and the objects of their study can be a problem, too, according to Black. Hence "armchair" theorists like Talcott Parsons, who was steeped in the heady vapors of grand theory for much of his career, tend to neglect empirical reality in favor of generalizations couched at high levels of theoretical abstraction.

[3] For years also white males studied white males. This was one of the things that prompted feminists to develop a "gynocentric" science to augment and operate alongside standard "androcentric" science (see, e.g., Bordo 1986, Hankinson and Nelson 1997, Harding 1986, Keller 1985, Tanesini 1999, and Tuana 1989). For an updated compendium of feminist philosophy of science, see Crasnow and Intemann (2021).

are essentially psychic. They are social psychic phenomena. We cannot, indeed, think of human institutions or of human history apart from conscious agents. The social is evidently a special development of the mental or psychic. It is mental interdependence, the contact and overlapping of our inner selves, which makes the "social." All this merely emphasizes again the point that it is the psychic element which constitutes the social, and that the criterion of the social is mental interdependence. The social process is a psychological phenomenon, consequently a psychological explanation is necessary to understand social processes or group behavior.

Since it is difficult if not impossible to think of the human social world apart from the "conscious agents" who populate it, perhaps the only way to excise the contaminating effects of subjectivity from sociological analysis is to do away with persons altogether. And this is what Black has done. Rather than talking about the behavior of persons, Black talks about the behavior of science, or art, or law, morality, or even terrorism (see, e.g., Black 2004, 2011). This is profoundly counterintuitive because we have all come to know, understand, and expect that it is *people*, after all, who do law, science, art, etc. As Black (2000, p. 347) explains, "Because social life such as law or science or art has no psychology of its own—no mind, no thoughts, no subjectivity—psychology totally disappears from sociology." In a whimsical moment Black (2000, p. 362) even stated "And I am notorious. I killed the person. I am the end of the classical tradition. The end of Western thought."[4]

Pure Sociology and Social Space

A very brief summary of the conceptual apparatus that is Black's pure sociology is in order. For Black, social life—not people—inhabits a universe of its own, which is *social space*. Social space, which is created by human interaction, consists of five dimensions. These dimensions are vertical space (social stratification or hierarchy up and down); horizontal space, or the distribution of persons across time and space in relation to one another (social morphology); symbolic space (culture); corporate space (the organizational or corporate level); and normative space (which is equivalent to social control; Black 1995).

Each of these dimensions may vary by location, direction, and distance. For example, in the vertical dimension of social space a society may be characterized by an uneven distribution of wealth: those higher up have far more valued resources than those below. Beginning with these simple concepts, hypotheses can be generated covering an almost endless array of substantive areas. For example, is there more crime in higher or lower locations in social space? How about religion, friendship,

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[4] Jeff Coulter (1989, p. 7) describes his sociology of knowledge perspective as "radical sociology" because, rather than putting persons at the center of his analysis, he emphasizes practices—actions, activities, and interactions. But these practices are carried out by persons endowed with minds and subjectivity. In this sense, Coulter's radical sociology is not as radical as Black's, to the extent that Black does not even allow persons to behave within the analytical framework of pure sociology. Instead, law or terrorism or ideas "behave."

or sport? (Black 1998, p. 159) The direction may be pertinent as well: crimes may be upward or downward (higher-ups victimizing those in lower locations or vice versa), but so may be gifts, complaints, therapy (see Tucker 1999), or other aspects of social life. As for distance, does law increase or decrease with distance? Research clearly shows that intimates are far less likely to use law to resolve conflict than are those who are less familiar to one another.

Let us look at the specific example of the behavior of medicine (Black 1998, pp. 164-165). For Black, medicine is a quantitative variable, to the extent that its magnitude (or quantity) depends on its location in social space. For example, in the vertical dimension, medicine increases with the status of the patient, whether status is measured by wealth, education, respectability, or so forth. However, medicine varies inversely with cultural and relational distance. For example, persons are far more likely to receive medical aid from someone who is unrelated to them (doctors for example) than from someone who is close or intimate (such as a wife or boyfriend).

Black (1976) is best known for his writings on the behavior of law. We have already discussed the horizontal dimension of social space with regard to law. As for the vertical dimension, the quantity of law increases with its vertical elevation. For example, wealthy persons are more likely than poor persons to use law to settle disputes (Black 1998, p. 163). Also, it is considered more serious if a poor person does something illegal to a wealthy person than vice versa. That is why, even today, penalties are less severe and conviction rates are lower for white-collar offenders than they are for violent offenders or those perpetrating so-called "street crimes."

Influenced by Black, a growing number of persons are examining areas of social life from the pure sociology perspective (see Black 1995, 2000, 2004; Campbell 2011; Cooney 2009; Manning 2012; Tucker 1999). One such area is domestic violence (see Michalski 2004). With regard to the normative dimension especially, domestic violence may be conceptualized, following Black, as a strategy for handling grievances, or as a form of social control more generally. To be specific, domestic violence may be understood as a form of self-help which acts moralistically to inflict pain on another. Structural features of interpersonal relations explain much about domestic violence. For example, those who are socially isolated run a higher risk of being a victim of domestic violence. On the other hand, women who are embedded in networks characterized by multiple cross-cutting affiliations (with friends, relatives, or acquaintances in neighborhood, extended family, work, or voluntary association settings) are less likely to be the victim of partner violence. As Michalski notes, these findings were first reported by M.P. Baumgartner (1993), a student of Black.

This is also why violence in general, and domestic violence specifically, is related to rules of residence. Rules of residence are the rules operating in any society that

specify where a newlywed couple ought to live. In societies that practice *patrilocality*, the newlywed couple is expected to live with or near the husband's side of the family. In *matrilocality*, the newlywed couple take up residence with or near the wife's side of the family. And in *neolocality* (characteristic of modern urban societies), the newlywed couple is expected to set up a household separate from that of their parents or other relatives. Rules of residence are aspects of a society's culture, so this would fall within the normative dimension of social space according to Black. And indeed, the matrilocal pattern is associated with much lower rates of violence than the patrilocal pattern, which is the most violent (Paige 1974). The rate of violence associated with neolocality falls somewhere between the other two patterns, and women's shelters and other types of support services typically available in urban society act as a functional equivalent to the familial support provided under the matrilocal pattern (Michalski 2004, p. 669).

Additionally, in the horizontal (or social morphology) dimension, violence tends to decline with less relational distance (that is, with greater intimacy) up to a point. Hence, for example, within the sphere of intimate relations, studies show that cohabiting persons are more likely than married persons to be the victim of domestic violence, to the extent that cohabitation is characterized by greater relational distance than marriage (Michalski 2004, p. 667).

The important point to be made here is that from the perspective of pure sociology, there is no need to invoke subjectivity. Feelings, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and consciousness never enter into the theoretical system. Pure sociology is blind or agnostic toward these phenomena. Explanation is derived from the five dimensional geometry of social space itself. Indeed, explaining human behavior in terms of the geometry of social space evokes Simmel's notion of the geometry of social forms. However, like many of the sociological classics, Simmel was individualistic to the extent that social explanation for him begins at the level of individuals doing things together in space and time. By contrast, for Black even though social space is created by human interaction, interaction itself is taken for granted and hence is exogenous to the theoretical system.

Naturwissenschaften and the Promise of Grand Theory

Black's version of pure sociology is the closest anyone has come to meeting the *Naturwissenschaften* ideal for sociology as formulated by Bruce Mayhew, among others.[5] In a way, Black's pure sociology is akin to physics in which the four fundamental forces operating across the universe—gravitation, electromagnetic

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[5] I state this knowing full well of the devastating critique of Black's pure sociology by Stephen Turner (2008). Briefly, Turner argues that Black's program is more rhetorical than it is scientific, because he is not really using measurement in a way that holds up under scrutiny from a philosophy of science perspective. Suffice to say that I am sympathetic to many of Turner's points, but in many ways the shortcomings of Black's claim to objectivism and science are the same shortcomings of virtually everyone else doing some form of positivistic sociology. This issue cannot be taken up here, however.

force, weak nuclear force, and strong nuclear force—are implicated in and provide explanations for all manner of physical phenomena (Weinberg 1994). Eventually, a grand unified theory of all physical phenomena—from the subatomic level of particle physics to grandiose cosmological physics which seeks to explain the birth and continuing existence of the universe in its totality—might someday be derived from these basic forces (see Raby 2004). Likewise in sociology, for years scholars have been trying to develop their own string theory, one which would close the gap between the micro-realm of face-to-face interaction and subjectivity, and the macro-realm of social structure and all manner of social collectivities. Comte, Spencer, Marx, Ward, Giddings, and Parsons are some of the better known thinkers who have developed grand theories that seek to explain the totality of social phenomena. Most of these grand theorists have found a place for subjectivity in their explanatory schemes, and the justification for its inclusion has always been that there exists good evidence that subjective phenomena are every bit as "real" as physical phenomena, and hence are deserving of scientific explanation. But of course Black does not agree, and has formulated an ingenious theoretical system that aspires to reach the purest level of sociological explanation, uncontaminated by psychology.

Two Examples: Tipping and Slavery

To reiterate, Black has shown a way of developing a grand sociological theory that refuses to give the cognitive element its due. From the perspective of pure sociology, phenomena that are otherwise explained with reference to subjectivity are either recast within the framework of social space, or are deemed irrelevant to sociological analysis. Let us consider a few examples, and see how a pure sociology approach might handle them.

In the first case, we may note that in many countries it is customary for patrons of restaurants to leave tips after meals. Presumably tipping functions to promote prompt and courteous service. One may surmise that tipping would be especially prevalent in situations where a person is a regular patron of a particular dining establishment. If indeed the person plans to come back to eat on a regular basis, he or she would want to ensure continuing good service upon return visits, so leaving a tip would seem to make good sense. But if tipping seems to make sense for regulars or return customers, what about one-shot customers, those who patronize a restaurant once with no intentions of ever returning? Here the tit-for-tat logic seems to break down. This in turn may lead one to hypothesize that, all things equal, one-shot diners ought to tip at a significantly lower rate than regular diners. Yet Bodvarsson and Gibson (1994) have found that both groups tip at about the same rate. One-shotters who were asked why they leave tips explained that "they would feel bad at the thought of the server's disappointment about not receiving a tip" (Frank 2004, p. 287).

Hence, tipping behavior is explained with reference to subjectivity, consistent with the interpretive tradition of explaining human behavior as the result of motivations, intentions, emotions, and reflexivity. But from the perspective of pure sociology, the behavior of tipping may be considered a type of social control, whose magnitude does not change a great deal along the horizontal or relational dimension. In the vertical dimension the magnitude of tipping may increase in the upward direction. In any event, explanations and hypotheses concerning tipping can be developed from a pure sociology perspective without recourse to subjectivity.

Let us consider another example. Rodney Stark (2003) has argued that all manner of social phenomena have originated with, or been heavily influenced in their development by, belief in God. Specifically, Stark (2001, 2003) makes the case that monotheism—the belief in one supreme God—has given rise to such things as the Reformation, science, witch hunts, and even the end of slavery. For example, in opposition to the Marxist explanation that slavery comes to an end only when it is no longer economically profitable (a materialist explanation), Stark suggests that slavery ended because it violated religious beliefs concerning Christian charity, morality, and the "good life" more generally (an idealist explanation). This form of idealism, which argues that beliefs and ideas have a distinct causal impact on the material conditions of our existence, is similar to the famous "Protestant ethic" thesis of Max Weber (1930).

Before moving on to this general discussion, it is noteworthy that nowhere does Stark (2001, 2003) cite the work of William Graham Sumner (1906), who devoted a number of pages of his *Folkways* to the issue of slavery. Perhaps it is because Sumner cited authors who claimed that Christianity formally recognized slavery before later repudiating it. Sumner (1910, p. 591) argued elsewhere that the later impulse of secular humanism had effectively "colored" and "warped" Christianity, stating further that "Humanitarianism led to opposition to slavery, and to the emancipation of women. These are not doctrines of the Bible or of Middle-Age Christianity." To the contrary, Stark argues that humanitarianism evolved out of, or at least was the secular equivalent of, religious—and specifically Christian—morality. On this issue, Stark's position is consistent with that of Charles Ellwood (1925, p. 388), who stated:

> Christianity, especially, has insisted upon the brotherhood, that is, the essential kinship, of all mankind. It has endeavored to make the sympathies and sentiments natural to the family group the standard for all moral and social practice. It has declared that the bonds of sympathy, altruism, and love which are naturally characteristic of the family should be the bonds which should unite all humanity. The great expansion of sympathy and altruism in Western civilization has been very largely due to these idealistic teachings of Christianity. Christianity has thus been one of the most powerful forces in the development of modern humanitarianism.

As Stark continues his argument, well before Europeans instituted slavery in the New World, Pope Paul III had decreed in 1537 that "Indians and all other peoples… should not be deprived of their liberty or of their possessions…and are not to be reduced to slavery, and whatever happens to the contrary is to be considered null and void" (quoted in Stark 2003, p. 291). Once it was instituted in Europe and the United States, slavery met the continuing strong opposition of the Vatican, and its eventual abolition in the United States was initiated and achieved by Christian activists. The American abolition movement began in Philadelphia with the publication in 1746 of *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, a pamphlet written by John Woolman, a Quaker. Throughout the pamphlet he referred to the "sin of slavery." Influenced by Woolman, by 1770 the Quakers had moved to a position that prohibited their members from owning slaves under penalty of exclusion from the church. As Stark (2003, p. 341) argues, "Thus was launched the American abolition movement."

After 1770 other groups joined the Quakers in condemning slavery, some of which were not affiliated with a specific denomination. Most abolitionists, however, were Christian. Together these Christian abolitionists formed the Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. Just five years later, in 1838, there were 1,000 chapters. Overwhelmingly during this time, it was church organizations—not secular clubs and organizations—that issued formal statements arguing for the abolition of slavery. Where anti-slavery pronouncements were made largely by religious organizations, pro-slavery rhetoric was largely secular, making reference to such things as economic and business interests, "liberty," "states' rights," and so forth (Stark 2003, p. 344). As the abolitionist movement made more headway in the North it started pulling in powerful secular interests, culminating of course in the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Rather than a war fought over economics, the Civil War was as much or more about moral visions (Stark 2003, p. 346). As Stark (2003, p. 347) summarizes:

> (1) abolitionism spread through the Christian churches in the North, sustained by moral indignation, (2) inflamed not only by the existence of slavery in the nearby South but by the testimony of ex-slaves and the predations of agents who captured and, often, kidnapped runaway slaves all across the North. Finally, (3) very few people in the North profited directly from slaves. Thus the abolitionists were well situated to confront slavery from a close, but *external vantage point*.

To reiterate, Stark's thesis is situated within the classical idealist tradition, which states simply that ideas are an autonomous force in their own right which can give rise to material reality. The subjectivity of the position is obvious: belief in "one true God" prompted the formation of social institutions such as science and social movements such as abolition which culminated eventually in the end of slavery. But rather than talk about the way ideas give rise to aspects of material reality, Black's pure sociology talks about the behavior of ideas per se.

In speaking of the behavior of ideas, Black is able to move persons from the center to the periphery of conceptual consideration. Just like medicine (discussed above) an idea is a quantitative variable. For example, ideas have magnitude as measured by how people define and respond to them. Stated differently, an idea is measured by the recognition it receives (Black 1998, p. 166). Likewise, the success of an idea has to do with its location and direction in social space. In the vertical dimension, for example, a downward idea (originating from higher status and directed towards lower status) is more likely to succeed than an upward idea. For example, given two scientists who hit upon a simultaneous discovery in their field, the scientist who is already better known (in terms of publications, citations, prestige of his or her university, and so forth) is more likely to be recognized and given credit for the idea than the lesser known (or lower status) scientist. In the horizontal dimension, the success of an idea varies inversely with the relational distance between its source and audience (Black 1998, p. 167). For example, persons who are intimately related take each others' ideas more seriously than the ideas of others. To summarize, from the perspective of Black's pure sociology, there is never a need to invoke an individual's or a collectivity's belief system (for example, that slavery is wrong). Rather, the idea is analyzed in its own right, and predictions are made regarding its success or failure (assuming direction and magnitude of the idea can be measured) across the five dimensions of social space.

Stephan Fuchs and Networks

Stephen Fuchs, who was a colleague of Donald Black at the University of Virginia, has never referred to his own brand of hard structuralism as pure sociology. Nevertheless, I suggest that Fuchs' work is compatible with Black's pure sociology in at least two crucial ways. First, like Black, Fuchs seeks to purge subjectivity from his theoretical scheme. Indeed, just as Black has pushed human beings to the periphery of his pure sociology, Fuchs' network theory is overtly and self-referentially antihumanist. Antihumanism, according to Fuchs (2001a, p. 63), bids "farewell to the agency framework and its derivatives, such as intentionality, the unit act, and rational choice. This means dropping `person', `individual', and `actor' as foundational constructs."

A second way Fuchs' position is compatible with pure sociology is that it is deeply antiessentialist. Fuchs' network theory rejects talk of intrinsic natures (such as "rational man" or the "self"), ultimate goals (such as the teleology of the social organism, the social mind, or even the motives of individuals), and true potentials. Instead, Fuchs emphasizes the variability of observable phenomena. Theories do not explain the essential nature of things; rather, "they are pragmatic devices and summaries to account for observations, not actual realities" (Fuchs 2001a, p. 16).

Having considered their compatibilities, Fuchs' version of pure sociology is different from Black's in two crucial ways. First, Fuchs is heavily influenced by Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, particularly the notions that systems are self-referential and self-producing. This is the theory of *autopoiesis*, developed initially by the biologists Humburto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Unlike Parsons, Burke (1997), and other theorists who view systems as open (for example, the assumption that resources are exchanged as inputs and outputs between system and environment), Fuchs and other followers of Luhmann view systems as *closed*. Systems follow their own logical and functional imperatives. As Rucht (2003, p. 206) explains, "Their environment is only represented as a theme of communication in the system, and only when the environment is perceived as a problem or threat to the system does it become a theme."

This means that, rather than the system being transformed and modified via inputs and outputs from the environment, the system transforms itself *into* itself (Mingers 2002, p. 280). Luhmann's (1994) notion of systems as self-referential and self-generating places emphasis on observers located in various configurations—Fuchs would later go on to specify these configurations as networks—who communicate with others on themes that come to the attention of the network of observers. For example, sociology can be thought of as a system whose observers—sociologists—observe themselves and the objects that are thematized as relevant to their discipline. There is nothing essential or true about observations; there is no Archimedean point that could be reached from which the good, the true, or the beautiful could be ascertained definitively and once and for all.

Modern Western philosophy went down this wrong path—a path that was followed by early American and European sociologists—as it tagged along behind Descartes, who saw the observer as the consciousness of the Subject. In the philosophy of the subject of Descartes, Fichte, Kant, and the transcendental phenomenologists, Subjects become aware of themselves through cognition and language (Luhmann 1994). Sociology reaches an impasse with the philosophy of the subject, however, because from the perspective of sociological observers the distinction between subject and object makes no sense, or is at the very least unsettled. As Luhmann (1994, p. 133) explains,

> …sociology can longer use the distinction between Subject and Object, as if sociology was the Subject and society, or the social system of science, was the Object. …Whenever it communicates its observations, sociology is being observed as an observer. These observations have consequences that have nothing to do with the truth or falseness of these observations, although truth or falseness may have their own consequences. In sum, it should be clear that sociology can no longer view itself as an independent observer that could enlighten or criticize society from the outside.

As sociological research moves forward, collecting data on a myriad of individuals through survey research, experiments, and other methods, there is an attempt to go beyond the case of the solitary ontological subject to the truth about society in its totality. Yet, if one begins with the assumption of the philosophy of the subject and the "truths" concerning the subjectivity, cognition, experience, and agency of individuals, the only way to explain the social totality is by invoking a collective subject or social mind. This is indeed what happened beginning in the 1860s with the professionalization of psychology, the rise of cultural or social psychology, and the later invocation of the social organism or the social mind by Franklin Giddings and other founding sociologists (Chriss 2006a). Assuming the importance of motives or intentions at the individual level almost always leads to the assumption that systems act to fulfill needs or desires as well (that is, illegitimate teleology). Therefore, according to Luhmann (1994, p. 135), we need to replace the philosophy of the subject by a theory of self-describing systems.

Fuchs has taken to heart many of Luhmann's admonitions, tacking on heavy doses of network theorizing in an effort to purge from sociology any remaining vestiges of humanism, essentialism, and subjectivism. This factor, the overt network theorizing of Fuchs, is a second crucial characteristic that distinguishes it from Black's pure sociology. Although Black on occasion uses concepts from network theory, they are by no means central to his pure sociology. Fuchs, on the other hand, makes extensive use of network concepts. Network theorizing is useful for those who pursue an antihumanist agenda, to the extent that one need never refer to persons. Specifically, persons or even larger units (such as groups or organizations) are referred to as "nodes." In traditional network theory nodes mark positions in social networks. Consider, however, the following provocative thesis of Fuchs (2001a, p. 337):

> In the beginning there were networks. Networks are fields of forces. They do not consist of nodes. Nodes are outcomes of networks. Nodes without relationships are nodes without qualities.

Here, Fuchs is not even willing to go along with the idea that networks consist of nodes. Instead, nodes (hence people) are *outcomes* of networks. In this sense, Black's social space is analogous to Fuchs' networks, in that both push real flesh-and-blood human beings to the periphery of their respective theories. Both are also fields of forces. In addition, contrary to both common sense and received social science wisdom (both of which are highly essentialistic), in the beginning it was not people, but *networks*. What does this mean exactly?

This has meaning only within the relational sociology that Fuchs is developing. From this vantage point, networks consist of *relations*, not nodes. Networks do the work which turns phenomena (people, groups, etc.) into nodes. A node has no real existence from the vantage point of networks if it is not relationally connected to and within

a network. For example, in the Kite network structure, when broken down into its subcomponents, relations can be maintained in the dyads A-B and D-E (see Figure 1).
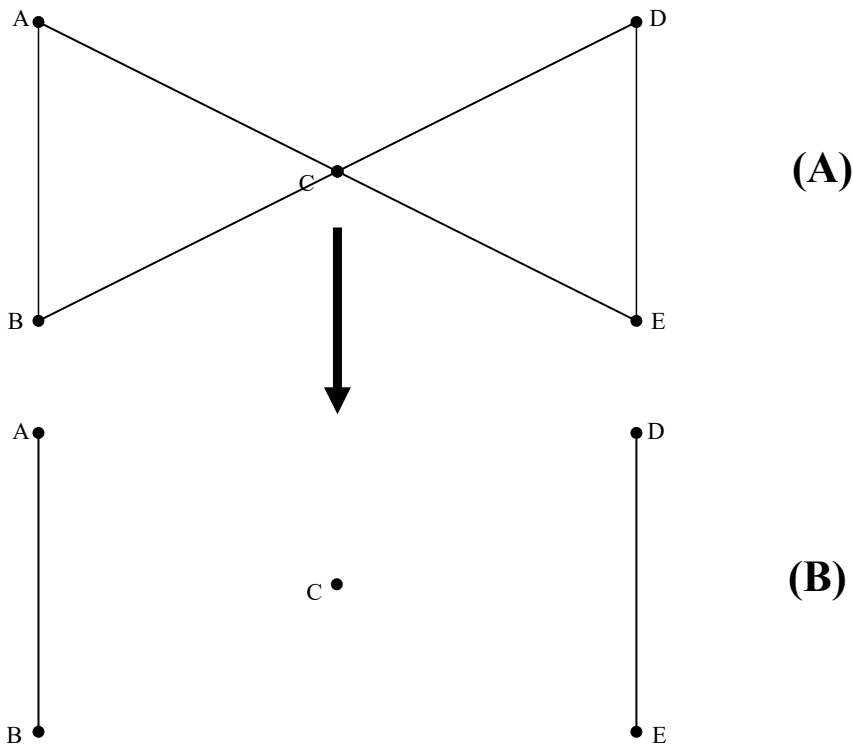

Figure 1. The Kite (A) and Subnetworking into Component Parts (B) with Introduction of Burke's (1997) Identity Process Model

But C is not really a node since it lacks relations with any of the other elements of the network. Nodes, then, are outcomes of networks. They are never sources or origins. There is nothing essential or true about nodes *qua* nodes. They only attain meaning within the relational nexus of the network, and only for the time being and from the perspective of observers of that network structure, and only until further notice (Fuchs 2001a, p. 256).

Perhaps an example will help illustrate what Fuchs is up to here. From the philosophy of consciousness perspective, human beings are the possessors of a variety of attributes, be it agency, identity, ethnicity, social capital, or what have you. The same goes for reputation. In any field of science, for example, there are superstar scientists who garner a disproportionate amount of citations to their work, who are affiliated with the most prestigious universities, and who attract the best and brightest students. From the perspectives of both common sense and sociology (or more specifically, the sociology of science), reputation is something that a few elite scientists "have" or

"possess." But this is somewhat misleading. Reputation is a characteristic of networks, not individuals. In other words, persons do not make reputations for themselves. As Fuchs (2001a, p. 185) explains, persons "cannot really 'control' their reputations, since reputations depend on recognition and appreciation within a network." And "reputation is not a thing or property, but a relation within a network through which reputation circulates" (Fuchs 2001a, pp. 185-186). This is consistent with standard network definitions of prominence. For example, according to Knoke and Burt (1983, p. 198), "An actor is prominent to the extent that he is involved in relationships that make him an especially visible member of a social system."

Besides concepts from network theory, Fuchs also finds some aspects of systems theory useful for his theoretical program. However, systems concepts—especially of the open systems variety—may (often unwittingly) introduce teleological elements into social theory. These potentially teleological elements that could crop up in Fuchs' theory—by way of systems concepts—thereby render it less "pure" than Black's pure sociology, because Black fastidiously eradicates all traces of teleology be way of his social space schema. Fuchs attempts to avoid teleology as well, and he does this by staying true, as close as possible, to Luhmann's idea of closed, self-referential, and self-generating systems. According to Fuchs, Parsons oversold the notion that social systems are goal-oriented, that they seek to maintain equilibrium and boundaries vis-à-vis environments, and are held together cybernetically by things high in information such as culture, norms and values. Rather than social integration being assured by way of shared norms and values, the reality is that society is not really integrated at all. There are no separate subsystems—such as Parsons' "societal community"—that specialize in such integration (Fuchs 2001b, p. 130).

This means that social order is temporary and local. There is no grand or overarching mechanism that assures order throughout the system. For example, there is no master "encounter" which oversees and regulates all the myriad encounters that occur between flesh-and-blood human beings taking place across space and time. What order there is, is locally accomplished, maintained, and repaired, for the time being, and for observers of the network. Communication is the work of networks, not "action" or "agency." Following Luhmann, Fuchs (2001b, p. 132) states for example that

> Persons are no longer seen as the essential sources of agency and meaning. What something means cannot be decided by individual persons, for example, by means of their intentional acts. Rather, meaning relates to other meanings and emerges from this difference and positional location in an overall structure of meaning.

In essence, then, for Fuchs the closed system model of Luhmann, quite different from the open system model of Parsons and others, is actually close to a network model. Like Black's social space, communication cannot "see, smell, or taste anything; for this

it depends on bodies and brains" (Fuchs 2001b, p. 135). It is communication that directs persons' perceptions and experiences, not the other way around.

An Excursus on the Death of the Subject

There is a strand of antihumanism—an evil twin of scientific antihumanism—that has very little to do with pure sociology or "hard" structuralism more generally. It is embodied in writings coming out of a broadly postmodernist, poststructuralist ("soft" structuralism according to Mayhew), or deconstructionist philosophical perspective (see, e.g., Agger 1991; Crook 1991; Jameson 1991; Seidman 1994). Jacques Derrida (1976) is one of the better known names associated with this broad intellectual movement. The idea is that the world is like a text, and that readers uniquely positioned in the real world by virtue of their age, race, sex, sexual orientation, social class, education, or what have you, are apt to interpret texts (the world) differently because of their differential locations in social space (this is not the same as Black's social space however). This form of radical hermeneutics implies that the old Enlightenment ideal that scientists uncover the "truths" about the world by following the protocols of positivistic method is exhausted, since there are no foundational truths to be had. Instead, there are merely countless interpretations of the world "out there," none of which are privileged over any others. This is the "polymorphous perversity of meaning" to which some deconstructionists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists have referred (see, e.g., Foucault 1980; Lyotard 1984).

This means also that the stable, Cartesian subject has been dissipated and shown to be a fraud. Part of the fallout of this radicalized worldview and concerted attack against Enlightenment science and reason is that "subjectivity recedes even further toward the indefinable edges of a twilight zone" (Schrag 1989, p. 9). The "death of the subject" is nigh (Diamantides 2000). This also fits in nicely with the increasing difficulty modern persons are purportedly having answering the question "Who am I?" (Porpora 1997). It may indeed be the case that persons are "shopping" for identity as a reaction to these newly emergent social conditions (see, e.g., Halter 2000; Markowitz 1997).

The point of all this is that we have arrived at a place and time—the beginning of the 21st century—in which there are concerns raised about the business of science, and about the social sciences more specifically. The contemporary program of the sociology of knowledge has both contributed to this state of affairs and fallen prey to it. From our modern—or perhaps better, our postmodern vantage point—we can look back at Ward, Giddings, Sumner, and Small (among others) and chuckle to ourselves at how naïve and innocent they were in putting such unbridled faith in the prospects of developing sociology as the *science* of society. Ward's work especially—but also Giddings' and Sumner's—reflects an unabashed positivism and naturalism which views the social sciences as merely an extension of the natural sciences. Again, by today's

standards their vision appears quaint and naïve. Today, there is growing skepticism of scientific knowledge, an uneasy feeling that it is merely a social construct, one among many discourses that are battling for attention in the public arena of ideas.

The origin of the postmodern impulse within intellectual thought was the rejection of the received dualism of mind/body which has played a central role in Western philosophy since the Enlightenment (Alway, 1995; Flax 1987; Hudson, 1989; Jaggar, 1983; Lyotard, 1984; Murphy, 1989).[6] This dualism served to bifurcate the world into two distinct realms: the *body*, representing an objective realm of facts and physical objects existing independently of human consciousness or sensory experience; and the *mind* which, in representing the subjective realm of opinion and human consciousness, attempts to grasp the obdurate physical world existing apart from the receiver.

The scientific method became sanctioned as the avenue through which the "truths" of the objective world could be settled—even if only provisionally (see Griswold, 1990)— through the fallible processes of disciplinary consensus and collegial protocol. But the claim to represent the truths of the world came to be seen more and more as an ideological, elitist undertaking by scientists (largely white males) who by self-proclamation established theirs as the only legitimate voice in matters of explaining the world. In fact, the sociology of knowledge (e.g., Bloor 1976; Gouldner, 1970, 1976; Mannheim, 1936) arose in large measure to challenge the notion that objective knowledge of the world is attainable through any particular method or procedure. This then serves to diminish the privileged status of scientists as the self-appointed champions of the quest for objective reality. Truth, then, is seen through the prism of postmodernism as merely that vision of the world which holds sway over a group of scientists working within particular areas of study. Rather than working toward the formulation or uncovering of certain lawlike truths which exist in the world, the postmodern loss of certitude now sees scientists as interest-driven as opposed to fact-driven, and it is hence ultimately the social position of scientists which plays the most important role in giving rise to the scientific community's currently sanctioned standards for knowledge and truth.

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[6] This rejection of dualism is also shared by most feminist theorists. Alway (1995) bemoans the fact that a "feminist revolution" has yet to occur in sociology. But for a cognitive revolt to occur within sociology, a sizable number of its practitioners—presumably much larger than currently is the case—would have to come to the same conclusion, namely that gender ought not be treated merely as a variable in social analysis and theory, but instead should be elevated to an ontologically privileged position within the analytic study of social systems. The argument that feminists make for the pervasiveness of gender in social reality and hence in sociological explanation, amounts to a call for a "central" concept from which all other concepts, explanations, or understandings of sociological import would or could derive. (This is quite similar in fact to Jack Gibbs' [1989, 1994] suggestion that "control" could be sociology's central notion.) But choosing one or several central concepts—be it race, gender, age, power, control, one's relation to the means of production, birth, death, personality, etc.—is a normative move because, as the list above illustrates, there are a variety of competing concepts which seemingly touch all corners of life and which thus could fill the role of "central" concept. This issue lies, then, properly within the realm of axiology, not ontology or even epistemology.

Lester Ward and the Sociology of Knowledge

Here, because of the emphasis it places on the social construction of reality, the sociology of knowledge converges with some aspects of the anti-science sentiments of deconstruction and postmodernism. But although the sociology of knowledge opens itself up to this sort of radical appropriation or reading, it need not always move in this direction. Before the sociology of knowledge came on the scene in large measure through the efforts of Karl Mannheim and Max Scheler in Germany, Lester Ward in America had already conceptualized the field, although the name he gave it never caught on. In his discussion of sociology as the description of social facts, Ward (1902, p. 642) stated,

> But there is still another source of social facts, as yet without a name, but always taken into account, and which is perhaps of more value to the sociologist than any of the foregoing. This is the sociologist's own social environment. If he would only recognize it, the facts he is seeking lie all about him. From birth to death he is literally bathed in a social medium and breathes a social atmosphere.

And on the next page Ward (1902, p. 643) continued:

> Sociology, therefore, in its more restricted and proper sense, is of all sciences perhaps the least to be regarded as a descriptive science. This is not because it ignores facts. It uses far more facts than any other science. But it is because its facts are supplied by other ancillary special social sciences—ethnography, demography, history, statistics, and the ever-present social environment, which might be called *mesography* when it is observed, recorded, and utilized by the sociologist.

Mesography could have been the name given to the sociology of knowledge had observers during and shortly after Ward's lifetime paid sufficient attention to his writings (Chriss 2006b). Nevertheless, the point to be made here is that Ward and other American sociologists worked from an unabashedly scientific (or naturalistic, or positivistic) perspective even while claiming that subjective phenomena deserved to be included within their broader scientific agenda (Chriss 2010). This is because, circa the 1880s and 1890s, psychology had just been recently "scientized" and professionalized, and in conjunction with the ascendancy of the theory of evolution and the biological sciences more generally—all of which fell into place in rough accordance with Comte's hierarchy of the sciences—American sociology found its own niche within the scientific arena. Sociologists had fought a long and hard battle to be seen as separate and distinct from the humanities and other more "idiographic" intellectual pursuits such as history (Giddings 1904, 1920; Lepenies 1988). Consistent with the era of its founding, then, early American sociologists' *Weltanschauung* included positivism and naturalism,

evolutionism (although already in decline by the 1890s), but also teleology, humanism, and subjectivism.

Accommodating Trends in Other Disciplines

The scientific state of the art in sociology by this time—1880s through the turn of the century—was such that there never was much if any inkling that the human person, or his consciousness or subjectivity, should be abandoned. Indeed, a true science of society could not be envisioned without these psychological concepts and principles (save for William Graham Sumner and a handful of others). Hence psychological sociology was born, and it reigned supreme during this era.

Today, however, humanism, teleology, and other aspects of subjectivity are under attack, both from the side of the humanities and insurgent social sciences (deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and some versions of feminism and cultural studies), and from the side of the social sciences as represented by pure sociology and some versions of network theory. Interestingly enough, many sociologists had condemned their own field for its "conservatism" for not getting on the postmodern/poststructuralist/deconstructionist bandwagon that was initiated within the humanities and literary studies years earlier (see. e.g., Gordon 2004). But sociologists should in no way feel that they must accommodate trends in the humanities, be it history, art, cultural studies (see, e.g., Mansfield 2000), or what have you. Franklin Giddings certainly did not, whether it was on the basis of his famous disputes with historians or with regard to his suggestion that literature and art are distinct from the sciences and should remain that way.[7] Indeed, Giddings' hard-nosed commitment to science at all costs, which in effect instructs sociologists to put on their blinders and not be swayed by "fads and foibles" (according to Sorokin's [1956] terminology) occurring in sociology or elsewhere, was one of the first and most successful programs of scientific and statistical sociology.

Giddings' engineering or mechanistic orientation was always uncompromising (Chriss 2006a; Turner 2005). Well before his time, Giddings (1924, p. 14) argued that a sociologist should be a social engineer: just as an engineer who works with physicals materials must know their properties, their limits of resistance, and their proper uses, so too must the social engineer recognize "that there are loads which human nerves and muscles can no more carry, and shocks which they can no more endure, than steel girders or concrete arches can withstand unlimited strain." Above

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[7] Giddings (1914) actually published a book of poetry entitled *Pagan Poems*. But he never mentioned this in his scientific work, staying true to his belief that the worlds of art and science were distinct and not open to cross-fertilization.

all else, sociologists must not be pie-in-the-sky utopian idealists, out to save the world as the spirit moves them.[8]

Here Giddings is close to an outright rejection of subjectivity as a source for directing or informing sociological analysis. His behavioristic psychology pushed him in this direction, even while he was seemingly championing subjectivity by way of the consciousness of kind. If subjectivity is to be purged from social scientific explanation, scientific antihumanism of the sort represented by Black's pure sociology and Fuchs' network theory appears to hold far more promise than the anti-scientific version represented by deconstruction and poststructuralism. Indeed, the field of sociology may find that the grand project of developing a science of society is helped along immeasurably by leaving subjectivity behind. If this is done, much of the classical theory we read today would finally be relegated to the dustbin of history. But are sociologists willing to do this? Pondering this question myself, I would have trouble letting go of Ward, Giddings, Ellwood, and the rest. Irregardless of how much they actually inform ongoing theorizing and research in the field of sociology today, they are just a damn interesting read. And others (including myself) continue to read the better-known classics such as Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Simmel for many of the same reasons.

Sociology continues to remain classical, and hence also committed to subjectivism and psychologism in some form, because progress toward the ultimate goal of uncovering the eternal laws of the social universe is slow and incremental. Perhaps a full-blown and widespread commitment to pure sociology would prompt something like a paradigm shift or conceptual revolution in sociology, but it is hard to say. Feminists have been saying for years that something like a paradigm shift could occur if more sociologists made gender a central component of their conceptual arsenal. We all hold out hope that the theoretical or conceptual traditions we favor will somehow make a difference, on a discipline wide level and even beyond, in informing both basic sociological research and applied social policy. And we will continue to muddle along down this path collectively, whether or not subjectivity is taken along for the ride. That is the ongoing saga of sociology, a continuity which links the early efforts of Lester Ward, Franklin Giddings, and W.E.B. Du Bois, to those of Randall Collins, Jonathan Turner, Mark Granovetter, Donald Black, and a host of other prominent and not-so-prominent contemporary sociologists.

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[8] Although he rarely employed the language of engineering, the naturalism of Lester Ward's dynamic sociology was nevertheless consistent with Giddings' program. For Ward (1893, p. 2), sociology makes sense only to the extent that sociologists can identify the social forces that operate on society, just as the natural scientists had done so in the realm of the physical universe. Even further, "if it cannot be shown that social phenomena can be controlled as physical phenomena are controlled by a knowledge of the laws according to which they occur, the hope of improving the social condition of man as his physical condition has been improved must be given up."

Margaret Archer, Agency, and Reflexivity

The attempt to excise subjectivity from sociology swims against contemporary cultural and intellectual currents which place the human subject front and center in ongoing projects of social, cultural, and psychological explanation. This is perhaps no more evident than in Margaret Archer's (2003) work on structure, agency, and the internal conversation. Echoing the philosophy of the subject project, Archer points out that the only certain thing in the world is that we are able to distinguish ourselves from all other objects in the world. To be conscious of this means, at the very least, that we possess self-consciousness, or knowledge of and about the self. There is something special about this first-person perspective; it is the only sure privileged access to knowledge we humans have, namely, knowledge about ourselves. This is the infallibility of the first-person perspective, according to Archer (2003, pp. 38-40).

Archer's (2003, p. 154) stated agenda is to "uphold the *private* life of the social subject," but also to "defend subjective reflexivity as a *personal power*." This is somewhat of a change from the mere affirmation of reflexivity as a naturally-occurring phenomenon or process which, if left unconstrained, gives rise to selfhood. Archer (2007) is attempting simultaneously to avoid two analytical positions in favor of a third. One position she attempts to avoid is the fixed trait argument of psychological reductionism, namely that reflexivity is an innate property of the human mind and that clinical predictions for behavior can be made on that basis. The other position which she seeks to steer clear of is radical social constructionism, namely, that selves are the product of ever-shifting cultural, historical, and social configurations. This is the Hegelian "cunning of history" argument where important life events occur behind the backs of the very subjects who participate in their making. It appears that all Archer is doing here is finding an analytical middle ground—the meso—to counteract the micro-fallacies of psychological reductionism and the macro-fallacies of social constructionism.

Archer sets out to illustrate the personal power of reflexivity by interviewing persons who, through the process of interview and conversation, provided to her access to their own internal conversations. Out of these interviews Archer detected three distinct modes of reflexivity by which persons engage in their internal conversations. One group of interviewees engaged in so-called *communicative reflexivity*, namely, taking private internal conversations and extending them outward to others. In other words, some persons actively communicate with others about the topics of their internal conversations, in effect turning intra-personal dialogues into inter-personal ones. As Archer (2003, p. 168) describes it, those persons characterized as utilizing the mode of communicative reflexivity use "external consultation to complete their inner deliberations."

A second group of interviewees engaged in *autonomous reflexivity*, characterized as an adamant stance that the inner deliberations of the mind constitute a private domain that is off limits to others. Unlike the communicative reflexives, these persons have no need to share their internal conversations with others. They are more or less self-sufficient, self-directed, and self-correcting. They have self-confidence in their own internal conversations (Archer 2003, p. 211).

A third group of interviewees employed a mode of reflexivity termed *meta-reflexivity*, namely, being reflexive about one's own reflexivity. Consider an act of primary or first-order reflexivity involving asking oneself today's date.[9] The internal conversation might go something like this:

> "What is today's date?"

> "January 3rd?"

This act of primary reflexivity can be inflated into higher levels by taking one's own internal utterance or proposition and making it an object of further conversation. The response of "May 3rd" did not sound right (as indicated by the question mark), so the person may then set out to try to establish the correct date. Reflexivity becomes meta-reflexivity as further rounds of internal conversation ensue:

> "Hmmmm, no, it's January 4th."

> "Why was I a day off?"

> "Well, this always happens around the holidays."

If indeed something like this goes on in everyday life, is it something with which sociologists ought to be concerned? Beyond Archer's claim that she has discovered three distinct modes of reflexivity, she also claims that these modes of reflexivity, each working in their own unique way, mediate the effects of structure upon agency. How does this happen? Sequentially, Archer suggests that many things of import to persons begin in the mind, as persons raise *concerns* about things in the world reflexively, and carry out internal conversations about these things. The next step exists somewhere in an ephemeral state between thinking and doing, whereby *projects* or plans of actions are drawn up, either internally (as in the case of autonomous reflexives) or in collaboration with others (as in the case of communicative reflexives). This is basically synonymous with "intent." Finally, these persons put projects into effect (some more successfully than others of course), culminating in a set of *practices* marking the activities of real flesh-and-blood human beings. As these practices are meshed together over space and time, the patterned regularities which sociologists call social structures come into view (somewhat reminiscent of Anthony Giddens).

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[9] This is a modification of an example provided by Archer (2003, p. 255).

And, of course, structures are an obdurate reality confronting individuals in their lifeworlds which must be taken into account as they reflect about themselves and others, contemplate plans of action, and do things together.

Hence, the micro-macro connection is solved in the linkages forged between consciousness – modes of reflexivity – concerns – projects – practices – structure – back to consciousness – and so forth. This is not so much a sequential, linear process as it is a cyclical or looping process. It is similar to Parsons' cybernetic system or Burke's (1997) identity control model, but also to the micro-macro linkages depicted in certain types of network theory. Archer (2003, pp. 357-361) disavows similarities to Parsons' program especially, but there are linkages nonetheless both to his theory as well as to the statics and dynamics approaches of earlier theorists such as Comte, Spencer, Ward, and Giddings. All of these programs also share deep and abiding commitments to the reality of subjectivity as well as the assumption that subjective phenomena must be incorporated into any adequate explanation of social life. Yet, for Archer, the real "stuff" of social explanation arises out of the meso-level, sandwiched in between and mutually influenced by the workings of structure at the macro-level and individual personhood with all its accoutrements at the micro-level.

The Romanticism of Agency/Structure

Letting go of this project, whether it is called the philosophy of the subject, the mentalist paradigm, or other related terminologies, will be difficult, because doing so leaves one with the painful alternatives of accepting either the "death of the subject" thesis emanating from deconstruction and poststructuralism, or the "scientific" version of a subjectless sociology embodied in the writings of Black, Fuchs, and others. One thing that seems always to be a part of subject-centered social theories, although rarely explicitly avowed by the authors themselves, has been a depiction of human beings as noble and dignified figures who are trying desperately—and sometimes unsuccessfully, especially when reflexivity is fractured or blocked—to cling to the last remaining things which mark them as uniquely human: their subjectivity, identities, and selves.

In this sense, not only Archer's work, but many works in the humanities, social sciences, and the popular press continue to emphasize the worth and dignity of the human person, as if to suggest our humanity is under siege and in need of shoring up or rescue. A popular novel by Mitch Albom (2006), titled *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (which was later made into a TV movie starring John Voight in the lead role of Eddie), is emblematic of this ongoing trend. In the story, 83-year old Eddie, the head maintenance worker at an amusement park, dies in an accident at the park, and he finds that in heaven you meet five people—some familiar, some strangers—who have insights to give you about your life. In the course of finding out truths through contact

with these people in the afterlife, Eddie also discovers that, regardless of how much he felt that his life had been meaningless and without merit, all lives ARE meaningful and important because of the way lives are intertwined with others. Even an obscure maintenance worker with not much to show for at the end of the day still finds a place in the sun when all is said and done.

Even as this novel aggrandizes the self, there certainly is evidence in the humanities and social sciences that the self is akin to a new object of worship in modern society even with ongoing secularization. The desire not only to rescue but exalt the self in social analysis in this way contains strains of both idealism and romanticism, which Martindale (1981) has aptly dubbed "romantic idealism."[10] This is traceable, again, to Hegel, and as Martindale (1981, p. 150) explains,

> In Hegel's great synthesis of the modern idealistic argument, the ego was located at the center of existence, credited with moral and aesthetic creativity ["agency" in Archer's terminology]. The ego and the moral or aesthetic world it creates appear as unified against a transpersonal psychic background. The processes of individual experience are paralleled in the process of nature.

This also points to a polarity between objectivity and subjectivity. Championing objectivity, Enlightenment science endeavored to go beyond mere appearances by the use of new measuring tools which would enable scientists to understand the exact nature of various parts of the whole in order to derive covering laws to better explain the physical universe or, with regards to sociology specifically, the social totality. The romantic critique of science, however, points out the irony that the world as it appears—specifically those things seen and understood from the perspective of human experience—is not available to the scientific mode of understanding. Science, therefore,

> …knows only secondary, not primary qualities: other kinds of knowledge which are accessible only to direct subjective experience are closed-off. Science knows the world only at second-hand. By contrast, the romantic mode emphasizes the importance of immediate experience as the basis of understanding (Cotgrove 1978, p. 360).

Conclusion: Finally Letting Go?

I agree with all those who defend the mentalist paradigm that, from the solipsistic perspective of any particular human being, one's own subjectivity is very real. Buying into the notion of intersubjectivity means that I am probably not that much different

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[10] Making an even stronger case than Martindale's notion of romantic idealism, Randall Collins argues that any invocation of the agency/structure dualism is inherently romantic. Collins (1992, p. 77) explains, "The question of agency and structure is not an explanatory question but an ideological one. To shift our theoretical focus away from micro/macro to agency/structure is a deliberate choice to give up the search for sociological explanations, in favor of defending an image of the social world which we find pleasant to believe." On this point I agree with Collins.

from my fellow human beings. I assume that they, like me, have feelings and emotions, engage in internal conversations, dream about and contemplate plans of action, like certain things while abhorring others, and so forth. It is within the aesthetic realm particularly that powerful subjective forces are on display. For me, and I assume for others as well, music is an especially powerful motivator of moods, feelings, and emotions. Harry Nilsson's "Remember" brings tears to me eyes every time I hear it. If I were banished to a desert island and allowed to take with me the body of work of only one vocalist, it would be Burton Cummings. I enjoy listening to the offbeat, sophisticated art rock of 10cc, which always gets me in a fighting mood because I often find myself defending the band against people who just don't "get" their music. Godley and Creme's "I Pity Inanimate Objects" is the weirdest, strangest, most creatively insane piece of music I have ever heard.

Movies are prime movers, too. I still choke up at the end of "Field of Dreams." There is almost nothing more enjoyable for me than watching the superlative acting performances of Jack Nicholson in movies like "The Last Detail" and "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," or the brilliant slapstick comedy of Curly Howard of The Three Stooges. The grotesque and macabre vision of Clive Barker in the "Hellraiser" series is chilling and unnerving. And the magnificence of "2001: A Space Odyssey" can hardly be put into words.

This is the problem of giving warrant to the free play of subjectivity. The record of what I like, or appreciate, or despise, or the kinds of emotions that well up in me given particular stimuli, are just not that interesting. Bring in another person and they will be more than glad to give you their take on how they see and experience the world. So what? We already know people have varying tastes, desires, emotions, and feelings. I love Godley and Creme and Steppenwolf, you hate them. So where do we go from there?

One might be tempted to suggest that subjectivity is a dead-end for sociology, in agreement with both the pure sociologists and the deconstructionists. At this point, I am willing to let go of it. This study has exhausted itself, and there is nothing to do but throw up one's hands and give up. Even acknowledging the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to this line of inquiry, the "science" of subjectivity has not gotten us much past folk psychology concepts, so why even bother with it? I am bombarded with images and talk of the self, feelings, and emotions every single day. Perhaps science should be a safehouse where one can escape subjectivity.

Enough is enough.

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