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Redefining Reality: A Resolution to Theoretical Paradox in the Field of Sociology[1]

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Abstract

In this article I propose that a "redefined" standard of truth offers a means through which to develop a united theoretical and methodological framework for sociological science. I argue that, although human agency needs to be defined in terms that are antithetical to social structural constraint, agency and social structure must also be compatible and co-productive. As such, I also assert that the micro level of individual behavior is interactively linked to macro structures through the medium of three dimensional power. Finally, redefined truth facilitates a broader and more inclusive definition of sociological subject matter, while also advocating an improved alternative to the conventional notion of "good science."

Introduction

In what follows, I propose a solution to the paradox of emancipation by suggesting that actors have the capacity to "redefine reality" (McGettigan, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001a). This solution has implications for a number of unresolved theoretical dilemmas. As evidenced in the three faces of power debate (Lukes, 1974, 2005), conventional approaches to sociological science employ methods that conform to a constrained definition of disciplinary subject matter. I argue that to observe the third face of power successfully one must expand one's definition of "good science" to more fully appreciate the multi-dimensional nature of empirical reality. In doing so, sociologists will be better able to

conceptualize the linkages (Alexander, 1987; Ritzer, 2000b) between the various levels of social structure and the diverse fields of sociological inquiry.

Consideration of the role that power plays in the dynamics between actors and social structures varies according to one's definition of scientific truth and influences the way one conducts sociological science. As such, critics (Collins 1991, 1997; Denzin, 1997; Seidman 1991; Smith 1991, 1996) have accused conventional sociology of imposing exclusive constraints on knowledge while also endorsing endemically unjust features of the contemporary social environment. However, such critics have been unable to develop a comprehensive substitute for the flawed scientific epistemology that they disavow. In an effort to overcome the epistemological dilemmas of standpoint perspectives, I advance a redefined standard of truth that, I argue, permits social scientists to more adequately compass the terrain of sociological subject matter and also to fashion a coherent alternative to "good science."

Competing Views of Power

According to Lukes (1974, 2005) there are three dimensions of power. The one-dimensional view defines power as something that is expressed in observable relationships: verbal or physical struggles between antagonists. The two-dimensional view includes the influence of intention in power relationships. This perspective criticizes one-dimensional power theories for overlooking the degree to which power may invisibly impede observable power contests. The three-dimensional view of power suggests that power is even more insidious. Three-dimensional perspectives assert that actors' very own interests are shaped by power structures. Thus, actors are often secretly hoodwinked into doing the bidding of others, even while presuming to serve their own self-interests.

The pluralistic, or one-dimensional view of power maintains that power in a democratic system is distributed among competing groups. This perspective stresses that, although it is unequally distributed, everyone has some access to power. Thus, Dahl (1961) assumed that one needed only to observe the democratic representational process in action to witness the exercise of power.

Dahl's "intuitive idea of power" can be described as follows: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (1957, p. 80). Power, in this sense, is operationalized as the ability of one actor to affect another, which Dahl and other pluralists believe may best be observed in decision-making situations. Overt conflict is a fundamental component of this operationalization of power. Dahl measured power in terms of an actor's ability to win decisions on key issues, which necessarily implies some disagreement, or in Lukes' words, "actual and observable, conflict" (1974, p.13).

Dahl's emphasis on studying "concrete, observable behavior" (Lukes 1974, p.12)

had a dual purpose. First, Dahl's (1961) study was a reaction to elite studies of power (Mills 1956). Elite power theorists claim that instead of being distributed pluralistically, power is possessed by a limited number of power brokers. Thus, Dahl's study of the political environment of New Haven, Connecticut was intended to demonstrate that many groups, not just elites, won key decisions and therefore possessed power. Second, Dahl had a scientific motive: he wanted to practice "good science," which implies a break with conceptual, philosophical issues in favor of studying observable behavior that is subject to conventional scientific analysis.[2]

Early critics of Dahl, proponents of what Lukes calls the two-dimensional view of power (Bachrach and Baratz 1970), argued that pluralist restrictions on the operationalization of power, that were intended to serve a particular definition of "good science," discounted an important facet of power: the mobilization of bias. The mobilization of bias is a "bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others" (Lukes 1974, p.16). Bachrach and Baratz claim that those who are in power exercise control over organizational agendas by making "nondecisions." Nondecisions are conscious choices made by agenda-setters that result "in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker" (Bachrach and Baratz 1970, p. 44). Issues that conflict with the interests of agenda-setters may, therefore, be easily suppressed simply by failing to allocate time for their consideration. For example, political parties often enhance the perception of unanimity by failing to yield podium time to radical splinter groups during national conventions. In this way, power may be exercised quite effectively without creating any visible conflict, which, in turn, creates a problem for the practice of "good science" according to Dahl's definition. That is, Bachrach and Baratz point out--in agreement with the notions of other important scholars (Chomsky, 1996; Domhoff, 2002; Foucault, 1977; Mills, 1956)--that there are a variety of relatively "invisible" social dynamics that extensively mold the contours of observable reality. Therefore, without engaging the quality of mind (Mills, 1959) necessary to conceptualize the domain of conventionally invisible social phenomena, one's observations of empirical reality will be flawed at best.

However, despite Bachrach and Baratz's strong criticism of the one-dimensional view of power, they in turn make the dubious assertion that nondecisions are still observable in the conventional sense (1970, p. 50). Bachrach and Baratz claim that nondecisions are observable if one considers "potential issues." Thus, nondecisions may remain invisible to the naked eye, but, according to Bachrach and Baratz, nondecisions can enter the range of the observable if one bears in mind the existence of invisible, subversive challenges to authority--which is what Mills, not Dahl, tends to argue.

Oddly, although they appear to have incorporated "unobservable" criteria into their operationalization of power, Bachrach and Baratz (1970, pp. 49-50) still insist, along with Dahl, that to avoid reducing the scientific analysis of power to

a branch of "moral philosophy," observable conflict must be present for power relationships to exist. That is, they claim that if no observable conflict is discernible in social relationships, then there is no way to judge accurately whether "consensus is genuine or instead has been enforced through nondecision-making" (1970, p. 49). Thus, in the end, Bachrach and Baratz support the same constraints on sociological subject matter--and therefore they end up advocating much the same definition of "good science"--that they criticized Dahl for adopting.

Lukes suggests that the conflict to which Bachrach and Baratz refer "is between the interests of those engaged in nondecision-making and the interests of those they exclude from a hearing within the political system" (Lukes 1974, p. 20). While, according to Lukes, this is a broader view of interests than that which is subscribed to by many pluralists, it remains a restricted definition. That is, Lukes argues that Bachrach and Baratz's definition is limited to what may be identified as "subjective interests" or those interests that "are consciously articulated and observable" (1974, p. 20). But this, Lukes contends, still sustains too narrow a view of interests and too great a dependence on observable conflict if one is to effectively define the full scope of power and the range of its invisible effects on observable reality.

> The trouble seems to be that both Bachrach and Baratz and the pluralists suppose that because power, as they conceptualize it only shows up in cases of actual conflict, it follows that actual conflict is necessary to power. But this is to ignore the crucial point that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place (Lukes 1974, p. 23).

Lukes (1974, pp. 24-25) proposes that power relationships may be comprised by latent conflict, or what he describes as "a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude." Real interests are the goals and desires that actors "would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice" (Lukes 1974, p. 34). In many cases, Lukes suggests, actors are not able to make the choices they would prefer because their conscious, subjective interests have been insidiously manipulated by invisible exercises of power.

For example, the socio-cultural context of the early twenty-first century USA tends to inscribe its citizens with "tastes" (Bourdieu, 1984; McGettigan, 1999; Ritzer, 2002a) for private homes, automobiles, computers, credit cards, cell phones, and fast food. Generally, we do not view our appetite for such cultural products as the work of social coercion. However, if we were to be situated in a markedly different cultural context, let's say sixteenth century Hudson Bay Inuit culture, then our desires would include a passion for such things as warm fur-lined clothing, well-constructed igloos, skin-covered kayaks, and raw seafood. In such a context, it would be preposterous to lust after Big Macs

because the extant cultural system would exert neither the impetus to seek, nor would it include any of the essential means to produce such delicacies. Thus, the third face of power works as a remarkably effective, macro-level *social glue* because of the way that it "encourages" individuals to apply themselves insatiably to the pursuit of those things that extant cultural systems are designed to provide. Conveniently, these selfsame forces facilitate the reproduction of the cultural context within which individuals are embedded (Willis 1977, Burawoy, 1979): our hunger for automobiles effectively sustains the viability of numerous global industries that are bent on satisfying consumer desires, e.g., petroleum, steel, shipping, etc. Automobile-lust also propels global infrastructure development for an expanding automobile culture (Schlosser, 2001).

Therefore, the third face of power can be perceived as a thoroughly enveloping blanket of power that "steers" micro-level individual behavior toward goals that bring about the reproduction of prevailing cultural contexts. Whether such cultural coercion should be considered "good" or "evil" is a matter of some debate. Since the preponderance of our humanity (Mead, 1934; Wiley, 1994) is accessible only through extensive communion with manipulative cultural environments, one should, seemingly of necessity, concede that there are positive aspects of cultural domination. However, members of some countercultures (McGettigan, 1999; Wolfe, 1968) and proponents of popular theoretical perspectives have, with qualifications, advanced arguments to the contrary (Lemert, 1999; Marx, 1906; Seidman, 1991). Nonetheless, putting aside the question of good versus evil forms of social power, it must be understood that cultural contexts are imbued with a subtle, invisible third face of power that thoroughly envelopes, and largely determines, the thoughts, behaviors, and goals of individual social actors. [3]

Indeed, exercises of the third face of power often result in what appears to be consensus, but such quietude can, Lukes argues, represent the most coercive face of power (Gaventa, 1980). Thus, Lukes suggests that one cannot capably analyze power or observable social reality without taking into account the dimensions of power that serve to structure events prior to their enactment in empirical reality. Yet, despite the fact that Lukes argues that it is essential to acknowledge the existence and effects of all three dimensions of power (i.e., the individual, organizational, and cultural levels of power), he also maintains that there are inescapable dilemmas that prevent agreement upon the definition of power's third face.

Lukes (1974, p. 26) states that power is "one of those concepts that is ineradicably value-dependent." This means that every definition of power is based upon value-assumptions and, therefore, any particular definition may only be applied situationally--never universally. However, Lukes adds that even though every definition of power is limited, some definitions nonetheless "extend further and deeper than others" (Lukes 1974, p. 26).

Lukes argues that the concept of interests is akin to power in that it is also a value-dependent, “irreducibly evaluative notion” (1974, p. 34). Furthermore, he notes that:

> different conceptions of what interests <u>are</u> are associated with different moral and political positions. Extremely crudely, one might say that the liberal takes men as they are and applies want-regarding principles to him, relating their interests to what they actually want or prefer, to their policy preferences as manifested by their political participation. The reformist, seeing and deploring that not all men’s wants are given equal weight by the political system, also relates their interests to what they want or prefer, but allows that this may be revealed in more indirect and sub-political ways--in the form of deflected, submerged or concealed wants or preferences. The radical, however, maintains that men’s wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and, in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice (Lukes 1974, p. 34).

While the three-dimensional, or radical, view of power may offer a deeper and more thorough-going analysis of power, Lukes admits it is still a value-dependent notion. The value-dependency of the three-dimensional view of power in turn leads to an acute and as yet unsolved problem: the paradox of emancipation.

The Paradox of Emancipation

For Lukes to identify an exercise of power, he must be able to address “the double claim that <u>A</u> acts (or fails to act) in a certain way and that <u>B</u> does what he would otherwise not do” (1974, p. 41). To clearly recognize an exercise of power, one must first identify a “relevant counterfactual.” A relevant counterfactual is a referent through which one may detect the interruption of an actor’s interests by the imposition of another set of interests. For example, supporters of one and two-dimensional views of power argue that observable conflict--actors visibly manipulating the behavior of others--suffices as a relevant counterfactual. Thus, according to this definition, power relationships exist only when <u>A</u> observably gets <u>B</u> to do something <u>B</u> would not otherwise do, e.g., parents sending reluctant children to bed, or police assaulting protestors with water cannons. However, in the case of the three-dimensional view of power identifying a relevant counterfactual becomes more complicated. The definition of the third face of power implies that events in empirical reality, as well as observers’ perceptions of those events, are distorted by social power. Lukes states:

> in general, evidence can be adduced (though by nature of the case,

> such evidence will never be conclusive) which supports the relevant counterfactuals implicit in identifying exercises of power of the three-dimensional type. One can take steps to find out what it is that people would have done otherwise (1974, p. 50).

Although Lukes cites several interesting examples, he never explains specifically how to identify a relevant counterfactual for the third face of power. Thus, Lukes takes the discussion of power to a point where he challenges the limitations that have been imposed upon its definition by other theorists. However, Lukes fails to follow through by offering a means with which his conception of power can be employed to produce a more competent evaluation of observable social events.

Lukes does not specify a method for identifying relevant counterfactuals because he claims power is such a value-dependent concept that it is impossible to develop a consistent power-identification process. Thus, he believes that there are ways to identify counterfactuals--and, thereby, exercises of the third face of power--but they depend in each case upon the values of the observer. Another reason that Lukes never specifies a consistent means with which to identify relevant counterfactuals for the third face of power is because he never clearly defines a model of real interests. And Lukes probably never proposed a specific method for identifying real interests because doing so precipitates certain seemingly insoluble problems. Lukes discusses two alternatives implicit in the identification of real interests:

> (1) that A might exercise `short-term power' over B (with an observable conflict of subjective interests), but that if and when B recognizes his real interests, the power relationship ends: it is self-annihilating; or (2) that all or most forms of attempted or successful control by A over B, when B objects or resists, constitute a violation of B's autonomy; that B has a real interest in his own autonomy; so that such an exercise of power cannot be in B's real interests (1974, p. 33).

Following this, Lukes states that the first alternative is a "licence for tyranny," while the second alternative "furnishes an anarchist defense against it" (1974, p. 33). Thus, implied within the very definition of real interests is a power struggle: to define interests for other actors is to impose one's own views about what is "right and wrong" upon the events that one observes, whereas failing to define real interests implies that one has elected not to recognize the occurrence of such subtle exercises of power. Although, strictly speaking, these alternatives may not represent a dichotomy, they do appear to represent the only available options for identifying exercises of the third face of power: to impose one's own value system or to relativistically avoid making any kind of judgment about the invisible effects of power on the course of social events. Recognizing the problematic consequences of both alternatives, Lukes refuses to embrace either one.

Benton (1981) labeled the conceptual impasse at which Lukes arrives the "paradox of emancipation."

> In its simplest form this is the problem of how to reconcile a conception of socialist practice as a form of collective self-emancipation with a critique of the established order which holds that the consciousness of those from whom collective self-emancipation is to be expected is systematically manipulated, distorted and falsified by essential features of that order. If the autonomy of subordinate groups (classes) is to be respected then emancipation is out of the question; whereas if emancipation is to be brought about, it cannot be self-emancipation. I shall refer to this problem as the `paradox of emancipation' (Benton 1981, p. 162).

Thus, Benton asserts that "emancipation" can neither be engineered in the minds of the subjugated masses, nor implemented through the machinations of tyrants: in both cases, coercive power undermines the goal of emancipation. However, Benton bases his dismissal of the potential for identifying real interests on misleading grounds, i.e., because actors cannot completely overcome the influences of ideological systems, Benton concludes that it is not possible for individuals to define, or to act upon their real interests. This neglects an important point that Lukes was trying to make: just because ideological systems generally deny the possibility of actors' emancipation does not mean that actors lack real interests. In other words, even though actors may not be able to free themselves from their ideological straight-jackets, the third face power may still be analyzed in terms of a conceptual definition of real interests. Still, even though Benton makes a number of invalid assumptions about real interests, Benton's paradox of emancipation does raise important issues that Lukes' view of power ultimately fails to resolve.

Benton (1981, p. 164-5) claims that Lukes evokes the paradox of emancipation by suggesting that power may be exercised over an actor "with an observable conflict of subjective interests" (1974, p. 33) while still preserving an actor's real interests. However, Lukes never suggests that power may be exercised over an actor in the actor's real interests. Lukes does propose that idea as an alternative, but one that he finds unacceptable. Lukes says that of the two given alternatives, tyranny vs. anarchy:

> I am inclined to adopt the first, the dangers of which may be obviated by insisting on the empirical basis for identifying real interests. The identification of these is not up to A, **but to B**, exercising choice under conditions of relative autonomy and, in particular, independently of A's power (Lukes 1974, p. 33).

Although Lukes makes it clear that he leans toward the merits of value-based evaluations of power, it is a mistake to conclude that Lukes abandons his

operationalization of power to the paradox of emancipation. If Lukes had explicitly adopted the tyrannical approach to defining real interests, then he would also have embraced the paradox of emancipation: he would have stated that the only way to define real interests would be to impose one's value-based assumptions on events in social reality. However, Lukes says that he is inclined to the tyrannical alternative, but then he stipulates qualifications to this option that seem to contradict it. Whereas the tyrannical alternative states "that A might exercise `short-term power' over B" (Lukes 1974, p. 33) in B's real interests, Lukes' qualified acceptance of that alternative--which sounds suspiciously like the second option--is that B must identify B's real interests independently of A's power. Although this appears to be a contradiction--or a way for Lukes to avoid making a choice--I think Lukes was straddling the two alternatives, tyranny vs. anarchy, in deference to an as-yet-to-be articulated alternative.

Lukes rejects the idea that real interests can be defined by reference to a particular model of interests for two reasons. First, he thinks power is such a value-bound concept that it is not subject to universal definitions. Second, because privileging a particular model would provide in his words, a license for tyranny. On the other hand, Lukes did not embrace the relativism that Bradshaw (1976) claims he did, because he expressly rejects the anarchy inherent in that alternative. Thus, one question that the paradox of emancipation raises is: how can real interests be defined in such a way that one can consistently identify exercises of the third face of power while not privileging a particular set of interests and while also avoiding a collapse into moral relativism? A second question the paradox of emancipation raises, that is more immediately relevant to the practice of "good science," is: how can observers within real social contexts consistently identify invisible exercises of power? I think Lukes offers a potential solution to this apparent paradox when he suggests that autonomy is a real interest.

Autonomy and Real Interests

The purpose of explicating the third face of power is to facilitate a more complete understanding of empirical reality: observable social environments cannot be fully understood without a grasp of the invisible and multi-dimensional social forces that construct the landscape of what and how we "see." However, the definition of radical power seems to imply that social actors, due to the omnipresence of invisible social power, are incapable of identifying exercises of radical power--or, in the language of another sociological debate (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1984; Ritzer, 2000b, pp. 521-552), social structures inescapably *determine* the entire scope of human thought and action. The deterministic argument maintains that social actors are nothing more than the unwitting pawns of social power structures. In other words, although actors may believe that invisible social power exists, because they are incapable of "seeing" precisely how they are affected by invisible societal influences, they are

unable to struggle against or in any way act independently of such forms of power.

Nevertheless, one potential solution to the problem of identifying radical power is to conceptually construct its antithesis. Despite the fact that Lukes does not assert an explicit model of real interests, he does state that a social actor "has a real interest in his own autonomy" (1974, p. 33). Thus, Lukes' argument suggests that social actors' "real interests" are subverted through *external* impositions of power. In other words, according to Lukes' characterization of the third face of power, that which prevents actors from choosing to do what they "would otherwise do" is an imposition of radical power that breaches the autonomy of individual social actors. Therefore, following the logic of Lukes' argument, if an actor were "autonomous"--if the third face of power did not breach actors' individual sovereignty--then the influences that are responsible for the corruption of actor's real interests would not be effected. Purely for the sake of argument, we can state that "autonomous actors",[4] due to their imagined freedom from the influences of coercive power, would not be disconnected from their real interests.

Certainly, a completely autonomous individual is something that does not and, for a wide variety of reasons, cannot exist in reality. However, that is precisely why this is such a useful concept for the purposes of the present discussion. Autonomy is that which cannot exist within an all-determining system of social control. If autonomy exists, then societal control cannot be absolute. That said, if one were able to identify certain conditions under which autonomy could exist within an environment of pervasive social determination--if, for example, one could identify a mechanism through which individuals could redefine the social landscape by creating "spaces" within which they could exercise autonomy--then one could also locate with specificity the phenomenon of agency. Thus, autonomy establishes a conceptual counterfactual for determining when the third face of power is being exercised and when it is not. As such, the concept of autonomy provides a means for resolving the paradox of emancipation.

Employing autonomy as a model of real interests arguably evades both snares, tyranny vs. anarchy, of the paradox of emancipation. First of all, rather than tyrannically defining a set of interests for actors, defining real interests in terms of autonomy asserts that it is up to individuals to decide what their real interests are. However, such a solution appears to plunge straight into the second snare of the paradox of emancipation: relativity. Nevertheless, if one could discover a way to find autonomy at work in real--as opposed to ideal, utopian, or purely conceptual--social environments, then one could argue that the definition of real interests may conceivably be governed by the ultimate standard: truth. [5]

Kernohan (1989), however, argues that power and real interests should not be defined in terms of autonomy for a number of reasons. First, he suggests that it is circular reasoning to define power in terms of real interests and then to

"characterize real interests in terms of their autonomy from the effects of power" (1989, p. 713). Secondly, he argues that one should not "identify power using a definition phrased in terms of intentions or wants, because intentions and wants may themselves be the creations of power" (1989, p. 716). And third, the term to be defined should not reoccur in its definition. In other words, "power must be defined prior to locating responsibility for its exercise" (1989, p. 722). Kernohan concludes by saying that:

> human agency is not the place to look for an adequate conception of power. If radical power exists, it will distort human agency by manipulating the beliefs and desires that ground rational decision making. A definition of social power in terms of human agency will be made difficult by the absence of a concept of a pure and unadulterated agent on which to base it. The existence of the power of one person over another is a social fact, not a material one; people do not have power because of an intrinsic property of themselves, but because of the social relations in which they are embedded (1989, p. 726).

This is a debatable conclusion, and one that somewhat contradicts a point Kernohan makes earlier when he observes that "[i]t is important to Lukes, as it should be to any social theorist, to give an account of power which comprehends power exercised through the manipulation of perceived interests" (1989, p. 714). Kernohan seems to be saying that even though it is important to account for human agency in theories of power, because a definition of autonomous agents "will be made difficult," the effort should be abandoned.

I agree that such a definition is essential and that it is difficult, but I reject the suggestion that the goal of defining agency in relationship to social power should be abandoned. Also, I do not think it is circular reasoning to operationalize exercises of the third face of power and real interests in terms of autonomy. There is an important difference between <u>defining power</u> and <u>identifying exercises of power</u>. Critics (Isaac 1987; Wartenberg 1990) of the "three faces of power" debate have argued that the "definition" of power that Dahl (1957) began with and that later theorists built upon was not a definition but, rather, an operationalization of power. Whereas, in fact, there are two definitions of power: "power to" and "power over." "Power to" may be defined as "a property, capacity, or the wherewithal to effect things" (Isaac 1987, p. 74): this is the type of power that makes it possible for people to move their arms, to dream, to get out of bed in the morning, and, generally speaking, to cope with and live life as unique individuals. On the other hand, "power over" can be defined as having "possession of control or command over others" (Wartenberg 1990, p. 18). "Power over" refers to the sociological dimensions of power through which the minds and activities of individuals are governed, manipulated, cultivated, corrupted, and sometimes destroyed (Gramsci, 1992). Indeed, despite the fact that Kernohan claims that "people do not have power because of an intrinsic property of themselves" (1989, p. 726), it is essential to

acknowledge that social power, i.e., "power over", cannot exist in a vacuum. People must exist, and they must be endowed with intrinsic capabilities to effect things, i.e., "power to", or else manifestations of social power become untenable.

Thus, the "three faces of power debate" is not so much a debate over the definition of power as it is a debate about the various ways that exercises of coercive power affect actors' interests. The difficulty that Lukes (1974) encountered was not how to define the third face of power, but how to establish a counterfactual that could be used to consistently identify exercises of the third face of power. Thus, it is not circular reasoning to correlate autonomy and power, to do so is simply to employ a counterfactual.

Therefore, I maintain that the idealized concept of autonomy offers a theoretical solution to the paradox of emancipation. However, thus far this solution has only addressed the first question that the existence of radical power raises (i.e., how can we define real interests without privileging a particular set of interests?). Yet, the whole point of developing a conceptual means with which to identify radical power is to achieve a broader understanding of social reality: to explain how people who are embedded within manipulative social environments can overcome the constraints that limit their understanding of society.

Whereas the theoretical resolution of the paradox of emancipation requires that one employs an extra-empirical (i.e., "ideal autonomy") conceptual mechanism, the purpose of resolving the paradox of emancipation is not to suggest that the only way to confront radical power is to escape reality. Rather, the purpose of resolving the paradox of emancipation is to expand the definition of empirical reality such that the problematic nature of the relationship between societal coercion and individual autonomy can be situated within it. In other words, the only worthwhile solution to the paradox of emancipation is one that situates the ideal within the real.

From the Ideal to the Real

The definition of truth that precipitates from defining real interests in terms of autonomy has marked similarities to Habermas' "ideal speech situation." An ideal speech situation is a theoretical interaction based upon "pure intersubjectivity," wherein there is "complete symmetry in the distribution of assertion and dispute, revelation and concealment, prescription and conformity, among the partners of communication" (Habermas 1970, p. 371). Pure intersubjectivity implies that there should be no restrictions on, or distortions of, the meaning interactants wish to share. In an ideal speech situation, each communicant would be able to completely understand the meaning that others have expressed because the distorting influences of power would be neutralized.

People have argued that Habermas is naïve for proposing that communication could ever be carried out under such ideal circumstances. Critics (Lukes 1982;

Turner 1987, p. 160; Clegg 1989, p. 94) have suggested that Habermas' presumption that truth could only be achieved in a coercion-free environment is not just totally unrealistic, but it also avoids the crucial problem that must be addressed: how do people who are enveloped by coercion achieve a better understanding of the reality that distorts their consciousness? Thus, critics have maintained that if Habermas' solution to the problem of understanding radical power is only applicable in an imaginary, coercion-free universe, then his solution is not really of value in our coercion-permeated reality.

I agree that Habermas' definition of an ideal speech situation is far removed from the less-than-ideal reality of experience. Further, I agree that any solution to the theoretical problem of defining actors' ability to be emancipated from the cognition-manipulating intrusions of coercive power must be situated within our coercion-permeated reality.[6] That is, since it is the objective of social science to explain empirical social reality instead of utopian alternatives to that reality, the discussion of abstract and conceptual dimensions of power must inform our understanding of real agents in real social situations. While Habermas' ideal speech situation ultimately fails to make this reconnection with reality, there remain elements of his theory that provide important insights into the process through which actors can generate moments of ideally autonomous activity, i.e., agency, within the coercive confines of social reality.

Habermas recognizes that "pure intersubjectivity is an idealization" (1970, p. 372); it is not supposed to be a description of the reality that does or could exist. However, his point is that intersubjective communication is oriented to the truth. Habermas asserts that even though all successful interactions are situated in coercive environments, communication must still be premised upon an effort to obtain truth or it will be meaningless.

Truth in Habermas' terms has specifically to do with communicants' ability to understand as fully as possible the meaning that other social actors wish to impart. A state of truth would be one in which all social actors could express themselves with perfect clarity while also comprehending the total content of messages from other interactants. Whereas such a perfect environment is impossible in reality, nevertheless, no matter how distorted an environment may be, the act of communication--the act of establishing an intersubjective context of mutual understanding--can generate a microcosm of that ideal environment. Herein lies the crucial process through which the ideal (i.e., limited exercises of autonomy as expressions of individual agency) can be understood to operate within the real (i.e., social contexts that are pervaded by invisible mechanisms of social control and manipulation).

According to Habermas, before meaning can be shared between communicants, they must first establish an environment of mutual comprehension. Communicants accomplish this feat by demonstrating their "communicative competence":

> ...in order to participate in normal discourse the speaker must have at his disposal, in addition to his linguistic competence, basic qualifications of speech and symbolic interaction (role-behavior), which we may call communicative competence. This communicative competence means the mastery of an ideal speech situation (Habermas 1970, p. 367).

In the course of communicating, actors do not simply spew information at each other. Rather they must begin by establishing the grounds upon which meaning can be exchanged cooperatively. Social power distorts knowledge through communication two ways: 1. It structures subjective interests (i.e. it tells people what to think); and, 2. Because power tells people what to think they often ignore what others are trying to say. An intersubjective environment must be established even if it is one's intention to deceive because if communicants want their partners to understand what *they* have to say, then they must first try to grasp the subjective thoughts of their partners. Therefore, the environment of mutual understanding upon which communication is founded serves to counteract some of the influences of coercive power.

Thus, Habermas' theory can be interpreted to mean that people can challenge power and overcome its distortions by "redefining reality."[7] When I say that social actors can redefine reality, I do not mean that they can wish the world away whenever they choose. The third face of power is exercised through the manipulation of individuals' conscious interests. As such, the third face of power constructs a bounded reality for people by limiting their cognitive field of interests to the pursuit of those things that contribute to the reproduction of existing power structures. Once again, radical power instills "tastes" (Bourdieu, 1984; McGettigan, 1999; Ritzer, 2000a) for activities and commodities (e.g., automobiles, televisions, McDonald's hamburgers, etc.) that enlist enthusiastic participation in the reconstruction of hegemonic regimes. However, as far-reaching as ideological (Lemert, 1999; Mannheim, 1936) controls may be, they do not utterly imprison individuals.

Despite the extensive control that ideological systems exert over the minds of people, there are occasions when ideological explanatory schemes become inadequate. In some instances, the reality that is defined by an ideological system must confront phenomena that are not well explained--and that may be directly contradictory to--the principal assumptions of that ideology, e.g., the threat to the Catholic Church posed by Galileo's observation that objects orbited heavenly bodies other than the earth. While people may be encouraged (Foucault, 1977, 1980) in a variety of overt and subtle ways to maintain their faith in the reality that is propagated by established power structures, it remains within the capacity of individuals to do otherwise.

Whereas many people might remain untroubled by anomalies that are not well rationalized by established belief systems--indeed, some might be encouraged by such challenges to redouble their allegiances to besieged paradigms (Kuhn,

1970)--occasionally some individuals decide to remedy the disjunctures between their expectations versus their perceptions of reality (e.g., layers of fossils that retreat further back into time than the Biblical Creation story can account for) by "redefining reality." In other words, the limitations of established explanations for anomalous phenomena sometimes require individuals to transcend and replace those inadequate schemes with more satisfactory explanations, e.g., rather than being Created, Darwin argued that a preponderance of available evidence indicates that species emerged out of long term struggles for survival.

Thus, redefining reality is the process through which individuals can challenge and negate some of the influences that the third face of power exercises over their consciousness; redefining reality is a means by which individuals can alter the existing landscape of social reality by creating "spaces" within which they can think and act with a degree of independence from individual, organizational, and cultural social constraints.[8] In the process of attempting to make sense of anomalies, individuals tend to deconstruct (Derrida, 1978) the conceptual frameworks that limit their ability to comprehend mysterious phenomena. As individuals re-evaluate their beliefs with respect to their inability to comprehend anomalies, the features of their belief systems that do not hold up under scrutiny can be rejected. If individuals are persistent enough, they may reach a point at which the critical mass of their contemplations overwhelms the remaining shackles of their former beliefs and, thus, they may experience a "moment of truth."

A "moment of truth" is an experience wherein individuals are transported from an inadequate definition of reality to a more satisfactory version. These experiences may be considered relatively truthful moments in that they are generated through a process that involves the negation of ideological controls over an individual's definition of reality. This is not to say that the redefined system of beliefs at which one arrives after experiencing a moment of truth is, therefore, Truth.[9] Far from that, I argue that, in keeping with the definition of the third face of power, all established belief systems exert their own forms of radical power upon the construction of knowledge. Thus, to experience an epiphany does not transport one to an ideal realm wherein truth reigns unchallenged--as opposed to the assertions of Habermas (1970, 1972, 1981). Instead, I merely suggest that the process of redefining reality permits individuals to negate some of the influences of radical power and, thereby, negotiate with the pervasive, consciousness-distorting influences of radical power. While individuals are not capable of total emancipation, nevertheless, the capacity to redefine reality and, thereby, ascertain moments of truth implies that it is possible for individuals to create bounded spaces within a context of coercive social constraint, and, therein, grasp a limited awareness of their real interests.

Emancipation within Limits

Idealized versions of emancipation (Habermas, 1980; Marx and Engels, 1902), as Weber (1968) observed shrewdly, tend to be illusions at best, and nightmares at worst (Ulam, 1989). However, despite the failure of ill-conceived political experiments, I maintain that that a specific form of emancipation remains possible even within the confines of the most repressive regimes. The existence of a capacity for redefining reality confirms that individuals who are situated within rigid contexts of social control can emancipate themselves sufficiently to think and act in a self-determined manner. Of course, the range of such emancipation is substantially constrained. Once again, just because individuals can conjure novel ideas does not mean that oppressive ideological superstructures will blow away like dust in the wind. Ideological systems have quite a bit of resiliency, and their advocates know how to fight (Sobel, 1999). Nevertheless, the fact that individuals can exercise any degree of freedom within the context of social structural determination establishes grounds to assert that not only can the paradox of emancipation be solved, but also that the source and location of human agency can be specified.

The capacity to redefine reality implies that individuals are inventive, creative, ingenious, etc., enough to develop explanations that no social system, nor any living person has ever conceived previously and then apply their novel ideas to improve understanding of ill-defined phenomena, e.g., far from being “designed” to lie at the center of the universe, the earth appears to be an unplanned outcome of an ancient and mysterious cosmic cataclysm. Thus, one can view such creativity as the spark of human agency. However, agency involves more than just producing novel ideas; agency implies that humans can translate their inventive, unheard-of ideas into action--and in so doing, initiate social change at the individual, organizational, and sometimes even the societal level.

Powerful as social definitions of reality may be, individuals can sometimes challenge, eliminate, and replace them. For example, despite being told from birth that the earth is flat, we might observe the disturbing and unaccountable behavior of ocean-going vessels at the horizon’s edge: disappearing and reappearing without being destroyed. Some observers might ignore the anomaly, or even contrive a convenient explanation that, while stretching credulity to the limit, remains consistent with what is already “known,” e.g., the ships are, in fact, falling off the edge of the planet, but they are recovered from certain destruction by winged marine steeds. Alternately, more independent thinkers might treat such a dilemma as an opportunity to transcend the socially imposed barriers that constrain their comprehension of observable reality. The process of transcending socially imposed barriers begins with creative observation (e.g., “Hey! Those ships look like they are gradually slipping below the horizon”) that is followed up by an individual-level challenge to social power (i.e., I guess that must mean that the horizon is not really the “end of the world”), and then the active dismantling of restrictive social controls (i.e., Based upon what I have observed, I no longer believe the earth is flat). Finally, the

realization of a redefined reality involves the implementation of an entirely new explanation that simultaneously explodes existing ideological boundaries and that also provides a more adequate description of the phenomena in question, i.e., the earth's surface appears to be curved and may, in fact, be a sphere zooming through space. Thus, as this example points out, individuals[10] occasionally demonstrate the requisite mental apparatus to make note of anomalies, develop creative new explanations for mysterious phenomena, and then overcome manifestations of social power that delimit thought and action. Therefore, individuals are not simply the objects of social coercion; sometimes agents can reverse the direction of such coercion and, thereby, modify themselves and the nature of the social world of which they are a part: e.g., human habits and culture all over the globe have changed steadily ever since the postulation that the earth is spherical.

Therefore, the autonomy that individuals exercise through the process of redefining reality establishes the necessary criteria for resolving both snares of the paradox of emancipation: 1. People must define for themselves what their real interests are; 2. People can do so in real social contexts by engaging their agency to generate autonomous "spaces" within the context of social coercion that are sufficient to counteract the social forces that limit free thought. Thus, autonomy can serve as a counterfactual to identify the third face of power, precisely because it is through the exercise of agency (i.e., autonomy in the face of, and within the context of social structural coercion that occasionally produces moments of truth) that individuals are able to recognize and renegotiate the influences of the third face of power. Moments of truth are both the medium and evidence of the individual-level capacity to identify the invisible dimensions of power: via the process of redefining reality, agents can emancipate themselves sufficiently to "see" the constraints of radical power on their consciousness. Also, the autonomy that individuals generate in the process of redefining reality offers an observable counterpoint to the pervasive social control in which individuals are otherwise immersed.

Of course, the kind of autonomy that emerges from the process of redefining reality has limited degrees of freedom. While it is a noteworthy achievement for individuals to identify, eliminate, and replace inadequate explanatory constructs that delimit their social reality, most social actors devote the greater part of their time to laboriously reconstructing the status quo. Indeed, even agents who are involved in the process of redefining reality also tend to be engaged simultaneously in efforts to sustain the frameworks of their culture. Galileo, Einstein, Darwin, and numerous other scientific radicals have concocted their uniquely revolutionary ideas while laboring to preserve the balance of their culture, i.e., eating the same food, wearing the same clothing, and speaking the same language both before and after the publication of their reality-reconstructing manifestos. Thus, the scope of autonomy exercised by even the most groundbreaking radicals is necessarily very narrow. Agents can exercise enough freedom to effect a little bit of social change, but then they

devote 99.9% of their remaining energy toward re-embedding themselves and their ideas into a slightly modified social world.

As such, even the most ardent truth-seekers tend to spend the vast majority of their time submerged within the terrain of culturally biased, “ideological” knowledge. Again, this is not due to the fact that scientists are all a bunch of pampered, hypocritical apologists for reigning political regimes (although some certainly are). Instead, the behavior of truth-seekers needs to be understood in relation to the toil of human survival: cultural contexts equip their members with the knowledge, skills, and training necessary to survive in a competitive and often cruel world. However, as Habermas (1970, p. 367) points out, it is not until humans have mastered necessary social skills that they can competently take part in the pursuit of truth. In other words, those who never learn to read, have little chance of transcending established boundaries of knowledge, and, thus, tend to be inescapably circumscribed and manipulated by the frameworks of invisible power. However, those who are able to “master the necessary skills and competencies” may, through a process of arduous, complex and sophisticated struggles, transcend the established frameworks of cultural power, achieve a limited form of emancipation and, thereby, glimpse moments of truth. However, having achieved such emancipation, truth-seekers must endeavor, so to speak, to mend the social fabric that their landmark achievements have rent: agents must reconstruct a “constraining” social world within which lies the only feasible means of enjoying a meaningful, secure existence.

Thus, the capacity to redefine reality implies that it is possible for social scientists to identify and analyze exercises of the third face of power from within the coercive context of empirical social reality. Indeed, far from dissolving practical reality, as Habermas argues, the capacity for social actors to redefine reality implies that “good scientists” can only obtain a thorough understanding of sociological subject matter by acting as agents who interrogate the coercive context of social reality from within (McGettigan, 1997, 1999, 2001a). One must directly confront the invisible influences of social power in order to effectively grasp the complexities of the simultaneously contradictory and complimentary relationships between agents and social environments.

Redefining “Good Science”

Dahl (1957) advanced a constrained definition of power in order to avoid debates about the nature and practice of social science that broadened definitions of power can incite (Alford and Friedland, 1985). While broader definitions of power have added to the proliferation of disciplinary debates, one cannot justify the artificial constraint of sociological subject matter purely for the sake of convenience. Despite the difficulties that it creates for the definition and practice of social science, a comprehensive description of social power requires the incorporation of empirical subject matter that lie outside

conventional boundaries of the observable. Just as it is illegitimate for Habermas to propose an alternative reality (i.e., ideal speech environment) to accommodate the consequences of his theoretical assertions, so too is it unacceptable to ignore vast dimensions of social reality in order to extend the longevity of inadequate scientific paradigms. If science is to be a pursuit that genuinely seeks truthful knowledge about the empirical world, then the definition and methods of sociology must be dictated by the special requirements of its multi-dimensional subject matter.

While the production of valid scientific knowledge depends upon adequate definitions of disciplinary subject matter and appropriate research methodologies, it is also essential to generate a philosophical framework within which one's pursuit of knowledge makes sense (Wright, 1992). For example, while some lament the lack of theoretical unity in sociology (Turner and Turner, 1990), the rationale for such disunity is easy to understand. Heavy-handed attempts at theoretical unification have fallen into disrepute (Parsons, 1970) due to, among other things, their tendency to elide dissent (Lemert, 1991, 1999; Seidman, 1991). Theoretical unification implies that a single version of "The Truth" must serve for all, but which version will suffice? Brilliantly conceived as they may be, the grand theories of sociology's greatest thinkers (Addams, 1902; Bourdieu, 1984; Durkheim, 1964; Giddens, 1984; Martineau, 1834; Marx, 1906; Weber, 1968; etc.) offer only imperfect representations of the entire social landscape. Indeed, how could the viewpoint of any individual be otherwise?

The notion of "redefinable reality" posits that there is a universe "out there" that exists independent of human cognition. As such, I argue that "universal truth" does exist, but such truth is not contained within extant scientific theories. Rather, "The Truth" extends infinitely into the unlocked mysteries of the expanding universe. In other words, reality is what it is: an asteroid is an asteroid is an asteroid, etc… "Truth" is an intrinsic, inseparable feature of phenomena as they exist independent of human perception. Lies and distortions come into existence via the vast human capacity for ignorance: humans view the illimitable universe through awed and flawed psyches. Thus, realization of the ultimate, universal "Truth" is only possible through a process of transitioning from inadequate to improved--but never perfect--descriptions of the universe. Although admirable in many ways, our grasp of infinite mysteries remains woefully limited. Nevertheless, the process of redefining reality permits admittedly limited human minds to generate "moments of truth." Therefore, humans have at their disposal the necessary cognitive mechanism, i.e., moments of truth, through which to take gradual but confident steps toward a broader understanding of the infinite truths that govern the universe--and, unless I am mistaken, that has always been the primary goal of science.

Still, as Lukes (1974, 2005) argues, the social process of endorsing truth tends to involve mechanisms that distort rather than clarify the thinking process. Imposing a single perspective on all social observers might well produce consensus, but never truth. While pessimists often conclude that this fact

consigns sociological theory unavoidably to epistemological fragmentation--indeed, according to some perspectives (Clough, 1992, 1994; Denzin, 1997; Lather, 1991, 1993, 1995; Lemert, 1991, 1999; Lyotard, 1984; Richardson, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996) the elimination of coherent knowledge standards represents a worthwhile achievement in itself--better meta-theoretical (Ritzer, 2000b) alternatives exist.

The version of "redefined truth" that I advocate asserts that no single person will ever arrive at an ultimate representation of Truth. Instead, humans can access narrow, momentary glimpses of truth through the process of transitioning from outmoded to improved definitions of reality. As scientists (and private citizens) it is essential to embrace coherent truth standards in order to attack "bad" ideas and replace with them with "better" ideas. In denying the existence of, or requirements for, such standards, one foregoes any rational basis upon which to rebuke quacks, e.g., tyrants who would proclaim that "inferior" people should be exterminated, or vigilantes who claim the right to identify and persecute "witches," or barstool physicists who profess to know more about relativity than Einstein, or sociologists who contend that all forms of knowledge are equal. Redefined truth establishes a basis upon which to rebuke such nonsense because limited, deceitful, or otherwise distorted explanatory schemes tend to generate a greater number of anomalies than more truthful knowledge claims, e.g., this is the primary reason that there are no departments of alchemy at accredited universities.

Still, according to the terms under which redefined truth is established, it remains up to each observer to evaluate the veracity of knowledge claims. For example, even the most widely accepted scientific theories are, and should be, subjected to intense criticism (Behe, 1996). An environment that invites criticism of even the most popular theories--whether or not we share dissenters' viewpoints--is crucial to the process of progressively and legitimately redefining truth. In other words, dissent is an acid test through which to evaluate good ideas and obliterate bad ones. Once again, no theory produced by humankind either has, or ever will capture "the Entire Truth." Indeed, precisely because of that limitation, the notion of redefined truth is an essential means through which to emphasize that even relatively truthful ideas often can and should be supplanted by better ideas, e.g., if humans were meant to fly, they would have been born with wings vs. the Wright brothers' contention that vehicles could be developed to overcome that shortcoming.

Redefined truth is sure to remain unappealing to those who dream of propagating a single, unifying social and/or scientific ideology. Nevertheless, redefined truth offers a meta-theoretical means to build bridges and generate real improvements in the contemporary field of sociological theory. That is, the notion of refined truth emphasizes that it is possible for advocates of various theoretical perspectives to collaborate and compromise. For example, from my redefined perspective, I feel perfectly secure in stating that, despite their irreconcilable theoretical differences, Karl Marx and Max Weber were both

brilliant theorists who managed to capture exceedingly valuable insights about the social world they analyzed. Neither theorist was entirely correct nor, I believe, should anyone feel conflicted about drawing upon the strengths of each theory, and ruthlessly attacking their weaknesses in an effort to develop newer, better social theories. Thus, I maintain that redefined truth makes it possible to draw constructively on the strengths of the vast storehouse of existing sociological knowledge in order to create, step-by-step, newer and better definitions of social reality. No definition of truth can legitimately claim to offer more, nor should be equipped to accomplish less.

Building Bridges

Dahl maintained that it was necessary to rely upon observable empirical events as referents for verification and evaluation of knowledge. In other words, Dahl argued that the relative "truthfulness" and thus the scientific merit of knowledge could only be evaluated with respect to a fixed (i.e., an empirically observable) standard. By arguing that there are additional invisible dimensions of power, Lukes proposed that Dahl's fixed points of observable evaluation were themselves embedded within environmental structures that served to bias the "truthful" evaluations they were intended to render. A realization of the biases that are inherent in fixed truth standards is also a fundamental component of the postmodern critique of modernist science (Lyotard 1988; Lemert 1991, 1999; Seidman 1991). Postmodernists suggest that within the very structure of unitary standards there operates a dynamic that simultaneously corrupts truth. Whereas, for truth to have any validity, it must be a standard that is consistent at all times and places; it must offer a fixed point to which knowledge may be brought for uniform and meaningful evaluation. However, the act of establishing a fixed point produces the result of, prior even to the moment of evaluation, privileging certain types of knowledge and marginalizing others. Therefore, rather than enhancing the production and accumulation of more truthful knowledge, fixed standards generally serve to legitimate the arbitrary biases that reproduce systems of cultural destructiveness and inequality (Collins 1991; Smith 1990; Wright 1992).

While the postmodern critique highlights a serious contradiction within the philosophy of modernist science, at the same time postmodernism suffers from a seemingly paradoxical contradiction of its own. The postmodernist contradiction is very similar to the paradox that Lukes encountered in positing the existence of the third face of power: due to the exercise of coercive power that appeared to be implied in standardizing the definition of real interests, he was unable to propose a consistent means with which to identify radical power. In turn, postmodern theorists have argued that modernist science subverts the pursuit of truth, but, due to their contention that standards invariably legitimate cultural biases, postmodernism never developed beyond a nihilistic critique (Lochner, 1999; McGettigan, 2000).

As a compromise, a number of theorists have advanced alternative epistemologies that are based upon localized, situated, or subjugated knowledges (Collins 1991, 1997; Denzin, 1997; Seidman 1991; Smith 1991, 1996). However, the problem that these alternatives confront is precisely the same as the dilemma Lukes encountered when he suggested that pervasive, radical power could only be identified situationally. Even though one may acknowledge that power is exercised through the imposition of universal standards, it is not epistemologically tenable to abandon universal knowledge claims. To sustain the claim that radical power is pervasive, one must identify a universal standard with which to recognize its effects consistently. The deeper issue that advocates of particularistic epistemologies must contend with is: how is it possible to identify a standard of truth that can identify exercises of radical power--and, thereby, a coherent alternative to conventional "good science"--but that also avoids being corrupted by such power? Here again, a solution may be derived from the concept of autonomy.

Defining exercises of radical power in terms of autonomy implies that truth can only emerge when the distortions of coercive power are negated. Thus, the concept of autonomy offers a standard of truth that avoids the inherent biases of other fixed points. Rather than imposing a homogenizing truth standard, autonomy implies that it is only through particularized efforts to challenge coercion that increasingly undistorted forms of knowledge can be achieved.

Thus, redefined truth can help resolve the epistemological dilemmas that are faced by advocates of particularistic alternatives to conventional science by offering a fixed point that promotes, rather than disqualifies, a consideration of the localized experiences of social actors (McGettigan, 1999, 2000, 2001a). Redefined truth also implies that, although individual social actors may be inextricably submerged in and dependent upon complex social environments, individuals can recognize, and in a limited way, challenge the imposition of social constraint. Indeed, redefined truth is contingent upon the capacity that social actors' have to transform their view of reality independently of, and in opposition to, the influences of their social environments. While this does not imply that all social scientists must be political activists, this does indicate that one must often challenge the status quo in order to avoid being befuddled by it (McGettigan, 1999, 2001a). Once again, moments of truth are necessarily a product of individual-level challenges to social constraints; the social structures that we study are often a significant impediment to realizing truth. Indeed, shedding light on the structure of social power tends to "expose" issues that the dynamics of social power are designed to shroud (Chomsky, 1996; Domhoff, 2002; Mills, 1956). Thus, the simple act of studying social power implies that one must be prepared to challenge the status quo, "contaminate" (Richardson, 1994) the environment under observation, and stimulate the potential for social change (McGettigan 1999, 2001a).

Despite Durkheim's (1965) protestations to the contrary, no social facts are sacred. Sometimes, to understand the social world, we need to alter it, and if

doing so implies an assault on various manifestations of social blight and injustice, then so be it (Du Bois, 1997; Durkheim, 1966; Fleuhr-Lobban, 1995; Friedan, 1964; Herman and Chomsky, 1995; hooks, 1994; Marx and Engels, 1902; McGettigan, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; Orwell, 1984; Wolf, 1991).

Therefore, a redefined view of truth implies that for anyone--including social scientists--to grasp the nature of social reality, they must exercise their capacity as situated social agents to challenge and more clearly perceive the invisible influences that interact with situated social agents in the process of reproducing the structure of social environments; it is only through such active engagements that "moments of truth" can emerge (McGettigan, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001a). In this way, the definition of "good science" can be broadened to assert that, rather than constraining the scope of social subject matter, more truthful knowledge can only be obtained through the active efforts of situated social actors to overcome the limitations that confine their understanding of empirical social reality.

Conclusion

The goal of "good scientists" was to transform the sociology of philosophical debate into one of sound, conventional science. However, whether one wishes to engage in philosophical debates or not, there are philosophical implications associated with every definition of science. The conventional definition of science, despite its adherents' commitment to objectivity, is tied to an overly simplistic definition of power and sociological subject matter. A redefined approach to science can conceptualize additional dimensions of power: recognizing the influence that power has over the behavior of social actors, the minds of "objective" observers and the substance of empirical reality.

Additionally, adopting a redefined orientation to truth enables researchers to conceptualize the seemingly paradoxical relationship between actors, agency, and social structure. By endeavoring to produce knowledge that acknowledges and respects individual perspectives, it becomes possible to better appreciate the ways that power affects knowledge and the process through which actors may simultaneously experience the generation of agency and thoroughly understand the multi-dimensional fabrication of society.

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Notes

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[1] This is a substantially modified version of an article originally published in the *Electronic Journal of Sociology*, Volume 3, Number 4. http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.004/mcgettigan.html

[2] This tradition in social science is closely related to what is often referred to as positivism. Turner (1987) describes positivism as "the use of theory to interpret empirical events and, conversely, the reliance on observation to assess the plausibility of theory" (1987, pp. 156-157). Although positivism has been criticized, reviled and renamed--Isaac (1987) pronounced positivism dead at the hands of Popper (1959) and refers to its descendant as "empiricism"--it remains an influential, if not the dominant, paradigm in sociology.

[3] Foucault (1980) notes that an important defining moment in his understanding of power occurred when he realized its "positive" effects.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (1980, p. 119).

Critics of Lukes (Parsons 1960; Arendt 1969; Mann 1986) have claimed that because of this "positive" dimension of power one may disregard Lukes' negatively characterized third-dimension of power. They suggest that Lukes' conception of power is entirely negative and, given that social power creates consensus and often generates socially constructive outcomes, these positive aspects of power imply that Lukes' conception is patently false. However, I maintain that the positive and negative functions of power may only be properly conceived in connection with a thorough understanding of the third dimension of power. Positive functions of power may or may not be "good" for social actors. I believe the positive functions of power must still be judged by a redefined standard of truth or else one's definition of "good" will still be too strongly affected by organizational and societal interests.

[4] Once again, the goal here is simply to develop a concept for the purposes of illustrating a point. Under no circumstances should this statement be interpreted to mean that autonomous actors either can or should walk the earth: they can't and they don't.

[5] Foucault (1972) argues that it does not make sense to disengage the concepts of knowledge and truth from power:

> The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power…Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise (1972, p.52).
>
> …truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have

> succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power (1972, p. 131).

I agree that, in reality, there is a dynamic, productive relationship between knowledge and power. However, my point is simply to emphasize that knowledge and power are distinct concepts. And given that knowledge and power are distinct phenomena, even though power effectively distorts most knowledge in reality, it is still conceivable to imagine knowledge that is distinct from power. If, indeed, there is no knowledge that is independent of power, if truth is wholly the captive and product of power, then truth would have to be the result of the arbitrary determination of power and it would be impossible for "intellectuals," despite what Foucault suggests, to detach "the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates…" (Foucault 1972, p.133). Thus, knowledge is not only conceptually distinguishable from power, but, as I will demonstrate, knowledge is also an important vehicle through which power is generated, exercised and, occasionally, undone.

[6] Such a definition must also be able to explain why agency, if it exists in the social reality that is permeated by structural coercion--as I argue that it must--causes that structural coercion to be <u>reproduced</u> rather than being <u>undone</u> as it is in Habermas' ideal speech situation. I disagree with Habermas' assertion that a utopian environment is the necessary result of agency--indeed, I have argued elsewhere that "redefinitions of reality" are much more likely to produce "mobile utopias" (McGettigan, 1999), or contexts that are embedded within, and are dependent upon, mainstream society, but that also facilitate fleeting localized counter-normative spaces.

Even Habermas argues that for ideal speech to develop it must be situated in an elaborate social context. For people to communicate intersubjectively, they must first master "linguistic competence, [and] basic qualifications of speech and symbolic interaction (role-behavior), which we may call <u>communicative</u> competence" (Habermas 1970, p. 367). In other words, for people to find a way to free themselves from social coercion, they must first master and obey an extensive structure that defines meaning in communication. One might argue that, in saying this, Habermas contradicts himself: rather than making the case that communication can generate a reduction in societal constraint, Habermas is demonstrating that actors are never free from social power, i.e., even when it appears as though actors are creating an environment in which they are removing the constraints of coercive power from their interpersonal communication, instead what they are doing is demonstrating that structural constraint is the precondition, the medium, and the result of intersubjective communication. However, one might also argue that, just because agency exists--and even though it must be defined in terms that are oppositional to social coercion--does not necessarily imply that agency and social structure are incompatible. Whereas agency may only manifest in contexts that incorporate individual-level opposition to social power, the consequences of its exercise are not sufficient to completely unmake society. Society is simply too large and adaptable to be threatened by the activities of individual agents. Instead, the negation of hegemonic constraint that agency generates is more likely to be "absorbed" (e.g., the work of entrepreneurs, inventors, and scientists, while often revolutionary, in many ways leads to modifications to, rather than the dissolution of, the social environment in which it is carried out) by society and generally serves to

extend and readapt, rather than dismantle, society.

[7] While, for Habermas, generating truth is tied to a social, intersubjective process, I suggest that the production of truth is an individual accomplishment. I argue that actors demonstrate a capacity for agency when, upon perceiving evidence that is in discord with their understanding of reality, they refashion their comprehension of reality to facilitate an understanding of that discordant evidence. Acquiring knowledge that might conflict with views that are already present in the minds of agents can be accomplished by participating in communication environments, through solitary reflection, or through various encounters with the empirical world (e.g., having an apple fall on one's head). The impetus (i.e., communication, reflection, or encounters with the physical universe) that impel actors to redefine reality is not as critical to the process of generating truth as is the ability of actors to perceive phenomena of which they have had no prior conception and then to reconstruct their view of reality to accommodate their newly realized perceptions.

[8] For example, individuals who raise doubts about religious teachings are likely to encounter coercive opposition at the individual level (from scolding parents, teachers, and ministers or priests), at the organizational level (from churches or schools that zealously advocate faith in order quash doubt), and at the cultural level (in the form of religious ideology or dogma that postulates the "order" of the universe and delimits the range of aberrant vs. acceptable thought and behavior). Thus, challenging the status quo generally implies the threat of repercussions from multiple levels of authority--and, therefore, this helps to explain why individuals are often hesitant to challenge the status quo--yet, in spite of such weighty opposition, it remains possible (albeit dangerous) for determined agents to challenge all three levels of authority simultaneously.

[9] Whereas Habermas suggests that the <u>product</u> of intersubjective communication is an ideal speech situation (i.e., during the course of communication the distortions of power will be slowly reduced until they are completely neutralized), my argument is that it is in the inception of communication--which is only sometimes followed by a limited redefinition of the reality--that actors demonstrate their capacity for agency. However, once communication has been established, because intersubjectivity must be embedded so deeply in elaborate social rules of engagement, actors cannot help but rely on social structures to sustain their interactions. Therefore, rather than developing into an environment that increasingly rejects social structural coercion and distortion, the agency that is demonstrated in the conception of communication generally becomes interwoven and more deeply embedded within the social structures that it initially challenged. Thus, rather than undoing social structures, agency is very often the mechanism through which elaborate structures of social control are transformed and extended.

[10] The category of "individuals" includes not just scientific geniuses, but every person with sufficient gray matter, education, and motivation to feel puzzled about anomalies. In other words, this means that just about everyone can and does redefine reality and, thereby, has a demonstrable capacity for agency.

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