

Samuel Salzborn · Eldad Davidov
Jost Reinecke (Eds.)

Methods, Theories, and Empirical Applications in the Social Sciences

Festschrift for Peter Schmidt

ARBEIT GRENZEN POLITIK HANDLUNG METHODEN GEWALT SPRACHE WISSEN
SCHAFT DISKURS SCHICHT MOBILITÄT SYSTEM INDIVIDUUM KONTROLLE
ZEIT ELITE KOMMUNIKATION WIRTSCHAFT GERECHTIGKEIT STADT WERTE
RISIKO ERZIEHUNG GESELLSCHAFT RELIGION UMWELT SOZIALISATION
RATIONALITÄT VERANTWORTUNG MACHT PROZESS LEBENSSTIL BELIN
QUENZ KUNST UNGLEICHHEIT ORGANISATION NORMEN REGULIERUNG
IDENTITÄT HERRSCHAFT VERGLEICH SOZIALSTRUKTUR BIOGRAFIE KRITIK
WISSEN MASSEN MEDIEN EXKLUSION GENERATION THEORIE HIERARCHIE
GESUNDHEIT NETZWERK LEBENS LAUF KONSUM FREIHEIT BETEILIGUNG
GEMEINSCHAFT INFORMATION WANDEL DIFFERENZ WOHLFÄHRTSSTAAT
ETHNIE BERUF RITUAL KÖRPER MODERNISIERUNG GESCHLECHT DEMOKRA
TIE EVOLUTION INTEGRATION KAPITAL REALITÄT KRIEG BILDUNG ALLTAG
KULTUR VERTRAUEN LIEBE WERBUNG GLOBALISIERUNG BEOBACHTUNG
RECHT EXTREMISMUS STATISTIK INTERAKTION KRIMINALITÄT ZUKUNFT
ALTER ERKENNTNIS MORAL RAUM KLASSE STEUERUNG GELD ZIVILISATION
EMPIRIE AUFKLÄRUNG ARMUT ENTSCHEIDUNG TECHNIK MIGRATION ÖFFENT



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Introduction

Samuel Salzborn, Eldad Davidov & Jost Reinecke

Peter Schmidt is a leading figure in the fields of sociology, political science and methodology. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, his colleagues collaborated to present him this Festschrift. First and foremost, this is an expression of our deep appreciation of and gratitude to our colleague and friend, Peter Schmidt, for his wide-ranging academic achievements throughout his career, his intellect and expertise he was glad to share with us, his continuous productivity in empirical social research, and the inspiration as well as the many motivating ideas he provided us with. Throughout his extensive career, Peter has been interested (and still is) in many thematic and methodological fields, and we believe that such a volume should reflect this diversity. Not surprisingly, the number of collaborators who expressed their interest to contribute to this festschrift is very large and reflects Peter's productive and rich network of researchers, experts, and practitioners, leading us to consider a new, and in our view, innovative concept for the book. Instead of describing large, comprehensive studies, the contributors present brief research notes that report interesting research topics or questions, or contributions to open new perspectives for such studies. Thus, reflecting this diversity, the list of authors in this volume is composed of both younger and more experienced researchers.

The festschrift is a collection of 40 contributions on theoretical, methodological, and theoretically driven empirical studies about various topics of research in the fields of sociology, political science, and social psychology. The chapters cover up-to-date advances in theory, methods of data collection and analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), models of rational choice, values, attitudes, and behavior, as well as empirical investigations of discrimination, nationalism, authoritarianism, identity, and social structure, all topics touched upon by Peter Schmidt throughout his extensive teaching and research career.

In this introduction we would also like to share some of our memories from our work with Peter by providing a few anecdotes. We have always experienced Peter as humane, sincere, supportive, motivating, constructive, loyal, helpful, and he has been an encouraging teacher, mentor, collaborator, and friend to so many individuals. He has been a true asset to any team he joined, he has brought many people together, and he has both the intellectual and emotional intelligence to lead teams effectively and to cooperate in easy and difficult situations brilliantly. His advice is always worth its weight in gold, and his optimism contagious. Throughout his career, his research has been original, inspirational

and innovative, providing his peers with many new avenues to explore as Peter's originality has always put him ahead of the rest.

Two personal experiences and highlights will be briefly addressed here. Jost Reinecke and other colleagues remember the founding of the working group "Structural Equation Modeling" in April 1986 at ZUMA, Mannheim. Peter was one of the main initiators of the self-organized working group, which still meets on an annual basis 25 years later. Always one for fun, during the 1992 annual meeting, Peter not only provided the entire audience with a brilliant and enthusiastic presentation (as all of us would have expected), he also surprised them with his colorful attire: To assist in the comprehension of his presented topic, his shirt depicted a nice graphical representation of an SEM model.

In addition to his research talents, Peter was and still is a great teacher. Ari Heyder and other colleagues remember the great times they had while working with Peter in various research projects and teaching courses. Ari remembers Peter as excellent in producing an open atmosphere during his lectures to encourage students to ask questions. His remarkable sense of humor has always supported this didactic aim. Students frequently began their questions with the sentence "Maybe this is a stupid question...", but Peter always responded "There are no stupid questions, there are only stupid answers". Sometimes, when explanations were quite complex, Peter used to add his legendary sentence "Is it now more clear, or are you still confused but on a higher level?" Also his metaphor to explain the idea behind global fit measures in SEM models by saying that "We've almost finished squeezing that lemon" to indicate a good fit shaped generations of SEM students. Finally, Ari concludes, not only was working with him a special experience. After hours he also demonstrated his great dancing ability and is particularly well-known for his classic dance move known as the famous "Schmidtian hip swing" (in German "Schmidtsche Hüftschwung"). As many of us can attest to, both professional and leisure activities with Peter have always been a great experience. Thank you very much, Peter!

We would like to thank Uli Wagner and the graduate school on group-focused enmity at the Universities of Marburg and Bielefeld for their financial support in the production of the book, and Lisa Trierweiler for the English proof of the entire book. This book is dedicated to Peter by all the contributors to this volume, by all others who wanted to but were unable to actively participate in the creation of this book, and by the editors. Happy 70th birthday, Peter, and many, many more!

I. Theoretical Reflections

Politics, evidence, treatment, evaluation, responsibility – The models PETER and PETER-S

Uli Wagner, Gunnar Lemmer, Judith Lanphen, Gesa Wemken, Jost Stellmacher, Stefan Simshäuser, Mathias Kauff, Johanna Kirchhof, Christian Issmer, Julia Becker, Frank Asbrock & Thomas F. Pettigrew

Science and politics are complicatedly related. Here, we will analyse the relationship of social sciences and politics. We will confine ourselves to those cases where science is used to help politics to realise its goals. Adopting from Popper (1935) and Campbell (1969), we will describe a normative model of evidence based policies: PETER – a model of mutual influences and dependencies of Politics, Evidence, Treatment, Evaluation, and Responsibility. The chapter ends with a sketch on the needed competencies to make the model work – the model PETER-S.

1 Politics

Democratically elected politicians have the responsibility to adjust their decisions and political behaviour to the demands of the society members who brought them into power. Thus, the content of a specific policy is in principle justified by the political voters who indicated with their votes their agreement with the political programme the politicians stand for.

Social sciences are not in a position to replace the process of political decision making and responsibility of political actors concerning the content of a decision. For example, it is a political decision, depending on majorities of voters, to favour and spend public money for public transportation instead of individual traffic. Science can, however, help to describe the actual situation including possible intended and unintended consequences, make prognoses for future developments, recommend – if politically desired – promising means of change, and support political decision makers in the assessment of the effectiveness of such interventions (Bamberg & Schmidt, 2006).

2 Evidence

Political discourses and the public opinion define certain societal, economic, or environmental developments as a problem. Such social constructions are, of

course, often subgroup specific and led by interests. Controversial political debates about the mere existence and the extent of bad developments often need objective evidence to get a feeling of the real amount of deviation. This is where science comes into play. For example, responsible political leadership should be interested in being informed about the development of tension between ethnic groups in the country. Questions that could be answered by social sciences are: Are level and content of mutual hostility changing over time? Are there specific geographical regions that show outlying values in mutual rejection? What about individuals showing extreme forms of outgroup rejection? What development in intergroup tension can be expected for the future? Answers to such questions, deducted, for instance, from survey research, can be of extreme relevance for political counterbalancing – if there is any interest in such. Thus, social sciences contribute to the diagnosis of the status quo of a societal problem.

Scientific research is not only needed to gain insight into the state of society concerning a social problem, it is also often asked to give reasons for the emergence or change in a societal problem. A question repeatedly asked is, for example, how an increase in violence – if empirically demonstrated – can be explained. The first step in search of an answer to such a question is to look for appropriate theories. Societal problems usually can be explained by different theories simultaneously. The plausibility of any single theory to understand a societal problem depends on its applicability to the specific case – relative to alternative theoretical approaches – and the – relative – degree of its empirical support. An adequate scientific theory offers a language to think and talk about the problem in question and its possible causes. For instance, one can assume that high prejudice against immigrants is a function of the degree to which the autochthonous population feels threatened by immigration and immigrants. Intergroup threat theory (Blumer, 1958; Stephan & Renfro, 2002) fits well to the description and explanation of intergroup tension in migration contexts, and is widely supported in many other different contexts. From the perspective of intergroup threat theory, the level of perceived threat associated with immigrants would explain their rejection in the autochthonous population.

Applying a theoretical framework to explain a societal problem is a first step; however, this does not automatically imply a correct explanation. The appropriateness of a theory and its inherent explanatory power for a specific phenomenon again depends on its evidence in the specific context. Thus, the second step is conducting an empirical test. This can be done on the basis of survey research. In the case that threat theory is an adequate explanation, it should be demonstrated that those individuals or groups reporting higher levels of feeling threatened by immigrants are also those who reject immigrants the most (Iser, Keil, & Schmidt, 2002). Survey data supporting a threat explanation of outgroup

rejection would show that the two constructs in question co-vary. This would partially support the assumption that threat causes outgroup rejection. However, correlational data like this cannot rule out the opposite causal relation between the constructs – namely, that a high degree of outgroup rejection or prejudice causes increased feelings of threat. A more appropriate test of such a causal hypothesis would be based on a longitudinal design in which the same respondents would be asked repeatedly, after a time interval, both for their feelings of threat and outgroup rejection (Schlueter, Schmidt, & Wagner, 2008). Another alternative to test more convincingly the proposed causal process is to conduct an experiment (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). In an experiment, the co-variation of an active manipulation of the independent variable ‘threat’ with observed systematic changes in the dependent variable ‘outgroup rejection’ would be considered as supportive of the causal effect of threat on rejection.

3 Treatment

Theorizing is the heart of science. This also holds true for interventions against inappropriate societal developments, be it – depending on the political perspective – aggression, outgroup hostility, or individual transportation. If it is known from scientific evidence that a certain degree of rejection of immigrants exists and that this goes back to feelings of threat associated with immigrants, threat theory also implies the appropriate treatment to intervene, namely, by reducing the level of threat. What is needed is an appropriate method to induce a reduction of threat. A treatment could be the improvement of intergroup contact between immigrants and the autochthonous population. Such an action hypothesis (Bamberg, Gumbl, & Schmidt, 2000) that intergroup contact reduces intergroup threat is supported by relevant research (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

4 Evaluation

Having an appropriate theoretical background to understand a phenomenon is necessary, but not sufficient for a successful treatment. The appropriateness of the selected intervention has to be evaluated empirically. Evaluations of intervention programmes are usually based on experimental or quasi-experimental designs. This implies to manipulate the theoretically assumed functional variable, for example ‘intergroup contact’, in order to achieve a reduction in intergroup threat, which in turn should affect level of outgroup rejection in people participating in the intervention programme. In order to have the opportunity to

control for confounding effects, such programme evaluations usually need a treatment and a non-treatment control condition. Treatment and control condition participants should be as similar to each other as possible; ideally assignment to the two conditions should be at random. The contact programme is implemented in the treatment group, whereas in the control group no such intervention takes place. To control for possible pre-intervention differences, the participants' level of outgroup rejection should be measured at least twice in both conditions, once in the time period before and once in the time period after the treatment. Such a design would allow controlling for confounding effects, such as maturation (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). If, for example, ageing had an effect on the target variable, this could be detected by comparing the development of outgroup rejection in the treatment and the control group. A data pattern showing a significant and strong reduction of outgroup rejection from pre- to post-test in the treatment condition, but not (or with a weaker effect) in the control condition, would support the effectiveness of the treatment programme. To get an impression of long-term treatment effects, a third delayed assessment of the variable to be changed, in this case 'outgroup rejection', should be added both to the treatment as well as the control group.

5 Responsibility

Political decision makers have responsibilities. Having won an election on the basis of a certain kind of political programme justifies and demands from the successfully elected to put the formerly announced political goal into effect. This also implies to use the best, most effective and efficient way to accomplish this goal. Science is a means to optimise such a realisation. Thus, it is the politicians' responsibility to co-operatively use the available scientific knowledge to improve their decisions and to implement evidence based policies.

Scientists have their responsibilities, too. The ongoing demand for a value-free science is often misunderstood. If it spots on value freedom of content, the demand is unjustified. Especially those social scientists who consider themselves as applied researchers usually have no problems defining the improvement of humankind's living conditions as their primary goal in science. Many applied researchers are also strongly committed to specific goals, like equality among people, living in appropriate economic conditions, equal access to education, etc. Thus, this kind of research is not value free in the content it specifies. And such a position makes clear that scientists are also responsible members of society.

Social scientists need fortitude to aim at the realisation of emancipatory societal goals (Holzkamp, 1970). Yet working as an engaged scientist and trying to

realise such kinds of goals requests rigour, especially regarding the methods they use and the way they conduct their empirical studies. In this sense, science has to be value free. Strength and determination in the pursuit of an implementation of a specific content should not be confused with a biased application of methods. On the contrary: If scientists are really interested in changing humankind's living conditions, this implies using the best kind of methods to get valid results (Pettigrew, 2008). Only such results can be assumed to be supportive of the realisation of emancipatory goals.

6 The model PETER-S

PETER, as described above, is a normative and prescriptive model of an optimised combination of political decision making concerning contents and goals of societal development on the one hand and a maximum of methodological rigour on the other. But how does it work? Politicians and (social) scientists live in separate worlds embedded in different reference groups. In these worlds reinforcement patterns often differ extremely; communication between them is difficult. Such a situation needs openness, empathy, and intercultural competence to get along with the other side. In other words, in order to achieve the desired fruitful combination of responsible political decision making and rigorous supportive science, a rare bundle of abilities is needed: PETER-S is a model that realises both high scientific rigour and great humanitarian competence. It also helps if the social scientist can emulate the enormous energy, dedication, and enthusiasm that Peter-S brings to social science research and its practical application.

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The Research Program of the Rational Choice Approach: A Reconstruction

Karl-Dieter Opp

One of the major theoretical paradigms in sociology and the social sciences is the rational choice approach (RCA). George C. Homans, with his article "Social Behavior as Exchange" from 1958, is the founder of the RCA in sociology. Although in the meantime there is a vast and burgeoning literature applying and extending the approach, it is still not clear what its central assumptions are and what arguments contemporary rational choice scholars adduce that speak in favor or against it. The present paper addresses these questions.

1 Some Characterizations of the Rational Choice Approach

Proponents of the RCA typically describe their approach using only a few sentences. For example, it is held that collective phenomena are the outcome of individual action. This empirical statement is then regarded as an argument for claiming that collective phenomena *should* be explained as an outcome of the actions of individuals. In his detailed critical analysis of various contributions to the RCA and its opposite, the collectivistic program, Viktor Vanberg (1975, p. 7) notes that the individualistic tradition (i.e., the RCA) insists that various social phenomena "are the outcome of the individual behavioral motives and their intertwining and are thus to be explained as the result of individual actions". According to James S. Coleman (1990, p. 2), the RCA explains "the behavior of the system by recourse to the behavior of its parts." The common assumption of these characterizations thus is that collective phenomena *are* the outcome of individual action and that collective phenomena *should* be "understood" by looking at individual actions.

The authors cited above and many others do not characterize the RCA in detail, as the previous quotations illustrate. It is thus not clear what exactly the RCA is that its contemporary proponents advance. Kincaid (1996, p. 13) is right when he notes: "Individualism and holism are nebulous doctrines with shifting meanings."¹

¹ See also the account of the different versions of the RCA by Udéhn (2001, 2002).

2 The Explanation Thesis

Our thesis is that the RCA advanced by most contemporary rational choice scholars is compatible with the program put forward by George C. Homans. It therefore seems useful to provide a short outline of Homans' basic ideas.² In his basic article of 1958, he addresses the RCA only at the end when he writes – referring to the propositions discussed in the first part of his paper – that "it is surprising, too, how propositions about the dynamics of exchange can begin to generate the static thing we call 'group structure' and, in so doing, generate also some of the propositions about group structure that students of real-life have stated" (p. 606, similarly p. 597). This statement is a first clarification of the program: It focuses on explanation, that is, on using propositions about individual action to derive propositions about collectivities and their properties. This is also compatible with the characterizations of the RCA by Vanberg and Coleman, cited above.

Homans clarifies his position in a talk presented in September 1953, that is, five years before the publication of his seminal 1958 paper, at a symposium (Homans, 1988, chapter 16). We should, Homans claims, adopt the strategy of economics which amounts to derive statements about groups from a general system of statements about individual actors. This, according to Homans, is a "reductionist" position. "I call myself an ultimate psychological reductionist – horrible phrase – because I have faith that the propositions of small-group research – when we have them – will be found deducible from a general psychology of behavior – when we have it" (p. 271). Let us look at some implications of these statements.

1. Of utmost importance is that the goal is explanation. The phenomena to be explained range from properties of small groups to social structures of organizations and societies. The explananda are thus collective phenomena.
2. The explanatory propositions are general statements about the behavior of individual actors. They serve to generate propositions about collective phenomena.
3. Homans does not say anything about the "reality" of collectives or whether individuals are the "ultimate" units of social reality. He does not believe "that the issue can be resolved by arguments about what is really ultimate, what is really real. I, for one, am not going to back into the position of denying the reality of social institutions. For many purposes, we often and usefully treat social organizations, such as manufacturing firms, as social actors in their own right, even when we know their acts to be resultants of complex chains of individual decisions. The question is not whether the individual is the ultimate reality or

² The program of an individualistic social science can be traced back to the Scottish moral philosophers of the 18th century. For details see Udéhn (2001, 2002); Vanberg (1975). See also Bohnen (1975, 2000).

- whether social behavior involves something more than the behavior of individuals. The question is, always, how social phenomena are to be explained" (1967, p. 62).
4. Homans does not claim *a priori* that collective phenomena can be explained by propositions about individuals. He advances an empirical proposition that can be falsified. As one of the previous quotations shows, he argues: *If we have appropriate propositions about individual behavior then collective propositions can be explained. "It is conceivable that at some time in the future – perhaps tomorrow morning – a sociological proposition will be discovered that is general, insofar as it applies to all social groups or aggregates, that has great power in explaining social phenomena, and that cannot itself be derived from psychological propositions"* (1967, p. 63). Thus, the RCA is falsifiable.
 5. In one of the previous quotations Homans characterizes the expression "ultimate psychological reductionist" as a "horrible phrase". As a matter of fact, "reductionism" indeed is still a swearword. Homans apparently did not care because he clearly stated what this term denotes: "reduction" means "explanation," and "reducing psychology to sociology" means to use propositions about individual behavior, suggested and tested by psychologists, in order to explain propositions about macro phenomena, proposed and tested by sociologists (and perhaps also by other social scientists).

Based on the previous brief account of Homan's research program, the first thesis of the RCA – which can be called "explanation thesis" – can be formulated in the following way:

Explanation thesis: Propositions about collectives can be explained by theories about individuals.

Let us briefly comment on this thesis. A proposition about collectives is any statement that refers to groups in the most general sense including families, organizations, or societies, whereas an individualistic proposition (i.e., a micro proposition) refers to statements about individual actors such as consumers or students. "Theories" are understood here as general statements with no reference to time and place that specify under what conditions certain phenomena are expected to obtain. "Explanation" means here that the collective propositions are derived from micro theories and additional assumptions.

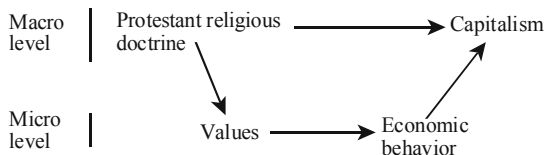
Throughout this paper, a distinction is made between the rational choice approach (i.e., the individualistic research program), that has been addressed so far and an individualistic theory (i.e., a micro theory). The explanation thesis is not related to any specific micro theory. As Homans suggests, whether the micro theory applied is theoretically fruitful is a matter of empirical inquiry. Proponents

of the RCA assume that rational choice theory is the best micro theory available at present. However, in principle, other micro theories could be used in an individualistic research program (which would then no longer be called RCA).

Let us look at the relationship between propositions referring to the macro level and the micro theory in more detail. If a statement about collectivities is to be explained by a statement about individuals, a first problem is that both statements refer to different kinds of phenomena. In explaining macro phenomena by a micro theory, the concepts of both levels must be related. Figure 1 the so-called Coleman boat (Coleman, 1990, p. 8) illustrates this. The starting point is Max Weber's proposition – a statement at the macro level – that Protestantism has influenced the development of capitalism. The micro theory applied reads that values influence economic behavior. To explain the macro proposition by applying the micro theory it is necessary that the concepts of the two levels are connected. It is important to note that in the Coleman scheme, relationships between the variables are empirical and causal. This is symbolized by the arrows. The explanation thus reads that Protestantism leads to the development of capitalism because the protestant religion brought about a change of certain values which, in turn, influenced economic behavior. The economic behavior of individuals has had an impact on the origin of capitalism.

It is not possible, due to limitations of space, to discuss problems of the Coleman scheme and of micro-macro modeling in more detail here (see Opp, 2011). Only two important points should be noted: It is problematic to assume that the macro proposition is a causal statement, it is rather a correlation; further, the assumptions connecting the micro and macro level need not be empirical, they may be analytical (for details see Opp, 2011). At this point, it is important to emphasize that the explanation thesis implies the formulation and testing of micro-macro models.

Figure 1: Relationships Between Macro- and Micro-Level Propositions



Note: The scheme is from Coleman 1990: 8, but has been proposed already by McClelland (1961: 47).

3 The Explanation Postulate

The RCA does not only claim that macro propositions *can* be explained by applying micro theories. The further claim is that micro-macro explanations *should* be carried out. This is the explanation *postulate*:

Explanation postulate: Propositions about collectives *should* be explained by theories referring to individuals.

This is not a moral postulate but a technological statement: It is assumed that the goal of the social sciences consists in providing good explanations, and that micro-macro explanations are a means to achieve this goal. In the following, the most important arguments for the explanation postulate are set out.³

1. Micro-macro explanations propose deeper explanations than pure macro explanations because it is shown why a given macro relationship holds. A macro explanation of some event is only satisfactory if the processes on the micro level that have generated it are known. For example, the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism will only be "understood" if one knows how the Protestant doctrine brought about capitalism, that is, how this doctrine changed the behavior of individuals that contributed to a capitalist order.
2. Existing micro theories can provide explanations of very specific kinds of behavior (i.e., their explanatory power is high). For example, macro approaches explain when revolutions originate. In contrast, the theory of rational action explains specific features of revolutions such as their nonviolence. The procedure is to find the specific action-related incentives that explain individual behavior in the specific situation.
3. Perhaps the most important consequence of applying the theory of rational action is that macro propositions are modified (see already Malewski, 1967). For example, the proposition that, in relatively large groups, voluntary contributions to the provision of public goods are rare holds only under specific conditions. We will return to this point later on.
4. Another argument for the RCA is that the collectivistic research program has not provided any lawful statements so far. It is thus not possible to apply macro laws if the explanation of macro events or macro relationships is at issue.

³ These arguments are usually not clearly stated in the literature (see, e.g., Homans, 1974; Coleman, 1990, chapter. 1; Esser, 1993). The following is based on Hummell and Opp (1971; Opp, 1979).

5. The independent variables of the theory of rational action refer to specific incentives such as different kinds of constraints or behavioral opportunities. These can be changed by politicians or administrators. If one wishes to achieve certain goals like reducing energy consumption, this can best be achieved by changing the incentives for energy consumption. This is often exactly what politicians do without being aware of applying an individualistic approach to politics. In general, the RCA is better suited for practical action than a macro approach.
6. An argument against a collectivistic program and in favor of an individualistic approach is that its proponents themselves resort to individualistic explanations. It is typical that collectivists suggest "interpretations" of macro propositions by drawing on the micro level. Apparently, only this accords plausibility to the validity of the macro propositions. This implies that collectivists seem to accept the basic idea of the RCA that collective phenomena are brought about by individual action. For example, Engels (1966/1888, pp. 212-213) claims that history is made in the way that "each pursues his own conscious goals".

4 The Reconstruction Thesis

The final thesis of the RCA – the *reconstruction thesis* – claims that concepts referring to collectives actually denote individuals or their (absolute or relational) properties. This thesis can be tested by analyzing the meaning of collectivistic concepts. For example, it could be analyzed how Talcott Parsons uses the collectivistic concept "social system." It turns out that his definition refers to individuals and their properties (see Parsons, 1951, pp. 3-23).⁴

Often collectivistic concepts are not clearly defined so that their meaning must be reconstructed. Therefore, the term "reconstruction thesis" is useful. It can be formulated in the following way:

Reconstruction thesis: An analysis of the meaning of concepts referring to collectives shows that they refer to individuals and their properties.

⁴ So far the only systematic test that has confirmed the reconstruction thesis has been provided by Hummell and Opp (1971, chapter IV).

5 The Collectivistic Program

What are the claims of the major competitor of the RCA, the collectivistic research program? I am not aware of any detailed exposition and discussion of its theses and arguments in the literature. Does it simply reject each of the three theses of the RCA? If so, what are the arguments? It would be desirable if those who reject the RCA, such as functionalists, Marxists, or system theorists, provide a detailed account of their alternative program.

6 Discussion

This paper claims that the previous outline of the RCA describes the views of most of its contemporary proponents. To test this hypothesis would require an analysis of a representative selection of work by rational choice scholars. This analysis should examine whether the theses and arguments for the RCA outlined above are accepted. Another fruitful line of analysis would be to discuss the various versions of the RCA (see in particular Udéhn, 2001, 2002) and compare them with the version advanced in this paper. Exploring these questions must be left for further analyses.

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Critique as Premise. Reflections on methodological commonalities between critical rationalism and critical theory

Samuel Salzborn

“Destroying badness is more human than seeking goodness.”
Max Horkheimer (1956/58)

In both scholarly and popular literature, there have been numerous writings underlining the *differences* between critical rationalism and critical theory. Not the least of these was the controversy between Karl R. Popper and Theodor W. Adorno concerning the “methodology of the social sciences” at a 1961 seminar of the German Society for Sociology, which became known in social science history as the *Positivismusstreit* or “positivism dispute” (cf. Adorno et al., 1969), and which reinforced the image of two scholarly philosophies diametrically opposed on theoretical-methodological grounds. Although there certainly exist numerous differences between the two schools of thought, these will not be further explored here (cf. Dahms, 1994; Frisby, 1972; Keuth, 1989); instead, the focus will be on an important basic commonality underlying both research traditions, which seems so fundamental that it may offer a new starting point for reevaluating the relationship between critical rationalism and critical theory. It concerns the methodological core of critical thought, which, on the basis of very similar political experiences and similarly inflected experiences of upheaval, and regardless of the contrasting theoretical and methodological consequences, appears to be in accord with the established body of scholarly research up to the first half of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, if one closely examines this essential methodological commonality shared by critical rationalism and critical theory, then one finds that both major philosophical streams demonstrate the necessity of reflecting on the political from a place of negativity, which is marked by its insistent doubting and relentless questioning of knowledge. Reason, which is invoked by both streams of thought, therefore remains – according to Karl R. Popper (1945b) and Franz L. Neumann (1953) – formulated along the lines of irrational faith or the ontological remainder, and both feel – very ambivalently – beholden to it, without finally being able to intellectually satisfy it:

“As negation of the absolute idea, content can no longer be identified with reason in the manner of idealism. Content is critical of the omnipotence of reason; therefore it can no longer be rational in accordance with the norms of discursive thinking. The

darkness of the absurd is the darkness of old surfacing again in the new. This darkness has to be interpreted rather than replaced by some artificial brightness or meaningfulness.” (Adorno, 1984, p. 40)

However, in order to continually challenge this systematic place of reason as an ontological uncertainty and thereby avoid its positive concretization, one needs to assume precisely this methodological foundation of a negative theory of the political, or, in short, of a critical core in thought: “The emphasis is on the idea of critique, or more precisely, of *critical discussion*.” (Popper, 1958, p. 160)

1 Falsification and Negation

Critical rationalism and critical theory use differing terminology in attempting to describe the place of critique: Here, the term falsification, emerging from the framework of critical rationalism, has a stronger connection to the philosophy of science (cf. Popper, 1959, 1982), while the term negation, belonging to the intellectual tradition of critical theory, has a stronger orientation toward social theory (cf. Adorno, 1973; Horkheimer, 1947). What both principles have in common is their reference to social reality as the place of suffering subjectivity, which cannot be overcome by ontological promises of salvation. Here, the place of freedom or of objective reason (cf. Horkheimer, 1947) appears in both schools of thought to be simply an undefined, negative place, which is to be hoped for as a possibility, but whose realization can hardly be expected: “Do not allow your dreams of a beautiful world to lure you away from the claims of men who suffer here and now.” (Popper, 1963, p. 361)

The negative ethic underlying both critical rationalism and critical theory is, therefore, based upon accepting that a positive anthropology always incorporates an undeducible ontological core which relies upon the myth of intersubjectivity when it tries to present itself as a universal ethic. Therefore, the imputation of an ethical and moral conception stripped of its subjective core can only remain metaphysical, because the postulate of relativity is inscribed within the category of the ethical, meaning the subjective reference to objective relationships, which nonetheless can only ever be defined in the asymptotic sense. In this respect, says Popper (1945a, p. 285), one can help resolve problems in the field of ethics only “if we formulate our demands negatively, i.e., if we demand the elimination of suffering rather than the promotion of happiness.”

The recourse to a positive ethic, as taken up by every utopianism and totalitarianism, runs contrary to the methodological core of critical thought. Morality, according to Popper, “is nothing but political hygiene” (Popper, 1945a, p. 107). Those who formulate it are subject to “the dazzlement of false immediacy”, as

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p. 160) write in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In contrast, Adorno (1973, p. 231) says that freedom “can be defined in negation only, corresponding to the concrete form of a specific unfreedom. Positively it becomes an ‘as if.’” Therefore, a critical ethic is always negative, or it is not – only in negativity does it preserve its potential for the nonontological and escape the suspicion of ideology, which is nonetheless raised by any movement toward the positive. A truly intersubjective ethic can exist only in that space where it emancipates itself from subjective morals, and precisely when it does *not* attempt to transform these onto an intersubjective level and thereby turn toward generality, but instead preserves its negative core as a categorical demand for freedom and equality, thereby staying intersubjective in its rejection of intersubjectivity:

“Each human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all others, so that it could all the more surely be made the same. But because that self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic period has always sympathized with social coercion. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured on the type of society which could make people to individuals” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 9).

2 Critique of the Utopic

With morals, ethics, or any political thought geared toward desiderata and utopias, there always exists the danger of asserting invalid generalizations. In utopian thought, the subject’s suffering becomes robbed of both its subjective claim to validity and its etiological anchoring in objective social structures:

“The thesis that the negation of a negation is something positive can only be upheld by one who presupposes positivity – as all-conceptuality – from the beginning. He reaps the benefit of the primacy of logic over the metalogical, of abstract philosophy’s idealistic delusion, of vindication as such. The negation of negation would be another identity, a new delusion, a projection of consequential logic – and ultimately of the principle of subjectivity – upon the absolute” (Adorno, 1973, p. 160).

Utopian thinking collectivizes suffering in moral terms, and this is precisely how universality is presumed of that which is individual: While the subject’s experience of suffering does possess an objective dimension in the form of socialization, the concrete experience of suffering itself remains a highly individual act, which, when turned positively toward a utopian vision of its alleviation, leads to a second instance of violence against the subject, in that the aim is not to remove suffering, but rather to positively inflect it into the ideal and thus set it up as a launching point for political agendas. Thus, according to Popper’s view, human misery may be “the most urgent problem of a rational public policy”, but “happiness is not such a problem”. Here, says Popper, the quest for happiness should

“be left to our private endeavours” (Popper, 1963, p. 361). In this view, the political goal can only be “that every generation of men, and therefore also the living, have a claim”. However, it is precisely *not* a claim on happiness, but rather “a claim not to be made unhappy, where it can be avoided”. Individuals have “a claim to be given all possible help, if they suffer.” (Popper, 1945a, p. 158)

Therefore, if one continues this line of thought with Adorno, the core of negative theory is to “lend a voice to suffering”. It is precisely in this suffering that social totality expresses itself, entirely particular but nonetheless mediated. According to Adorno, “suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.” (Adorno, 1973, p. 18) Therefore, the critical aspect of critical rationalism and critical theory is to never abstain from critique, to resist affirming false appearances, no matter how illustrious they may seem, and also not to assume that recognition of the ideological automatically leads to its abolition. Precisely the inevitable fact of mediation within the totality of civil society acts to burn doubt into the seismographical core of critical thought. The refusal to blend into the masses, always chafing against the reins, remains a constant impulse: An impulse which takes its responsibility toward the subject seriously precisely because it refrains from offering a straightforward affirmation and therefore from making any crude promises. The socializational context is a total one, and every belief in a utopian illusion serves to romanticize it, while undermining the necessity of critiquing the here and now. Since, as Adorno (1974, p. 39) says, there is no real life in a false one, thus underlining the nondeterminability of what should be considered right, Popper rejects the promise of an ideal, happy world and the concrete hope of a heavenly state:

“But of all political ideas, that of making the people happy is perhaps the most dangerous one. It leads invariably to the attempt to impose our scale of ‘higher’ values upon others, in order to make them realize what seems to us of greatest importance for their happiness; in order, as it were, to save their souls. It leads to Utopianism and Romanticism. We all feel certain that everybody would be happy in the beautiful, the perfect community of our dreams. And no doubt, there would be heaven on earth if we could all love one another. But [...] the attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell. It leads to intolerance. It leads to religious wars, and to the saving of souls through the inquisition.” (Popper, 1945b, p. 237)

3 The Place of Critical Thought

Therefore, critical thought inhabits the conflicted space between belonging and not belonging, an indeterminable sociotheoretical space beyond certitudes, doubly free: free of compulsion, but also free of certainty. The only certainty in criti-

cal thought is uncertainty, or only the opposition to the delusion of conformity, of the unquestioned and the ideological; it is the ceaseless doubting of scholarly and political dogma. Critical thought therefore localizes itself in a social and scholarly nonplace marked equally by its inclusiveness and its exclusiveness: Only those who engage with the circumstances, analyzing them both empirically and theoretically, are able to participate in the critical interpretation thereof. Nonetheless, there always remains the danger that this inclusive process could contribute to the very same structure that produces the suffering. Only the systematic insistence on critical thinking and the continuing presence of political and scholarly critique, even in seemingly practical applications, can immunize against the suspicion of becoming ideological. However, every certainty, even that of existing outside the ideological, implies a utopic ideal, thus negating even *this* certainty as an ideology. If critique is to function as the methodological premise, then politically only the conflicted space remains, and the nonidentity of ambivalence: to be inside and yet always outside.

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