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Angelo Fusari

# Understanding the Course of Social Reality

The Necessity of  
Institutional and Ethical  
Transformations of  
Utopian Flavour

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Transformations of Utopian Flavour

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*In memory of my mother*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

**Abstract** The primary aim of the present book is to clarify the nature of some basic misunderstandings that afflict both the interpretation and management of modern dynamic societies. The roots of this theoretical and practical confusion are identified with the adoption within the social sciences of the method of observation and verification. This may seem surprising in the light of the fact that the triumph of this method facilitated the emergence of the modern natural (and mechanical) sciences. And in fact, just this success has propelled the extension of the observation-verification method into the social sciences, where it is today dominant. The deficiencies of this method in the analysis of social reality are, however, masked by the trappings of scientific rigour imparted, which is often enhanced by additional borrowing of method from the mathematical and formal sciences. It must be recognized that the observation-verification works well when applied to quasi-stationary societies, where the key hypothesis of the repetitiveness (or quasi-repetitiveness) of events typical of the natural sciences is fulfilled. But with the advent of modern dynamic society, itself very much an effect of the great advancement of the natural and formal sciences, the failure of the methodologies of these sciences with regard to the analysis of social reality has become increasingly marked, its consequences ever more devastating. My book *Methodological Misconceptions in the Social Sciences* was dedicated to an accurate analysis of this embarrassing situation and a consideration of ways to remedy it. Unfortunately, the observation-verification method continues to enjoy great prestige in the social studies. This is mainly due to the fact that it is based on de facto situation with regard to established interests and hence enjoys the favor of dominant social classes. The present book, therefore, sets out to provide a simple and clear description of the situation, the related confusion, and the ways to remedy the problem.

**Keywords** The question of method • A third method for social studies versus the current methods of natural and logic-formal sciences • Social change versus repetitiveness • Observational view, as congenial to established interests of dominant social classes

This booklet discusses some of the main problems of global society, indicates their roots and offers solutions that will often prove to be necessary. The contemporary world is afflicted and, I dare say, increasingly disturbed by the absence of those solid reference points that are indispensable for the governing of human societies in the face of the great changes caused by ever greater technological progress. We shall see that such global disorientation is not inevitable, for it arises from some basic methodological lacunae of social thought; and we attempt to remedy the situation by way of a methodological revision allowing us, first of all, to define scientifically both solid reference points and the path of their evolution through the various historical ages.

I'll explore various, sometimes amusing applications of results presented in my book *Methodological misconceptions in the social sciences*,<sup>1</sup> which can be considered the scientific foundation of the present essay. A large part of these applications carry a utopian flavor, but they are nevertheless recommendations that arise from the pursuit of a rational and livable organization of modern dynamic societies combined with some substantial ethical improvement. These are recommendations that point to an escape-route from some failures that have always afflicted human societies.

A clarification of the title of this book is indispensable. The expression 'The necessity of...' must not be intended as something that will necessarily happen. The achievement of the organizational necessities that this study underlines may require long lasting and extremely painful processes of trial and error and may even be indefinitely blocked by the opposition of powerful contrary interests, if humanity does not become conscious of those organizational necessities, a consciousness that current social thought seems unable to promote. The quantity of studies carried out and statements put forward in defense or denigration of capitalism made by way of inspiration of the observational method appropriate to the natural sciences is impressive. But the able elusions on the subject that utilize, with a flavor of high scientific substance, the method of abstract rationality typical of logic-formal sciences, probably are even more insidious. I'll try to overcome this unfortunate condition of social thinking.

In this essay I will relate an adventure in sidereal space. This literary expedient should facilitate understanding of the arguments and allow the reader to bypass the false problems and useless complications that cluster around the matter on Earth, where reason is largely devoted to improving our skills at treading upon one another's toes. But I suggest to social scientists that, soon after the reading of this introduction and the section that follows it, they turn to the reading of the

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<sup>1</sup>Students preferring details will probably be irritated by the concise treatment in this essay of problems abounding in theoretical complexity. But this brief essay, which is addressed to non-specialist readers, is built upon deep and profound studies on such subjects as method, forms of power, economics, politics, ethics and law, as well a detailed historical analysis of social systems and civilizations considered particularly significant for the understanding of the societies in which we are living. For these studies, which also employ advanced mathematical and statistical procedures, see, for example: Fusari (2014, Ekstedt and Fusari (2010), Fusari (2000).

Appendix, where some methodological equivocations afflicting social sciences are discussed. Eventually, our sidereal perspective might even prove useful in understanding the needs and habits of extraterrestrial societies that humanity will sooner or later encounter.

We shall narrate a scientific counterpoint, a story of the adventure of science that is topsy-turvy in relation to the world in which we actually live. To be precise, we shall imagine that in the extraterrestrial society where the actions described take place, the development of the social sciences has preceded, influenced and placed breaks upon that of the natural sciences; a marked contrast with our Earth, upon which the very opposite has happened. The point of this conceit is that it facilitates a clear and simple perspective upon the method of the social sciences; this being a vitally important scientific matter that, nevertheless, is all too frequently presented in abstruse and complicated forms by current analyses.

We must consider our extraterrestrial interlocutors lucky; the backwardness of the social sciences with respect to the natural (and mechanical) sciences has, on Earth, reached an alarming level, which causes a technical and cognitive short circuit between the two branches of knowledge, thereby increasingly reducing the human capacity to organize and manage social systems. This transforms technological conquests into instruments of destruction and threatens to destroy the very possibility of life on Earth. The devastating wars and other follies that have troubled human history are without precedent even among the wildest beasts, and this despite man's proud assertion of being gifted with reason, the most important and true form of which—scientific reason—has yielded exceptional technological achievements.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, scientific reason is not able to help social relations because of deep methodological misconceptions.

Never has there existed on Earth a social order able to conjugate social justice, economic efficiency and a high and continuative rate of growth of production; notwithstanding the fact that such an order is perfectly feasible, as Chap. 8 will show. The domination of the economic system and market relations in modern dynamic societies generates very perverted effects. It is distressing to consider the misfortunes, among which the calamity of involuntary unemployment ranks high, that humanity began to procure with great vigor from the time we arrived at the capacity to produce material wealth at a good pace. Such considerations oblige us to dedicate much space to showing how the services of the market may be preserved and yet made into an *instrument* at the service of human societies, instead of acting as a greedy despot exploiting and manipulating men and their things.

The lack of ethical progress from the beginning of social life and in comparison with the immense progress of human knowledge and technological achievements, and despite the great efforts of moralists and the religious, is astonishing. We shall

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<sup>2</sup>A great student of history wrote: "Indeed history is no more than a list of the crimes, the follies and the misfortunes of mankind" (see Gibbon 2000, p. 81). This will oblige us, much later in the essay, to address some objections to the famous booklet by Erasmus of Rotterdam, 'In Praise of Folly'.

see that it is possible to reduce this gap; more precisely, we shall see that it is possible to scientifically develop a large proportion of ethical questions and, in this way, to lead man to virtue through rules suggested and approved by reason. In fact, it can be shown that the rational and efficient organization of social systems cannot be achieved in the absence of some fundamental ethical imperatives. The knowledge of these imperatives allows the moderation of even the sharpest human conflicts, caused by collisions among personal interests as well as among different civilization forms: conflicts against which the golden rule of reciprocity and the love for one's neighbor are impotent, as everybody is inclined to reciprocate and love according to his own way and convenience. Unfortunately the dominant social thought denies the possibility of scientifically treating ethical values; and this feeds a growing *ethical vagueness* in the modern dynamic and global society that thwarts the efforts of moralists and the religious.<sup>3</sup>

Human virtue is strongly influenced by the character of social organization, in particular the forms of power. If we assume, under the influence of observational methodologies, that the forms of power are inevitably obliged to assume the usual dress of domination-power, instead of service-power, Machiavelli's teaching becomes irrefutable and the dominated people can choose only between rebellion and, as indicated by Guicciardini, managing in the light of particular and personal interests. Any pulpit is impotent against the consequent corruption: the preachers of virtue are condemned to throw their words to the wind and their listeners are kept in check by spontaneous behaviour and the working of Mandeville's paradox.<sup>4</sup> At least this is so if we are unable to propose some rules and organizational forms that lead to the uprooting of domination-power and the corruption that it forges, in favor of what we denominate service-power.

Everywhere we turn our eyes, we see that domination-power darkens and holds in subjection the liberating force of reason: in the life of the man in the street and in the work of great statesmen, legislators, judges, businessmen and administrators. Unfortunately, the fact that existing social relations and the whole of history are deeply permeated by domination forms means that the prevailing mere observational method implies the acceptance of domination-power; this clearly shows that such a method, if used in the investigation of society, acts as a distorting trap.

Volumes have been written reproving the exploitation of man by man and tremendous revolutions have been set in motion in order to do away with it; but the problem has never yet been faced with due clearness on the more general question of the degeneration of the forms of power into relations of domination, of which

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<sup>3</sup>L. Pellicani, in the final chapter of his main work, expressed great concern for the instability that modern dynamic societies derive from the chronic instability of ethical values (See Pellicani 1988). An instability that, we add, is largely fed by the growing scientific vagueness on ethics.

<sup>4</sup>Such a paradox underlines "the baseness of the ingredients that taken together give the healthy mixture of a well ordered society" and, as Mandeville puts it in his poetical account of the discontented beehive: "so every part was full of vice, but the whole were a paradise... and...living in the comfort in the absence of great vices is a useless UTOPIA" Mandeville (2000), pp. 4, 13 and 20.

exploitation is one of the consequences. The result has been that, notwithstanding the best intentions of so many would-be liberators, these revolutions have invariably constructed new systems of domination and exploitation. A well known booklet by G. Orwell gives a wonderful representation of such behavior.<sup>5</sup>

This deceit has perhaps reached a terminal point. The conquests of the *open society* have stirred up a great wish in the mind and heart of humanity, a desire for individual freedom. Such a wish, stimulated by subjective feelings and supported by the objective evidence that individual freedom is indispensable for self-propulsive development, will raise a violent wind of renewal in global world, mainly in the immense districts where the individual has never hitherto had importance. Power forms will be the main casualties of the hurricane, which must therefore be violent and promises uncertain outcomes. We have to fear, but not despair. It is possible to do much better within the open society, which constitutes the most brilliant and promising social form that man has built till now. But the feelings and ethical impudence that have given rise to the open society can also wither it, while its frenetic pace threatens to crush humanity, its author, if an institutional, methodological and cultural revolution does not circumvent those feelings and teach humanity the way to govern its pace and direction.

The considerations above oblige us to dedicate a brief reference to the most embarrassing and depressing phenomenon that wraps itself around and within human life: *the evil in the world*. Such a phenomenon has been intensively discussed and analyzed by theologians, philosophers, historians, psychologists, psychoanalysts, etc., but their discussions have been almost entirely in vain, for this is a problem without univocal solutions. In Voltaire's *Candide*, James the Anabaptist says: "It seems that men have partly corrupted nature; they have not been born as wolves but wolves they have become. God has equipped them neither with twenty-four pounder cannon nor with bayonets; but they have built cannons and bayonets to destroy themselves. To this account I could also add bankruptcy and justice that takes possession of bankrupts' goods to subtract them to creditors".<sup>6</sup> What are the reasons behind so much self-damaging behaviour? A number of philosophers have stated that man is by nature good but human institutions have transformed his natural goodness into instinctive aggressiveness and wickedness; but the reason why human goodness has given rise to such wicked institutions is not clarified. Others take the opposite stance, arguing that human nature is predominantly and irreparably infested by bad instincts, and they deduce from this that humanity must be subjected to vigilant surveillance and governed with cynicism and deceit or at least, and according to Augustin of Hippo, guided toward the *De Civitate Dei*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See Orwell (2008).

<sup>6</sup>See Voltaire (2006), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>See Augustin of Hippo (2000).

It seems to me that those arguments are not convincing. History shows, at every time and in every place, that humanity is by nature good and bad, the author of great rushes of generosity and of much greater wickedness. Logic and common sense suggest that such behavioural and existential dualism is an inevitable result of the limitations afflicting human nature. Well, in observing such mixtures of virtue and wickedness, students cannot avoid acknowledging that the human propensity to make mistakes due to our cognitive limitations together with our ‘freedom’ to make the most atrocious errors is coupled with the human potential to scientifically understand the problems of the world and to so gain knowledge exponentially over time. Such potential is an important means for spiritual and material growth; but to be able to operate it is necessary that men are strictly subjected to the consequences of their actions, that is, are ‘responsible’ for them; in other words, it is required that in the use of command-power the notions of ‘service’ and ‘responsibility’ replace that of ‘domination’. Unfortunately, a number of institutions and even ethical principles have been shaped much more under the influence of bad instincts than with the purpose of promoting ‘responsibility’ and thereby increasing generosity and mutual well being. The notion of ‘responsibility’, which should be a cornerstone of the studies on social systems and of the teaching of educational institutions, is for the most trampled on and ridiculed. And, alas for the large majority of moralists, ‘responsibility’ finds systematic applications almost only through the automatisms of the competitive market, their great enemy.

There is a great need of reason where the winds of passions and interests blow with strength, as is the case in social reality. But here it is important to underline the distinction between individual reason, which often acts as the servant of bad instincts, and scientific reason, which represents (as just seen) an important means for the improvement of human conditions but is subject to ambiguity if not based on steady and reliable methodological foundations. Unfortunately, social thought is lacking when it comes to method; largely in consequence of that the role of science in ethics is explicitly denied by the large majority of scholars. In effect (and as Chaps. 11 and 12 will show), current social teaching is constrained by the strait-jackets of being or daydreaming of what ought to be, and remains distant from any solution of the crucial methodological question for social science: how to combine *being* and *doing*, observational and organizational aspects but avoiding that the second is overwhelmed by the first.

This essay is intended for an audience of rational people, in particular, the vast majority who are dominated by (and suffer the exploitation of) forms of power. It should also benefit those who consume their energies in pathetic attempts of domination; for even if they succeed in such a difficult task, they are forced to wear themselves out even further in defending the paltry privileges they have grasped and to suffer the humiliations inflicted on them by higher-ranked rulers. I take the liberty of reminding my readers who belong to the dominating class of Rousseau’s warning: “he who thinks to command others is no less enslaved than them”.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup>See Rousseau (1962), p. 4.

present book is, however, primarily addressed to the following two audiences: scholars and men of action engaged in solving the ever more complicated problems of human societies; and enthusiastic young people, humiliated but not defeated by their vain pursuit of crazy utopias, and whose enthusiasms may be durably brightened only by aid of the torch of some institutional design illuminated by science. T. Nagel has written: “the problem of planning institutions able to warrant the equal importance of every person without charging on individual unacceptable obligations has not been solved yet”.<sup>9</sup> Here we shall attempt to show that it is possible to organize social systems in such a way that, in Nagel’s terms, both the resulting satisfaction of the impersonal motivations of each individual and the satisfaction of personal motivations will be very high.

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<sup>9</sup>See Nagel (1998), p. 13.