

Review Essay

LOOKING FOR THEORY

“Facts” and “Values” as the Intellectual Legacy of the 1970s

A discussion of Richard J. Bernstein's *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), and Arthur L. Stinchcombe's *Theoretical Methods in Social History* (New York: Academic Press, 1978).

JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER

The 1970s was in most respects socially bankrupt, a decade that lived, insofar as it lived at all, off the patrimony of the decade before. As we look forward to the one succeeding, we can hope only for a renaissance that will revivify earlier ambitions and, perhaps, point them in new directions as well. Intellectual history, although hardly reducible to ideology, is surely influenced by it. In American sociology, there has been no significant theoretical development in the past decade. The old idols, long destroyed, have merely been pilloried, and no new ideas have been developed with enough power to take their place. The theoretical legacy of the 60s consists in the destruction of functionalism. The conqueror on the structural flank was critical sociology, the blend of marxism and humanism adopted by the New Left as it moved gradually toward the center of American intellectual life. On its “methodological” flank, functionalism was successfully assaulted by the forces of positivism, many and varied in their form. These theory-builders-from-fact moved from the periphery to the center, as symbolized by the recent Presidential address of Hubert Blalock at the annual American meetings of Sociology. Professor Blalock's address on the logic of equations broke new ground with its absolute lack of reference to the classic tradition of social thought. In these ways, the movements of the 1960s successfully destroyed the traditional center of sociology. There is precious little of what used to be called “general theory”.

There is a great deal more of criticism and of quantitative, anti-theoretical theorizing. Sociology is stretched fine between ideology and undigested facts.

The two books under consideration here are significant representations and carriers of this two-pronged strategy, and it is fitting that they should be published at the decade's denouement. If Richard J. Bernstein, author of *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, was not a participant in the movements of the 1970s, he was surely greatly affected by them. His book is a triumphant affirmation of the new "critical" tendency in sociological theorizing and a clarion call for more of the same. Arthur L. Stinchcombe was not a participant in those political struggles, but he was an active strategist in the positivist movement that has come to be called theory-building. In his most recent work, *Theoretical Methods in Social History*—whose title testifies to the paradox of the anti-theoretical theorizing this tradition espouses—Stinchcombe attempts nothing less than to read the discipline's most creative thinkers as vulgar empiricists. The emperors have no clothes; Stinchcombe, indeed, sees them as naked from birth, bare fact alone. These are ambitious works. They purport to be revolutionary, but in fact they are the routinization, not the charisma, codifying positions long ago staked out. Still, they are intelligent and in their own way powerful, and I shall consider their arguments in the detail they deserve. Yet we must first understand that they are as much "collective representations" as statements of scientific fact. I hope to demonstrate, indeed, that they are much more interesting for the way they reflect the nature of contemporary sociology than for the theoretical points they make. For each offers a slanted and distorted picture of social science. One reduces all of science to fact, the other to value. Neither of these is what social science is all about.

The Patrician Attack on "Empirical Theory"

Bernstein's book consists of four sections. The first outlines what he calls "empirical theory," the mainstream theorizing of Smelser, Merton, and Homans that accepts for its task the search for general propositions and laws. In the three sections which follow, Bernstein takes up the criticisms of this mainstream work by language philosophy, phenomenology, and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school. "Empirical theory" is Bernstein's polemical *bête noir*, "critical theory" his ideal. The first and most debilitating problem with the book, therefore, is that he has made "empirical theory" into a theoretical straw man; the second is that he never fully clarifies what his objections are even to this simplified target; the third is that the objections he offers are misleading; the fourth and last is that his alternative is itself problematic.

The observant reader may have already noticed a major problem with Bernstein's characterization of "empirical theory": he has classed together three theorists who are decidedly different in their understanding of the empirical and its scientific role. By casting so wide a net, Bernstein hopes that his catch will be that much bigger. The problem is that he is not sure of his objections to the positions these theorists propose, and we are left to wonder whether he is fishing in the right waters. For a good part of this first section, Bernstein moves back and forth between two different objections to the conception of science that these "empirical theorists" uphold. First he argues that the natural science model of general propositions and laws is inapplicable to the study of society. It is "not appropriate" (31) because none of these theorists has been able to make causal statements that attain anywhere near the precision of statements in the natural sciences. Bernstein's second argument is actually quite different; that social science, whether causally precise or not, cannot separate itself in any way from ideological perspectives. In the chapter's final section, however, we are met with a surprise. Bernstein considers at some length Nagel's defense of the natural scientific model for sociology, a defense that argues the possibility of precision and ideological objectivity. Bernstein apparently is convinced; at least he offers no substantive argument. Instead, he offers a *mea culpa* and loophole: he is not, he says, interested in such "impossibility arguments" (41). They may make points in the abstract, but they are too esoteric to evaluate the nuts and bolts of practical theorizing. So much for philosophy. In the conclusion to this chapter, Bernstein tries to tell us what his objections to "empirical theory" actually are. They seem to be two: first, empirical theory eliminates concern for the history of social thought, dehumanizing social science and debasing graduate education; second, empirical theory, which tries to describe what *is*, strives to eliminate normative theory, which strives to describe what ought to be.

Now that his objections have been clarified, we can go back and evaluate his position. I suggest that it is not at all impossible to do social science; there have been numerous propositions and generalizations about the social world that can bear some causal weight.¹ This does not mean it is possible to approach the precision of natural science. There are difficulties of measurement, as well as differences in ideology that prevent not only precision but consensus. None of these considerations invalidates the fact there is often quite effective causal analysis in social science and that in some areas it has become increasingly precise. As for Bernstein's second objection, that social science is ideological, I would certainly agree. But what does this actually mean? Why should it imply, after all, that no explanation is possible, that no causal analysis can accurately approach the nature of social reality? Social science is inherently ideological, but it is not only so. We can admit our values without

wishing them to cloud our thought; we can even admit that they will cloud our thought without abandoning the effort to maintain our cognitive independence and integrity. The basic question here is not whether there is ideology, but what our attitude toward it should be. Do we welcome it and try to tailor our cognitive interest to meet these demands, or do we try to separate our values from our concepts in an analytic sense, knowing full well that any concrete statement will, nonetheless, be permeated with both?

Turning to Bernstein's more explicit objections at the end of the chapter, does empirical theory strive to eliminate the history of thought? Our answer can only be "not necessarily". Whether it does so or not depends on what kind of "empirical theorizing" we are talking about. It depends on what we consider to be the status of "fact". If facts inevitably presuppose a priori judgments about such things as epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics, then systematic theory can never be separated from its historical traditions. This is a question of Parsons versus Merton, and in this debate Parsons surely comes off the better. Whitehead, via Merton, is wrong: social science, at least, cannot forget its founders, whether it would like to or not. Merton's own reference group theory emerges from Simmel, his theory of anomie from Durkheim. Bernstein cannot deal with this intrasociological debate because he has lumped all his theorists together as empiricists. No doubt most sociologists would like to forget their theoretical past, but the question is whether such amnesia is logically implied by a theoretical tradition that aims at causal statements and generalizations. "Impossibility arguments," Bernstein to the contrary, are, in fact, all that matter. It is not the concept of a social science that is at fault, but what we understand this science to be. At least two branches of contemporary "empirical theory," functionalism and marxism, have certainly not forgotten their founders or neglected the history of social thought. Neither has any hesitation about basing a vision of contemporary empirical life on a new and revolutionary "reading" of a classical work.

We are left with the second of Bernstein's "real objections," his belief that empirical theory eliminates normative theory. Many radical positivists would, in fact, like to wipe "old fashioned" normative theory off the face of the earth, but most "empirical theorists" are more than willing to see this different kind of theorizing flourish. But here's the rub: Bernstein actually objects to the *idea* of "different kinds" of theories. He does not simply want to see a healthy normative tradition alongside an empirical one; he wants rather to eliminate the distinction within empirical theory itself. Bernstein objects to the "categorical" distinction between facts and values, theory and practice (44–5, 173). He objects to the very notion that "the task of the social scientist is to describe and explain social phenomena as accurately as

he can." I would contend the exact opposite. If the integrity of both kinds of thinking, the normative and the cognitive, is to be preserved, it is precisely this analytic, categorical distinction which must at all costs be maintained. If we don't know that a statement is trying to be truthful in a cognitive way, we shall not know how to criticize it. Should we say, for example, that an inaccurate statement is merely "bad"? In practice these distinctions are always and inevitably obfuscated, but we must try all the harder to preserve them in an analytical sense. The problem is exactly parallel to the distinction between theory and fact. If we reject the positivist and empiricist position, we realize that we can never separate a fact from the theory informing it. Yet we do not, for all that, eliminate the categorical distinction between the two. It is convenient to "know" there is a part of social existence that seems unproblematic enough for us to test against it more speculative knowledge. The same is true for the distinction between facts and values. If we could not distinguish what ought to be from what "is," there would be no way to begin even thinking about either.²

In the final three sections of his book, Bernstein's argument is hard to pick out from the admirably lucid, unobjectionable summaries he offers of various works. Bernstein continues to raise objections to social science that he has already admitted are incorrect, a strategy which indicates further his ambivalence about central issues. He argues, first, that social science is "objectivist": "many mainstream social scientists" accept that "in the final analysis there is a realm of basic, uninterpreted, hard facts" (112, cf. 228, 23). Second, and more generally, he argues that the commitment to an empirical and objective standard of evaluation implies that theorists accept a purely objective image of the human actor. Buried in empirical theory, in other words, is a moral paradigm of the calculative individual (106, 229), the isolated human being who acts only according to physical needs (118, 123, 226). Empirical theorists can refer only to physically observable phenomena, and they can have no reference to interpretive sociology (82–3, 138, 144). But these objections reveal a fundamental unfamiliarity with the central object of Bernstein's critical attack. "Many mainstream social scientists," it is true, accept the notion of uninterpreted facts, but only a distinct minority of sociological theorists do so. Indeed, Bernstein himself had earlier cited Smelser's argument about the impossibility of theoretically uninterpreted facts.³ Yet Bernstein's second objection is the most questionable. It is he, not contemporary "empirical theorists," who conflates methodological objectivity with presuppositions about the nature of action. Durkheim was a positivist, but he hardly shared the utilitarians' image of the instrumental, physicalist actor. Weber's entire sociology is dedicated to the proposition that an interpretive sociology which accepts the primordially of meaning and symbolization can, nonetheless, accept at the same time empirical standards of evaluation.

Typical of Bernstein's peripatetic quality, in the course of making these objections he also, remembering Nagel's "impossibility argument," invokes his own. He admits that it is, in principle, possible to separate facts and theories (77), and that it is possible to maintain the objectivity of "general statements" without being compromised by positivism (86). Such objectivity is possible, as Kuhn and others have demonstrated, through the existence of a scholarly community upholding standards differentiated from the concrete actor. How can Bernstein reconcile these admissions with the polemic of his major argument? He does so by trying to link this now legitimate generality to normative theorizing alone. As the book progresses, we realize that Bernstein is not interested in cognitive or empirical theory at all, even if it could be precise; nor does he care whether the history of social thought is or is not related to contemporary analytic theory. His defense of the possibility of independent generality is used only to justify the possibility for objective criticism, and he implies, time and time again, that in fact only critical statements can be truly objective (84). He argues, for example, that Kuhn's reference to the significance of persuasion in scientific debate is tacitly an argument for the importance of normative arguments about rationality (93). This is a peculiar reading of Kuhn, but it indicates the hidden agenda actually informing Bernstein's book.

Bernstein would like to reduce cognitive, or empirical, theory to normative argument. General scientists' knowledge, he insists, should be so value-informed that it can in itself be the basis "for the reform of social existence" (176). He breaks down, in this way, any categorical distinction between analytic and evaluative modes, maintaining that knowledge is merely the expression of interest (180). Yet rather than talk about the nature of the good and how it can be determined and argued, he speaks about normative argument only in a "scientific" way. He assures us that normative theory can distinguish the true from the false (74). Rather than talk about the substance of rationality, and how we can learn what it is, he speaks about rationality as "inherent" in thought itself, and he shifts his concern to the problem of how evidence can be established to "validate" this inherent truthfulness. Pseudo-empirical standards are suggested. Normative statements are true, he suggests, if they can initiate voluntaristic processes of self-emancipation (203), or if they stimulate effective political practice (215). But these suggestions are naive. Who is to determine if emancipation has occurred, or as Marx asked in one of his more prescient moments, who is to educate the educators? Perhaps we can trust the psychoanalyst's rationality, as Habermas does, but would the subjects of Jim Jones' hypnotic charisma not argue with equal strength that their leader's "normative theory" was equally rational and liberating? As for political practice, is it too coarse to suggest that on these grounds there is

no way to distinguish Lenin from Hitler, and that the theory of Marx himself, a relatively ineffective organizer, would have been relegated to the dustbin of history? Should the normative validity of Christianity vis-à-vis Fascism be a matter of how many military divisions the Pope employs?

Bernstein's argument about normative theory derives, of course, from Habermas' work, and no analysis of this book would be complete without some consideration of this brilliant, but flawed thinker of the Frankfurt school. Unfortunately, serious consideration of the various issues in Habermas implicitly informing Bernstein's book (for example, the wrong-headed claim that "empirical theory" has an inherently conservative ideology, and that it implies action of a manipulative and instrumental kind), is beyond the scope of this essay. I shall limit comment to the issue in Habermas' work that provides the underpinning for Bernstein's exultation of the normative. Habermas' thinking, as all the Frankfurt school thinkers' before him, is stimulated and distorted by a contradiction from which he cannot escape.⁴ On the one hand, he argues that there is a "rationality" that is, in a Hegelian sense, imbedded in the very essence of historical being and which cannot be refuted by mere empirical study. On the other hand, he differentiates himself from classical philosophy by arguing that the outcome of this rational dialectic must be traced not through the unfolding of reason but through concrete, empirical processes in the real world. Each of these commitments, however, vitiates the truth claims of the other. Habermas' empirical analysis—for example, his notion of an inherently contradictory capitalism—falters because his confidence in objective reason allows him to gloss crucial propositional questions. His normative argument, at the same time, is weakened because he takes its moral clarity and acceptability for granted, and his principal concern becomes the demonstration of its validity by empirical means, means such as practice and emancipation which have the same highly questionable status as those already noted in Bernstein's work.

Ultimately, Habermas believes that the validity of the normative argument is assured by reference to a consensus that is the product of free and unrestrained discourse between rational actors, a process of communication that assumes the existence of universalistic criteria to which all can agree. Bernstein agrees that this standard exists, and he hails it as the final refutation of the claims of empirical theory that values cannot be objectively proved. Yet in fact nothing could be more far-fetched than this "ideal speech situation." If actors are imbedded in society, how could a situation of completely unrestrained discourse ever occur? Speech is always bound by norms, which only begin with, but are not limited to, the cultural baggage carried by language itself. But if these norms are historically specific, then the rationality they propose could

never universalistically arbitrate the interests of various groups. We are left, therefore, with an evasion rather than a clarification. Habermas tells us nothing about how or by whom the rationality of different ideological discourses will be decided, because he ignores one of the central analytic propositions of the empirical theory he so sharply criticizes, namely the thesis of the normative boundedness of interest and rationality. Once we understand that there can be no empirical demonstration of the validity of one form of critical rationality over another, we begin to understand that there is something starkly elitist in Habermas' normative theory and, therefore, in Bernstein's as well. In their assumption that rationality is not only inherent in human nature but that it can also be empirically demonstrated, they obscure the crucial questions any democratic theory of knowledge must confront. In fact, the correct answers to these questions are actually imbedded in the "empirical theory" Bernstein and Habermas so despise, and which should be more accurately be called "liberal" rather than "empirical" theory, if we understand that this liberalism differs radically from the individualism and empiricism of traditional liberal thought, such as Locke's.

Contemporary liberal theory accepts the notion that values can be rational, but it rejects the notion that they can ever be consensual if society is to remain even formally free. There is, therefore, a true contradiction between empirical freedom and all claims to the absolute, "inherent" truth. This acceptance of inevitable conflict over the rationality of values stems from an acceptance of the integrity of individual human beings; this respect leads the theory of modern liberalism to reject the other fundamental assumption that informs the "critical" orientation, namely the notion that normative truth can be established by empirical procedures. If this were true, then the scientific "educators" would have a monopoly over moral authority, and this special power of insight would allow them to legitimately assume control over the lives of ordinary individuals. To avoid this, facts and values must be separated as sharply as possible, even if only in categorical terms, for only this separation can protect the democratic commitment to the integrity of individual human choice. Scientists and other smart people can try to rationalize the world all they want, and make predictions until the cows come home, but these experts will not, according to this liberal theory, be allowed to impose their particular moral commitments on anybody. Cognitively they may see more clearly, and we would all like the fruits of their vision. But morally they may be no better than the *lumpen* hipster, the petit bourgeois corner druggist, the falsely conscious worker, the opiated priest. The question of moral rationality must be argued on a different plane, and we must be prepared to accept certain inevitable differences of opinion. Far from instrumentalizing the world, then, the categorical distinction between facts and values that informs "empirical theory" actually is designed to humanize it.

Bernstein and Habermas think of themselves as revolutionary theorists. They would “restructure” the positivism of established theorizing by introducing new perspectives that emphasize prior value commitments and non-empirical thought. But the attack on the moral poverty of objective, cognitive insight is actually of long standing. Phenomenologists fought against the possibility of generalization from the beginning of social science, and the critical quest to valorize cognition represents a fear of the consequences of independent empirical insight that has deep roots in German and, more generally, Romantic intellectual culture. Intellectuals have never wanted to give up their special prerogatives to moral insight. Yet they must be forced to do so, for educators should never be given the power to educate themselves. The independence of empirical and normative theory must be maintained.

The Utilitarian Attack on “Speculative Theory”

If Bernstein takes a patrician attitude toward sociological theory — who needs facts or objective theories? — Stinchcombe takes a utilitarian one. Stinchcombe is suspicious of all “speculation”. Dispense with the “grandiose” architecture of social thought and general theory; all we should be concerned about is having a room to live in where we can meet our basic needs (2). Stinchcombe is the Puritan in Elizabethan England; he can hardly contain his disdain for “mere literary devices,” for metaphors, for philosophizing, all of which, he suspects, simply camouflage a weak theoretical intelligence. Stinchcombe’s project is to examine the historical theories of Trotsky, Tocqueville, Smelser, and Bendix and to demonstrate that insofar as they come up with good sociological theory it is because they all employ the same “theoretical methods,” methods which allow them to get equally close to the empirical world. In some part Stinchcombe succeeds; at least he shows that, contrary to Bernstein, empirical thinking can be analytically separated from ideology. Only because there is some independence from ideological commitments can there be some important overlapping propositions between such political antagonists as Trotsky and Tocqueville. Stinchcombe uses this empirical convergence, moreover, to deliver a terrific attack on the “number-crunchers” of social science. For although, as we shall see, Stinchcombe himself fetishizes methods, his at least are the methods of reason — “theoretical” methods — rather than the methods of arithmetic alone. No good historical theory, Stinchcombe insists, can come out of the manipulation of numbers. Making a count should be the last stage of any empirical enterprise; it should be allowed only after different empirical instances have been made comparable by analytic means (5–6). Yet Stinchcombe’s book must also be judged problematic, because while he corrects some of Bernstein’s errors he can do so only by presenting a mirror image of Bernstein’s misunderstanding of empirical theory. If for Bernstein

there are no facts, or generalizations about facts, for Stinchcombe there are no ideas, or generalizations that derive from ideas. Stinchcombe claims, for example, that ideology never enters in an important way into great theorizing; he would like us to think that Trotsky and Tocqueville are basically saying the same thing, and that he prefers Trotsky only because he is a better scientist. But excepting Stinchcombe himself, what theoretical observer would mistake Tocqueville's analysis of the benefits of aristocracy for Trotsky's demonstration of the pathetic weakness of the same? Still, our concern is not with ideology *per se* but with Stinchcombe's general understanding of theorizing in social science, and it is on these grounds that we have to quarrel with his book.

The problem with Stinchcombe's argument about the fundamentals of historical explanation is that he misunderstands the nature of science. For Stinchcombe sees, and has always seen, science as a one-way movement from facts to theories. The most general fallacy of this position is that facts themselves can be separated from their theoretical gestalt. It is useless, Stinchcombe insists, to point to prior "theoretical" differences between Trotsky and Smelser as reasons for the contrast in their empirical explanations: one does not apply theory to history, but rather one uses history to develop theory (1). Propositions can be completely separated from world view; theoretical generality comes simply from research into the facts (2, 115, 117). What distinguishes great theorists from minor ones is simply that they "thought about the facts" harder and better than others (3). Independent ideological commitments, as I have already mentioned, cannot, in Stinchcombe's view, exercise any influence on theorizing; neither can any other non-factual elements be granted causal autonomy in the production of science. General classificatory schemes, for example, have no effect. Stinchcombe claims that abstract notions of "universalism versus particularism" had no impact on Weber's sociology, that Weber's theory emerged only from detailed considerations of causal sequences (22). Neither do analytic models have an impact on theorizing independently of perceived empirical fact. The marxist model of development from feudalism to capitalism, then, was not an important stimulus for Trotsky. How could it stimulate empirical theory, if it was itself too general ever to be disproved (16)?

Stinchcombe does not think that facts simply produce theories by themselves; no, there must intervene between facts and theories what Stinchcombe calls analogical reasoning. Theory is the elaborate construction of analogies between different empirical instances. It is hard to find out what Stinchcombe exactly means by analogy, and I am not sure he knows himself. I think, however, that he conceives analogizing in the most common sense way, simply as making a

relationship between two or more things. What follows are the crucial analogizing strategies he discovers, and praises, in the theories he has analyzed: a) theorists develop implicit distributions of important qualities – loyalty, political courage, alienation – and keep these distributions in mind to compare with the performances of the actors, corporate or individual, they are studying; b) theorists keep in their minds a set of all the hypothetical choices that can conceivably be made by actors or groups in specific situations, and they compare this hypothetical set with the decision actually made in order to gain better insight into the nature of the latter; c) theorists have in their minds ideal-type sequences of development, which they use as points of comparison to understand the course of the more uneven path of empirical development; and d) theorists analogize to what would happen if systems were perfectly functional in order to understand the nature of empirical dysfunction and conflict (51–60, 70–75, 89–102, 111–113).

But these analogies are no more than techniques of argumentation imbedded in the very nature of rational logic. They are a form of “reason” itself, no less and no more. Certainly every good theorist will follow these or similar analogizing strategies: it would be impossible to think sequentially, to make comparisons, to demonstrate, or to refute if they did not do so. This reasoning, however, cannot and does not produce what we think of as scientific statements. We need more substantive commitments to make sense out of the formless and chaotic world of sense impressions that is scientific “data”. There are, in fact, a whole range of such substantive commitments, and they correspond to those levels of analysis Stinchcombe specifically discards; they are models, classifications, ideologies, and epistemologies, and they are all non-empirical assumptions that allow the merely formal techniques of reason to make sense of the sensual world. Stinchcombe’s understanding of analogies is too anti-literary, for metaphors – fuzzy, diffuse, and imagistic as they are – had a tremendous role in the structuring of even the most revolutionary empirical breakthroughs in natural science. Whether order is “felt” to be continuous or discontinuous, whether substance is “believed” to be atomistic or organic – these unconscious images of the world have motivated scientists from Kepler to Einstein.⁵ Even more important, because even further removed from any commitment to specific empirical form, are purely philosophical assumptions about epistemology. Stinchcombe tries to dismiss the relevance of epistemology by claiming that it rests upon individual psychology (115–116). True, philosophy assumes that certain orientating frameworks rest in the individual’s mind before he encounters sense data, but this does not reduce epistemology to an individual or subjective trait. Epistemology is structured in different intellectual traditions and carried by different social groups. All of Bentham’s circle shared this materialism, and the epistemology

of Utilitarianism has continued to narrow and instrumentalize the understanding of the social world to the present day.

Only when we put together epistemological assumptions with general metaphors and models, ideologies, classifications, and certain unexamined and, hence, a priori propositions can we understand the non-empirical context within which social theorists confront the factual world. These contexts are the traditions of marxism, functionalism, and Weberianism within which Trotsky, Smelser, and Bendix worked. Theorists do not work simply with facts and apply their reason. They work with theories, the theories of their fathers, and they try to elaborate and specify them in ways that allow these theories to explain new and unexpected sets of facts. If they are successful, they can defend the theory against its attackers and critics, and this, for any great theorist, is just as important as explaining the empirical world itself. What else could have inspired Trotsky to conceptualize uneven and combined development, if he were not trying to modify and sophisticate the theory of "even" development of Marx? Why, after all, did Smelser study family development, if it were not to demonstrate the explanatory advantage Parsonian theory gained by its systematic attention to independent processes of socialization? Certainly we could not understand the innovative quality of Bendix's project if we did not understand that his life's work has been to specify the ways in which Weber's understanding of political authority can be applied to the modern world.

The best way to refute Stinchcombe's view of science is to turn to Stinchcombe's own scientific arguments. For Stinchcombe's analysis of the "facts" of historical theories reveals that he brings to his exercise of reason heavy preconceptual baggage. Stinchcombe's analysis is permeated by rationalistic utilitarianism, and he selectively reads his "data" in a way that makes it demonstrate the models of action and order that he himself prefers. This presupposition is clearly manifest in his general perspective on social change. "The causal forces that make systematic social change go," he writes, "are people figuring out what to do" (117). Historical actors are practical; they don't have time to waste on fantasy or on ideas. The cognitive content of peoples' minds is all that matters, and if new material situations develop, so this empirical understanding will change. The most sustained analysis in this book is Stinchcombe's attempt to derive from Tocqueville's and Trotsky's histories a common theory of political authority (33–50). What emerges is instructive, for this is political authority shorn of every vestige of impractical adornment. Informing the empirical reading is an instrumentalist epistemology of action: people will maintain a line of conduct as long as it is effective in allowing them to achieve their conscious purposes (40). If we assume that order is collective, then this rationalistic understanding of action leads naturally

to certain presuppositions about how collective order works. Stinchcombe's world is ordered by external and coercive structures. The state is a material organization, so authority can be maintained only if it is effective (35); legitimacy has only epiphenomenal status. Stinchcombe dismisses "general symbols" like the divine right of kings, patriotism, and religion as without substantial impact (48). Symbolic references occur in political discourse only if people are unable to solve the problems of practical existence; symbols order action only if they can actually commit governmental organization to carrying out their model mandates. If symbols remain vague and diffuse, and are not so institutionalized, then they will have no force at all, for people close to government will be able to see for themselves that the symbols have lied (49).

There is a certain brutal honesty that permeates all of Stinchcombe's work, and it is a peculiar fact that in each of his books on the methodology of science he offers his readers, *sub rosa* to be sure, admissions that effectively neutralize the positivistic moral of his principal arguments.⁶ In the last few pages of *Theoretical Methods in Social History*, Stinchcombe acknowledges "the utilitarian character of the explanations of individual actions" he has proffered (121). He has, he admits, selected historians "who have little touch with values and enthusiasms," and he has even, in the further effort to avoid the irrational realm, "selected parts of their work to analyze which are unrepresentative." Why has he done so? Is it because the irrational character of action does not reside in the facts themselves? Hardly. He has taken the utilitarian approach for personal and idiosyncratic reasons, "because I find such utilitarian theories more congenial." They sound, he writes, "more like the people I know." By comparison to such "sensible plans," ecstasy or commitment to ultimate values seem like "weak and erratic" causes. Besides, utilitarianism has an explanatory advantage, for when we assume rationality the connections of social structure to the volition of individuals "are easier to construct." Stinchcombe's reading of these four historical theorists, we must assume, is meant to be as empirical as their reading of history itself. We can only be grateful to him for demonstrating so clearly the personal, a priori commitments that have informed this scientific exercise.

NOTES

1. One need only think here about the generalizations and middle range theories that have been produced about social stratification. Certainly there is not complete agreement, but even disagreement about such general issues as the role of values versus material incentives does not nullify the areas of empirical understanding that now exist and the advances that have been made. This is clear, for example, in the recent debate over Donald Treiman's *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective* (Academic Press, 1977). While Haller and Bills sharply criticized some central tenets,

they acknowledged that Treiman had pulled together and systematized a large body of rather consistent empirical studies (Review of Treiman, "Occupational Prestige Hierarchies: Theory and Evidence," 721-734 in *Contemporary Sociology*, 1979). A book offering a more general theory about a different area of stratification, and which certainly succeeds in advancing some important generalizations and propositions, is William J. Goode's *Celebration of Heroes* (University of California Press, 1979).

2. Certainly the central assumption of Alvin W. Gouldner's *The Dialectic of Technology and Ideology* (Seabury Press, 1976), a highly critical theoretical work, is that the empirical elements of explanation can be separated from "ideological" distortions of reality. This is true despite Gouldner's commitment to a reflexive sociology; it does not challenge his self-consciousness commitment to critical ideology in any way.
3. Bernstein, 21. This is also, of course, the principal methodological assumption of Parsons' "analytical realism" in *The Structure of Social Action* (Free Press, 1937).
4. These critical weaknesses in Habermas' work are formulated as a "contradiction" by Axel van den Berg, in a powerful essay entitled "Critical Theory: Is There Still Hope?," *American Journal of Sociology*, (1980) 449-478.
5. On the impact of these general metaphors and models, see Gerald Holton, *The Thematic Origins of Science from Kepler to Einstein* (Harvard University Press, 1973).
6. In *Constructing Social Theories* (Johns Hopkins, 1968), Stinchcombe appended a closing section ("Levels of Generality in Social Theory") to his programmatic second chapter on the logic of science, which offered a differentiated conception of scientific change that effectively refuted the more positivistic argument preceding it.