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Rethinking Burawoy's Public Sociology: A Post-Empiricist Reconstruction

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Following Michael Burawoy's ASA presidential address in August 2004, "For Public Sociology," an unprecedented international debate has emerged on the current state and future of sociology (Burawoy 2005a). The goal here will be to provide a stock-taking of the resulting commentary that will offer some constructive suggestions for revising and reframing the original model. The central theme of discussion will be that while Burawoy's manifesto is primarily concerned with a plea for the institutionalization of public sociology, it is embedded in a very ambitious social theoretical framework whose full implications have not been worked out in sufficient detail (Burawoy 2005a). The primary objective of this essay will be to highlight such problems in the spirit of what Saskia Sassen calls "digging" to "detect the lumpiness of what seems an almost seamless map" (Sassen 2005:401) and to provide suggestions for constructive alternatives.

Burawoy's proposal has enjoyed considerable "political" success: "Burawoy's public address is, quite clearly, a politician's speech—designed to build consensus and avoid ruffling too many feathers" (Hays 2007:80). As Patricia Hill Collins puts it, the eyes of many students "light up" when the schema is presented: "There's the aha factor at work. . . . They resonate with the name public sociology. . . . Wishing to belong to something bigger than themselves" (Collins 2007:110–111). While many might be skeptical about the "we" of the resulting activism (Nielsen 2004), there was after all no overt threat to individual "professional" autonomy. By giving "professional sociology" sanctity, it was possible to avoid the charges of simplistic anti-positivism. Instead, Burawoy falls back on the comforting language of a Durkheimian pluralism that offers hope of reconciliation based on a complementary division of labor between four

types of sociology: professional and policy sociology oriented toward “instrumental knowledge,” as opposed to critical and public sociology concerned with “reflexive knowledge” (understood primarily in normative terms). The problem is that despite the provocative pedagogical intuition that underlies and justifies the model’s use as a heuristic device, upon closer examination it cannot be adequately defended in its current form as a theoretical framework for understanding the discipline of sociology.

This essay is written from the semi-peripheral perspective of a standpoint influenced by the international context of European social theory, Canadian and Latin American social research, and my own earlier defenses of a “critical theory of methodology” and a “postfoundationalist critical theory” (Morrow 1994; Morrow and Torres 2002). So it was with some discomfort that despite my initial sympathy for Burawoy’s intervention, further reflection—prompted by the invitation to contribute to this book—forced me to the following re-considerations.

Assessing Burawoy’s manifesto for a “public sociology” will require a quick review of previous commentaries as a point of departure for developing some proposed revisions that will focus on issues related to the theoretical status of the model. The unifying argument will be that Burawoy’s model—based on a polarization between instrumental and reflexive knowledge—overgeneralizes a particular historical configuration of tendencies especially evident in the United States. The model must therefore be situated within a more generalized metatheoretical framework that (1) is not based on a polarization of instrumental and reflexive knowledge; (2) expands the quadrant now labeled “critical sociology” to encompass “social theory” generally in order to extend its meaning to include the multiple forms of reflexivity necessary for social inquiry; (3) takes into account that professional sociology as empirical knowledge takes a multiplicity of explanatory and methodological forms that cannot be reduced to the concept of “instrumental knowledge”; and (4) recognizes that policy sociology needs to be differentiated by recognizing its “technocratic” and “liberal enlightenment” forms, a distinction that suggests greater continuity between some forms of policy and public sociology. Finally (5), such modifications will provide a basis for clarification of the logical status and rationale of a fourfold model of the division of sociological labor.

THE DEBATE THUS FAR: AN OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

While many of the commentaries are generally supportive testimonials (e.g., Blau and Smith 2006; Piven 2007), other discussions have made explicit criticisms of Burawoy’s theoretical scheme and its implications (Claw-

son 2007). At least four key themes—often overlapping—can be identified: (1) the tension between interdisciplinarity and sociological myopia; (2) reservations about the specific tasks and future of public sociology in different national contexts; (3) questions about scientific credibility; and (4) fundamental theoretical problems of the original model.

Those who point to the dangers of sociological myopia note the tension between a globalizing ambition and a narrow focus on sociology (Chase-Dunn 2005): “sociology cannot handle it alone” (Ehrenreich 2007:236). Burawoy defends his sociological focus in terms of reconstituting the traditional universalizing ambitions, disciplinary divisions, and positivist methodology of social science, a concern that is framed as part of a critique of Wallerstein and the Gulbankien Commission’s utopian vision of a unified social science (Burawoy 2005b). However necessary, such a reconstitution must also take into account that much sociological research and especially sociological theory has depended crucially on theoretical work outside of sociology (Aronowitz 2005; Braithwaite 2005; Holmwood 2007). Yet accepting the need for interdisciplinarity does not require denying that sociology has a distinctive disciplinary perspective but does provide a reminder that other fields have more often paved the way: the call for a public sociology generally seems to ignore that most of the pioneering forms of public social science have been carried outside of sociology, especially professional and interdisciplinary programs and the well-developed tradition of “action research” (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

Regarding the second question, considerable discussion has questioned the future and priorities of public sociology, especially Burawoy’s prophetic stance based on a model of “three waves” of public sociology, culminating in its focus on the defense of civil society from markets and the state (Burawoy 2005c). This issue will be taken up only indirectly here in questioning both the identification of policy sociology with narrow instrumentalism and defining public sociology as primarily a defensive strategy against the state.

The third question of scientific credibility and authority provides the basis for strong “positivist” and empiricist critiques that criticize the model for giving moral questions priority over “the canons of science” (Tittle 2004), rather than following an engineering model of applied science based on the “old school” notion of “the epistemology of science” (Turner 2005:29), a point reinforced by understanding the context of university governance (Brint 2005). Others point to our limited ability to “predict what knowledge will be useful in the long run” (Smith-Lovin 2007:127) and the necessity of defending a “strong” professional sociology as the only way to re-establish the authority of sociology (Boyns and Fletcher 2005). Related forms of criticism proceed from more pluralistic empiricist arguments about the limits of existing forms of knowledge, for example, the risk of being “high in affect,

low in competence" (Stinchcombe 2007:143), and the defense of more "enlightened" policy sociology based on solid research (Massey 2007). As well, there are concerns about a lack of accountability to peer review (Smith-Lovin 2007) and the difficulties of communicating social knowledge—the distortions resulting from the translation of "theory" into "practice" (Beck 2005; Ericson 2005; Stacey 2004; Stinchcombe 2007). Though such cautions cannot be ignored, post-empiricist philosophies of science do not give much support to the dream of a unified sociological discipline whose positive scientific knowledge provides a foundation for authority based on an engineering analogy (Bryant 1995). Moreover, as recent research in citation networks between disciplines suggests, sociology long ago traded centrality for cohesion and cannot realistically aspire to the self-enclosed autonomy of economics, law, and even political science (Moody and Light 2006).

Even if there is little basis for a return to the positivist vision of pure applied knowledge, there is still the fourth question of the adequacy of Burawoy's alternative. Others, while generally sympathetic to the idea of institutionalizing public sociology, argue that the schema will simply not bear the weight of justifying the worthy cause. As the historical sociologist Orlando Patterson bluntly puts it, the model "illustrates some of the worst habits of contemporary sociological thinking . . . excessive overschematization and overtheorizing of subjects, the construction of falsely crisp categories" (Patterson 2007:176–177). Most of the more critical responses thus start from questioning the division of labor argument, stressing instead the unity of sociological work. At one (admittedly utopian) extreme, Sharon Hays suggests that all sociology should be public to avoid public sociology being "cordoned off as just another form of lowly labor—a mail room job for losers" (Hays 2007:81). A number of others reiterate a unity argument that also calls into question the usefulness of the fourfold schema: for Richard Ericson, "all sociology . . . involves knowledge that is at once professional, critical, policy and public" (Ericson 2005:366); for Immanuel Wallerstein, all sociology is simultaneously intellectual, moral, and political (Wallerstein 2007); and for Andrew Abbott it is always reflexive, instrumental, and value-laden (Abbott 2007).

More helpful for the reconstructive purpose at hand, Craig Calhoun provides a short checklist concerned with repairing the schema. First, what is the analytical status of these quadrants? Second, the tendency to overemphasize the discreteness of the four positions results in the striking anomaly that "critical sociology exists only to criticize other forms of sociology" rather than use empirical analysis to criticize society (Calhoun 2005:357). Third, what problems result from reserving autonomy primarily for professional and critical sociology, thus calling into question its importance for policy and public sociology? Fourth, if sociologists are to take the standpoint of civil society, this raises problems related to standpoint theories generally, as well as the reification of civil society.

Andrew Abbott's devastating critique of the foundations of Burawoy's model provides another key entry point for the revisions proposed. Abbott's objections are based on two fundamental issues. First, the overall structure of the model around a means-ends axis (instrumental versus reflexive knowledge) is rejected as a "disastrous error" because sociology is intrinsically value-laden (Abbott 2007:188). Second, linking critique and reflexivity directly with left politics is also mistaken because it does not take into account the non-political basis for moral perception, which for Abbott is best articulated in humanistic values whose realization is not tied to any particular sociological method.

RETHINKING BURAWOY'S PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY: AN AGENDA

Without necessarily disagreeing with the critiques of the foundations of the model, it can nevertheless be sustained that with appropriate revisions the notion of a sociological division of labor can provide important insights into the different practical configurations around which sociologists necessarily organize their activities. A key aspect of the proposed revisions will be a rejection of the polarization between professional sociology (based on "instrumental knowledge") and critical sociology (based on "reflexive knowledge"). Rejecting the instrumental versus reflexive knowledge distinction provides the basis for meeting Abbott's two fundamental objections—that all research is reflexive and value-laden and critique cannot be reduced to a political category.

REWORKING THE FOUR FACE MODEL: FIVE RECONSTRUCTIVE STEPS

The four-way complementarity thesis relating the four sociologies is the linchpin of Burawoy's whole argument. On the first horizontal axis, professional and policy sociology are linked by shared concern with "instrumental knowledge." On the other horizontal axis, the harmonizing connection is between the primacy of "reflexive knowledge" (primarily normative) for both critical and public sociology. As we will see, the proposed revision based on eliminating the instrumental versus reflexive knowledge distinction will have the effect of weakening the harmonizing assumptions found on the two horizontal axes—based respectively on shared instrumentality versus shared reflexivity—and reducing the conflicts on the vertical axes—based on the opposition of instrumentality and reflexivity, as well as drawing out more clearly the internal differentiations within all four categories. The two relatively autonomous forms of knowledge—professional sociology and social theory—use cognitive

styles that inevitably conflict with orientations to immediate practice, whether as policy or public sociology. Moreover, the differences between policy and public sociology as practice-oriented sociologies are not necessarily all that strong when a state has high levels of legitimacy and democratic participation. While this shifting of the alignments of tensions and complementarities will not require the model to necessarily implode, it will introduce arguments suggesting somewhat more intense conflicts and contradictions across the autonomous inquiry versus practice divide than the Durkheimian model of complementary differentiation suggests. Above all, these relations can no longer be conceived schematically in terms of a 4x4 matrix, as opposed to more specific sets of relations that respect the distinctive tasks of the systematic reflexivity of social theory. These relations can be introduced in terms of the following diagram:

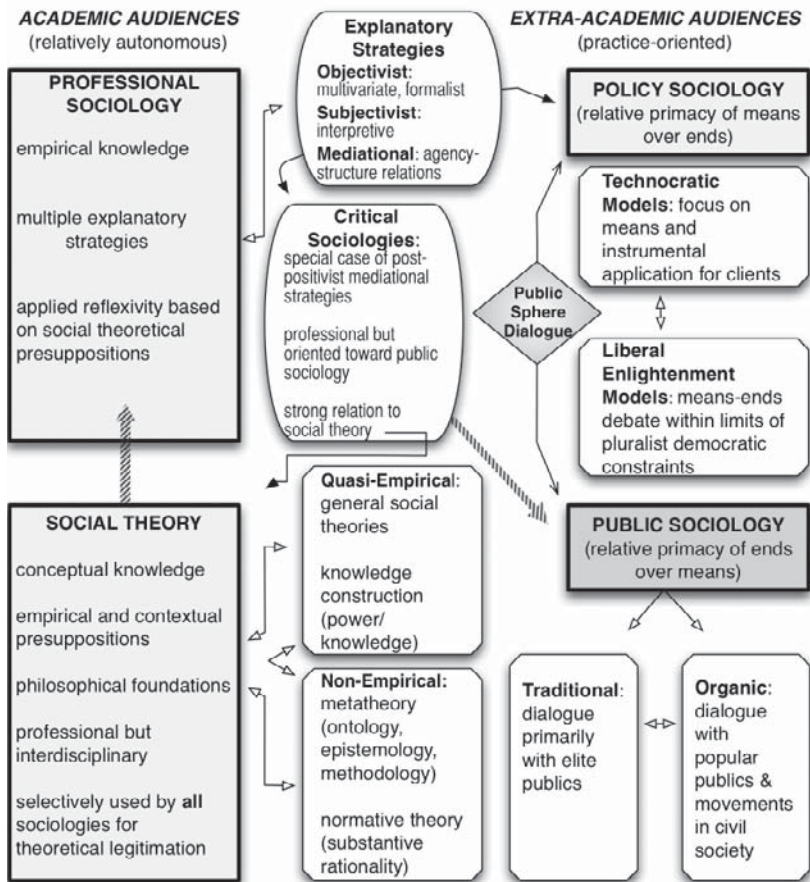


Figure 3.1. The Division of Sociological Labor

ELIMINATING THE INSTRUMENTAL-REFLEXIVE DISTINCTION

The first step toward developing these arguments will be to reject the instrumental versus reflexive knowledge distinction as a way of contrasting two forms of sociology. As Burawoy notes, "In ways I cannot go into here, this scheme bears a close relation to Habermas's theory of system and life-world, and a more distant relation to Talcott Parsons's AGIL system. The distinction between instrumental and reflexive sociology has its roots in Max Weber" (Burawoy 2004:105). The suggestion that the model can be justified by reference to insights derived from Weber (along with Habermas and to a lesser extent Parsons) raises some complex questions that can only be discussed here in a cryptically brief way given space limitations. Though various authors (e.g., Abbott, Ericson, Wallerstein, McClaughlin, et al.) point to the unity of sociological inquiry, they tend to use the argument to reject the model altogether. The present discussion instead proposes a (radical) revisionist strategy.

The first step will be to focus on demonstrating that the instrumental and reflexive sociology distinction cannot be legitimated by the example of Weber. The proposed alternative strategy will be elaborated in four more steps: rethinking the domains of critical and professional sociology (steps two and three), drawing out some of the implications for policy and public sociology (step four), and reconsidering the theoretical status of the model as a whole (step five). As will become apparent, these revisions have the effect of complicating issues in a way that moves away from the elegance and simplicity of the original model, but at the gain—hopefully—of a more convincing account of the field of sociology.

As an initial reference point, consider the key formulation of the instrumental-reflexive distinction:

This is the distinction underlying Max Weber's discussion of technical and value rationality. Weber, and following him the Frankfurt School, were concerned that technical rationality was supplanting value discussion, what Horkheimer (1974 [1947]) referred to as the eclipse of reason or what he and his collaborator Theodor Adorno (1969 [1944]) called the dialectic of enlightenment. I call the one type of knowledge instrumental knowledge, whether it be the puzzle solving of professional sociology or the problem solving of policy sociology. I call the other reflexive knowledge because it is concerned with a dialogue about ends, whether the dialogue takes place within the academic community about the foundations of its research programs or between academics and various publics about the direction of society. Reflexive knowledge interrogates the value premises of society as well as our profession. (Burawoy 2005a:11)

Burawoy's response to one of the critiques of his instrumental-reflexive distinction (directed against McLaughlin et al.) is also revealing:

To eliminate the distinction between instrumental and reflexive knowledge—between the logic of means and the logic of ends, between the logic of efficiency and the logic of reason—just because there is a real tendency toward the stifling of reflexive knowledge, whether critical or public, is to surrender to third-wave marketization. (Burawoy 2005c:165)

The following discussion will not argue for eliminating the distinction in general. The question at hand is rather whether the instrumental-reflexive distinction—grounded in Weber's distinction between instrumental and substantive rationality—is suitable for grounding two different axes of sociology. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to note the ambiguity of the use of the term "instrumental" here. One formulation suggests that perhaps Burawoy may have a rather idiosyncratic and limited meaning in mind: "Professional and policy sociologies are instrumental knowledges, linking means to given ends—the one, puzzle solving oriented to fellow sociologists and the other, problem solving, oriented to clients" (Burawoy 2007:6). If puzzle solving is all that is implied by calling professional sociology "instrumental knowledge," then it is relatively uncontroversial, but at the same time has little to do with Weber's concept of technical rationality understood as calculation of efficient means. But as Burawoy's overall discussion suggests, he does indeed have in mind invoking this stronger claim since he wants to pair instrumental rationality with its opposite—substantive (value) rationality.

In order to substantiate these problems in using Weber (and by implication, Frankfurt critical theory), it is necessary to show three things: first, why Weber's notion of instrumental rationality cannot be used to define professional sociology; second, how the label "instrumental knowledge" conflicts with Weber's own characterization of sociology as a discipline; and third, the difficulties of directly equating the normative (value-rational) concerns of critical sociology—that is, the social criticism generated by "reflexive knowledge"—with "substantive reason."

Whereas it may be justifiable to refer to the "problem solving" of policy sociology as instrumental, it is not so clear that "puzzle solving" in research can be usefully characterized as instrumental in Weber's sense, hence following the "logic of efficiency" when the "ends" are presumably something like "scientific truth." The term "instrumental rationality" (*Zweckrationalität*—sometimes translated "purposive rationality") was introduced by Weber as part of a fourfold differentiation of types of social action. But is it justifiable to call scientific activity as the construction of knowledge a form of "action" in the same sense as instrumental actions of an entrepreneur or even a policy expert? Matters are further confused by jumping from a

typology of rationalities of action to one of forms of knowledge. To say that sociological knowledge is the outcome of the instrumental action of puzzle solving tends—given the larger context referring to Weber—also to imply that the resulting research has instrumental uses, which is why it is paired with policy sociology in the first place. But the fact of puzzle solving actually says nothing about the logical structure or potential uses of the finished puzzles: empirical knowledge can take many different explanatory forms, of which instrumental knowledge in the strict sense of technical control and prediction is only one. In other words, an action typology is surreptitiously converted into what sounds like an epistemological distinction: instrumental versus reflexive knowledge.

What appears to be at work here is a failure to differentiate the multiple ways in which Weber talks about rationality. Though commentators have struggled with Weber's inconsistent usage, Donald Levine's classification captures some of the key variants:

conceptual—the “increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts”;
 instrumental—the “methodical attainment of a particular given practical end through the increasingly precise calculation of adequate means”;
 substantive—the organization of effort on behalf of normative ideals; and
 methodical or formal—what Weber terms *Planmäßigkeit*, a methodical ordering of activities through the establishment of fixed rules and routines.
 (Levine 2005:116–117)

Social scientific activity can thus be more insightfully referred to as conceptual or formal (or perhaps theoretical) rationality, but not instrumental rationality and the use of instrumental knowledge in the sense used, for example, by George Ritzer in his analysis of McDonaldization (Ritzer 1996). Moreover, given that Weber admits that belief in scientific inquiry is itself a value, it would be necessary to acknowledge that in practice conceptual rationality also has an underlying value dimension.

To turn to the second question, beyond failing to correspond to Weber's theory of rationalization, Burawoy's argument is not consistent with Weber's own characterization of sociology. Weber neither identified the conceptual rationality of sociology with its instrumental uses nor accepted—given his Nietzschean tendencies—that value rationality could be a form of “knowledge.” Following later neo-Kantian philosophers such as Dilthey who developed a hermeneutic critique of “historical reason,” Weber's sociology was grounded—unlike classical hermeneutics—in recognition of non-naturalistic forms of causality (Harrington 2001).

Nevertheless, his anti-positivist stance sharply differentiated the social sciences from the natural sciences because their foundation was interpretations

of meaning, even though some forms of social science were contributing to the rationalization of social action.

Finally, with respect to the third question, Weber cannot be easily used to justify the characterization of critical sociology in terms of its capacity to produce “reflexive knowledge” linked with substantive reason. Substantive reason (a term used in his legal studies as a contrast for formal rationality) and value rationality in general (*Wertrationalität*) were not for Weber forms of knowing that were subject to rational evaluation because they ultimately had non-rational foundations in a metaphysical “war of the gods.” One could just dismiss Weber here, but that would require justifying how normative reasoning could be considered “knowledge.” The early Frankfurt School attempted to do so with the metaphysical notion of “objective reason” as the foundation of substantive reason—an argument that Habermas has subsequently rejected in turning to a procedural, communicative ethics. And as postmodernists stress, to play the conceptual game of engaging in debates about the value rationality of ends provides no guarantee of producing universally valid norms, even if they were possible. In short, when Burawoy reduces reflexive knowledge to a form of “knowledge” based on a “dialogue about ends,” he simply glosses over the immense practical and philosophical difficulties with respect to what that might mean in the contemporary context. In short, it is necessary to start all over by rethinking the issues involved in defining the categories labeled “critical sociology” and “professional sociology” in their own terms before an effort is made to unjustifiably reduce their relation to a contrast between reflexive and instrumental knowledge.

FROM CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY TO SOCIAL THEORY

A second step of revision would thus be to deal with the immense problems resulting from the characterization of the autonomous quadrant of reflexive knowledge as normative “critical sociology,” an issue that goes beyond the potential historical deficiencies of its reflexivity (McLaughlin, Kowalchuk, and Turcotte 2005). This section will focus on the rationale for replacing “critical sociology”—understood by Burawoy primarily as normative (reflexive) knowledge—with the more inclusive notion of social theory. In Burawoy’s formulation critical sociology appears schizophrenic—it tends to be professional and empirical in its contemporary practice as research, and yet its claim to distinctiveness in informing public sociology is that it is foundational and especially moral: “It is the role of critical sociology, my fourth type of sociology, to examine the foundations—both the explicit and the implicit, both normative and descriptive—of the research programs of professional sociology” (2005a:10). Yet if one looks at a journal like *Critical*

Sociology or others associated more broadly with critical social theory (e.g., *Theory and Society*), it is hard to distinguish such work from a somewhat marginalized form of professional sociology that just gives more attention to value questions, power, and the historical origins of the definition of research problems. Perhaps the hesitation to make this link with professional sociology explicit stems from the reluctance of associating critical sociology with "instrumental knowledge"—a problem that disappears if this characterization is dropped as argued previously.

To further develop this shift from "critical sociology" to "social theory," two points need to be recognized. First, the full distinctiveness of this "foundational" quadrant as a form of largely non-empirical theorizing needs to be recognized, especially how it cannot be a form of "sociology" in the same sense as the other three faces of inquiry. Jonathan Turner indirectly identifies the problem with the complaint that Habermas's otherwise interesting writings are just "philosophy," not really sociology at all (Turner 2005:35).

Second, it should be recognized that the inevitable oscillation between narrow and conflationary uses of the term "critical sociology" is a source of endless confusion. For example, whereas Alain Touraine equates critical sociology with Marxist forms of social determinism (Touraine 2007), subsequent qualifications open up the term to include Pitirim Sorokin (Jeffries 2005). Why not then even include Parsons, who was after all a normative (liberal) critic of fascism, racism, and excessive inequality? A term that in this context gives rise to such serious ambiguities needs to be replaced.

The face misleadingly labeled "critical sociology" should thus be renamed more generically as "social theory," or more specifically, "systematic reflexive theorizing," since all sociologists engage in reflexive theorizing and social theory to some extent. While critical sociologies may be associated with some of the most visible forms of social theory, they do not have a monopoly on this kind of conceptual work. Critical theory in the Frankfurt tradition is thus a form of social theory that draws upon a particular configuration of its multiple forms of reflexive discourse, even if grounded in a normative theory of emancipation. Nor is social theory uniquely sociological because it is part of an interdisciplinary discourse that includes all of the human sciences. Moreover, to "criticize" in the context of social theory should not be read in its purely negative or primarily normative sense, but rather as including the full range of "reflexive procedures" that are the basis of the "non-empirical methods" underlying research practices (Morrow 1994:ch. 9). Systematic reflexive theorizing is thus closely associated with "social theory" as codified in two recent encyclopedias of social theory (Harrington, Marshall, and Müller 2006; Ritzer 2005) that can be contrasted to the narrowly positivist vocabulary of "sociology" in the 1960s (Fairchild 1965). Nevertheless, a distinctive feature of American sociology

has been the systematic neglect of the philosophical training necessary for social theory, even in elite programs. Whereas for Alan Sica this neglect “comes close to pedagogical negligence—not unlike prohibiting students from learning statistics, while insisting that they publish in the better journals” (Sica 1998:9–10), for Ben Agger it has culminated in the “diaspora of American social theory” (Agger 2006).

To speak of social theory as the relatively autonomous complement to professional sociology also helps clarify the range of concerns of systematic reflexive theorizing by posing the question of “what is social theory.” For example, Gouldner’s later work is best analyzed as social theory (Antonio 2005), a concept that is much wider than that of “critical sociology.” Without attempting to provide a formal definition, it is possible to describe four of the key forms of discourse associated with social theory: the non-empirical discourses of normative theory (values) and scientific metatheory (ontology, epistemology) and the quasi-empirical inquiries of historicist and constructionist studies of knowledge and general socio-historical theories.

Beyond normative issues, a second central theme of social theory has been a preoccupation with metatheoretical questions about ontology, epistemology, and methodology that are concerned with the status of social knowledge and social explanations. A good representative here in the American context is Stephen P. Turner, who has moved back and forth between sociology and philosophy (Turner and Roth 2003). A third preoccupation of social theory—the social construction of knowledge—has roots in the sociology of knowledge, but has been extended in somewhat different directions in Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology and poststructuralist approaches (e.g., Foucault). Such work has attempted—at its best—to draw out the implications of the social construction of social knowledge, while attempting to avoid both relativistic reductionism and foundationalist notions of scientific “truth.”

Finally, social theory has also been centrally preoccupied with general theories of modernity and postmodernity (e.g., Lyotard, Habermas, Giddens) that cannot be reduced to the somewhat narrower notions of a sociological theory of social change. And to summarize, Burawoy’s own call for the institutionalization of public sociology is essentially an essay in systematically reflexive social theory that draws on all four of its analytic features: normative theory; the metatheoretical foundations of inquiry (e.g., claims about instrumental knowledge); the historical analysis of the formation of sociology as a disciplinary field and its larger implications; the general historical theorizing implied by a “third-wave” model of the sociological tradition that projects “value science” as the rising tide of the future.

With the preceding suggestions in mind, compare Burawoy’s original formulation with an alternative version based on replacing critical sociology with a comprehensive understanding of the systematic reflexivity of social theory:

However disruptive in the short term, in the long term instrumental knowledge cannot thrive without challenges from reflexive knowledges, that is, from the renewal and redirection of the values that underpin their research, values that are drawn from and recharged by the wider society. (Burawoy 2005a:19)

The revised version:

However disruptive in the short term, in the long term the conceptual rationality of empirical research paradigms cannot thrive without challenges from the systematic reflexive insights of social theory, that is, from reflection about the normative and metatheoretical foundations of inquiry, historicist awareness of the construction of knowledge, and the provocations of general social theories that stimulate thinking outside the confines of narrowly empiricist theory.

RETHINKING PROFESSIONAL SOCIOLOGY

A third step would be to draw out the implication of rejecting the characterization of professional sociology as grounded in "instrumental knowledge" and a "correspondence theory of truth," thus reinforcing—against Burawoy's own intentions—the positivist tendencies that have long dominated much American social science (Steinmetz 2005). For example, some readings of Burawoy criticize a concession to positivism that makes it unsuitable as a foundation even for public sociology (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2005:364). Though unified as "instrumental knowledge," the diversity of professional sociology is recognized by reference to "research programs" in the sense used by Imre Lakatos (Burawoy 2005a:10). This terminology is misleading, however, in that it implies a unity based on "core" assumptions and cumulative findings that are generally lacking in sociology (Holmwood 2007:59). This highly idealized view of cumulative research is strategically important for the model in that it provides a knowledge base for high consensus "instrumental knowledge" that in turn legitimates its application in policy research, even though the concept of cumulation itself is fraught with difficulties (Abbott 2006).

A much more representative example of what goes on in social research specialties is evident in the characterization of social gerontology by Norella Putney and her colleagues—and accepted by Burawoy as resulting in a form of public sociology. The resulting list is a rather messy set of approaches whose explanatory diversity resembles many other fields: life course perspectives (the most widely cited); social exchange theory; age stratification perspectives; social constructionism; and critical perspectives that include the Frankfurt tradition, Foucault, political economy, and feminist theories

(Putney, Alley, and Bengston 2005:93–95). Given the multiplicity of theoretical perspectives, there is no unified “research program” in Lakatos’s sense beyond a value and topical concern with aging groups.

Burawoy’s informal use of the language of research programs obscures how professional sociology is based on diverse explanatory strategies, some of which are highly conducive to policy sociology (hence potentially instrumental in the strong sense), whereas others have no apparent or immediate instrumental value or have only “weak” instrumental possibilities. For example, as Charles Ragin points out, sociological explanations have multiple goals: “1. identifying general patterns and relationships; 2. testing and refining theories; 3. making predictions; 4. interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena; 5. exploring diversity; 6. giving voice; 7. advancing new theories” (Ragin 1994:32–33). Subsuming all of these possibilities under the heading of “instrumental knowledge” simply cannot be justified aside from the rather trivial sense in which they share “puzzle solving.”

The theoretical strategies of professional sociology can be broadly differentiated in terms of their location on an agency-structure continuum that can be understood ontologically as part of subject-object opposition or epistemologically in terms of a differentiation of three basic “knowledge interests” (Habermas 1971). At the objectivist (positivist, primarily quantitative) extreme are approaches based on the study of causality using multivariate analysis and other formalist approaches. In opposition, various anti-positivist interpretive (hermeneutic) strategies focus on social action and interaction (e.g., symbolic interactionism, social phenomenology, ethnomethodology). Finally a variety of mediating strategies pursue questions linked with an agency-structure model concerned with the interplay of subjectivity and structural relations of causality understood in historicist terms: functionalism and neofunctionalism; historical sociologies; and critical sociologies that, even though often historical, are linked with research problems with strong, explicitly defined value implications (e.g., critical research on race, class, and gender; world system theory; research associated with various forms of critical social theory).

Among these three basic strategies, only forms of objectivist research concerned with prediction and the identification of strict causal social mechanisms might be viewed as “instrumental knowledge” in the sense of technical control. Furthermore, all draw at some point very selectively upon systematic social theory to construct “applied” strategies to legitimate their research paradigms. This “applied reflexivity” includes normative and metatheoretical (and methodological) assumptions, as well as stances with respect to the implications of the social contexts of research and the form of general theory that should inform inquiry. Functionalism has ontological foundations in biological systems theory just as many forms of critical sociology are grounded in classical historical materialism. But typically such

"reflexive" concerns take the form of "given" presuppositions because of a primary focus on empirical research problems and theoretical revisions and elaborations within a framework of "normal science." Only as systematic social theory are such questions pursued as a relatively autonomous theoretical activity, most often in response to paradigmatic crisis.

Given this diversity and the very weak links between methods and value outcomes, all forms of professional sociology might potentially provide important insights for public sociology under the right conditions. Critical social science has no monopoly of "emancipatory" potentials, even though the early Habermas tended to draw this conclusion. As Abbott points out, overly generalized critiques of positivism have the bad habit of concluding that a concern with values "obliges us to some particular methodology" (Abbott 2007:203). But as he admits, there do remain major problems relating to the "humane translation" of the implications of different explanatory strategies. For example, some methodologies are more appropriate for addressing some kinds of questions better than others. As well, there are immense difficulties in communicating such issues through the mass media—themes tellingly illustrated in Judith Stacey's account of her experience as an expert witness on gay families (Stacey 2004). Making sense of these problems, however, would require understanding professional sociology in more explicit post-empiricist (and post-positivist) terms grounded in an understanding of multi-paradigmatic explanatory diversity.

Finally, it becomes possible to summarize the alternative to Burawoy's original formulation of the instrumental-reflexive distinction. The proposed revision version, however, cannot readily be reduced to such a rhetorically elegant and concise formulation, because the fuzzy reality of contemporary social inquiry requires a somewhat more theoretically elaborate and less schematic set of distinctions.

Autonomous inquiry takes the form of conceptual rationality, whether as professional empirical sociology or social theory. Sociology cannot be defined in terms of a polarization between instrumental and reflexive (normative) knowledge because professional sociology as empirical knowledge is constructed through multiple explanatory and methodological strategies (e.g., objectivist, subjectivist, mediational) with distinct social theoretical presuppositions. Moreover, the potential uses of professional sociology—whether more purely instrumental or as part of more democratic, communicative deliberation—cannot be known in advance. Though critical sociologies can be identified as giving a distinctive emphasis to value questions and social engagement, they necessarily remain within professional sociology and dependent upon its base of empirical knowledge.

Rather than constituting a form of knowledge in the stricter empirical sense, social theory is best understood as a family of rational (interdisciplinary) discourses—whether quasi-empirical or non-empirical—whose

intellectual function as forms of systematic reflexive theorizing is to constantly interrogate the practices of the other three cognitive styles and their relation to the academic knowledge system as a whole. Consequently, there is a complementary relationship between systematic social theory and professional sociology, even though competing research paradigms selectively draw upon social theory for their legitimation. Finally, rejecting the instrumental-reflexive knowledge polarization also suggests that the primary division of cognitive styles is around the competing demands of relatively autonomous theory and competing strategies of practice.

THE DIVISIONS WITHIN POLICY SOCIOLOGY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

If the opposition between “instrumental” and “reflexive” knowledge as two separate quadrants is rejected, what then is the alternative for locating differences of cognitive style between policy and public sociology? A fourth step—following from the preceding revisions—would be to recognize the differences within policy sociology and the implications for its relationship to public sociology. To address this topic it is necessary to return to Weber’s discussion of policy analysis based on the distinction between the “ethics of responsibility” and the ethics of “ultimate ends.” This schematic typology contributes to misunderstanding, however, if it is taken to imply that there could be a practical politics of either pure ends or pure means—just as Burawoy’s model suggests a polarization between reflexive ends and instrumental means. In practice, the social liberalism that Weber personally advocated attempted to link liberal values with the kinds of policies that he considered “realistic” with the given stock of empirical knowledge, as against the irresponsibility of revolutionary Marxism. Nevertheless, despite some weaknesses in this regard, critical sociologies have always been centrally concerned with developing “scientific” means for realizing the basic values of the Enlightenment—freedom, equality, solidarity, justice—through institutional reorganization. Most forms of social criticism make some effort to take into account the available means, even if resisting opportunistic capitulation to the oppressiveness of the “real” (i.e., “another world is possible”). The alternatives within sociology today are thus not between purely “instrumental” and purely “value” orientations, but between positions that offer competing strategies for combining means and ends. Critical sociologies ironically also adhere to a variant of an ethics of responsibility, but one that simply gives higher priority to mobilizing new interests and reducing specific value inconsistencies related to social justice. At best, it would be possible to say that critical sociologies give relatively higher priority to ends than means, whereas professional and policy sociol-

ogy reverses the relative priority. The result is the opposition between what might be called a narrowly pragmatic or *conventional ethics of responsibility* and the pluralist critical pragmatism (Bohman 1999) of what might be called a *radical ethics of responsibility*.

Professional sociology as empirical research is not intrinsically committed to either the conventional or radical option because it produces knowledge that might in principle be used to legitimate the "means" aspect of either position. For this reason calling professional sociology "instrumental" exaggerates its affinities with policy sociology and obscures its necessary relation to public sociology as a resource for "alternative" policies. The means-oriented knowledge of those advocating radical change can only come from the same stock of professional empirical knowledge, even if drawing upon different forms. Every invocation of "another world is possible" in public sociology is also necessarily implicitly linked with reference to (alternative) technical means, even if these may be viewed by policy sociology as unreliable, likely to produce excessive social conflict, too costly, and so forth.

It should also be emphasized that such visionary social theoretical questions are not the monopoly of the "left." The variable affinity between social theory and public sociology becomes clearer if the explicit possibility of "reactionary" public sociology be recognized, for example, sociology in Nazi Germany and now in the cynically marketed "public sociology" of largely right-wing think tanks in the United States. The skewed outcomes of conventional policy pragmatism do not reflect the inherently "conservative" character of empirical knowledge so much as its selective use given the particular way in which policy research has been institutionalized by both the democratic welfare state and the private sector. More visionary ends may arouse sympathy in "enlightened" policy sociology but are ignored in the name of "realism" on the assumption their realization must await the development of appropriate means. But these conventionalized priorities also contribute to the highly selective use of professional knowledge, hence the devaluing of qualitative and critical sociologies. Nevertheless, the relation of policy and public sociology is not static. The possibility of radical reformist democratic regimes opens up innovative and experimental phases that draw upon more "enlightened" policy sociology that responds to the criticisms of public sociology (Flyvbjerg 1998, 2001). For such reasons it is also problematic to define the state as necessarily the enemy of civil society. When public sociology is weak and cannot make itself heard, policy sociology tends to regress to more purely technocratic tendencies linked with technical rationalization and undemocratic capitulation to dominant interests. In short, in contrast to the original model, the potential complementarity between policy and public sociology is highlighted in this revised interpretation.

The strong polarization between policy and public sociology in Burawoy's model—linked to the instrumental-reflexive distinction—obscures the important differences within policy sociology and contributes to an exclusive association of public sociology with “civil society” and opposition to the state. Rather than consign policy sociology to its fate as an instrumental perspective bereft of values, it becomes necessary to recognize the fundamental division between orientations toward “technocratic” and more democratic “liberal enlightenment” models of applied knowledge that provide reflection on means-ends questions within the constraints of the given democratic public sphere (Morrow 1994:306–309). As William Julius Wilson reminds us, Morris Janowitz used the term “enlightenment” to describe the potential contribution of professional sociology to policy research (Wilson 2007:117). Similarly, the legacy of “traditional” public sociology—from early pragmatism through Mills, Lynd, and Gouldner—has been centrally concerned with the interplay between the transformation of public (state) policy and the values to be realized within civil society. Consequently, to define public sociology exclusively in terms of audiences in civil society and their mobilization as a task of organic public sociology simply bypasses the continuing strategic importance of state–civil society relations as the reference point for transformative change. As opposed to Burawoy's stress on the defensive character of public sociology, a radical ethics of responsibility necessarily retains a concern with informing the transformation of public policy. The resulting reformulation of the relation between policy and public sociology can be summarized as follows:

Both policy and public sociology are defined by linking means and ends to facilitate the re-ordering of social life in the name of “reason.” Because policy sociology has a shorter time horizon and deals primarily with state and private clients, it draws selectively upon empirical research to justify a more instrumental approach to problem solving in the name of a narrowly pragmatic or conventional ethics of responsibility that tends to give priority to largely given ends for which there are available relatively reliable means. Nevertheless, beyond this technocratic model, policy sociology in relatively democratic societies must also compete with liberal enlightenment models that give some consideration to questions about defining ends, though such concerns are constrained by the limits of the democratic public sphere and unequal representation of group interests. Public sociology, in contrast, is not constrained by providing immediate policy “solutions” and has a longer time horizon, speaking on behalf of dispersed publics without effective representation, future publics (e.g., generations), and values not adequately taken into account in policy sociology (even in its more enlightened forms). Consequently, public sociology also draws upon professional empirical research to articulate alternative means for realizing neglected values and interests in the name of a critical pragmatism—a radical ethics

of responsibility. Whereas “traditional” public sociology often extends its concerns to questions of transforming state policy, “organic” public sociology tends toward a more defensive mobilization to protect civil society.

THE MODEL'S RATIONALE: THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY OF SOCIOLOGY

Though Burawoy toys with the possibility of a link—“an uncanny resemblance” (Burawoy 2005a:11)—between his model and Parson's AGIL schema, closer examination suggests that such a functionalist grounding is not necessary, is inconsistent with Burawoy's overall approach, and leads to contradictory interpretations. Not only does the model conflict with the effort of Parsons and Platt to locate the university within knowledge societies (Holmwood 2007:60), it also cannot be reconciled with understanding Parson's AGIL schema in terms of Weber's theory of rationalization (Levine 2005:118–119). The point of departure for the fifth step would be to drop any reference to the problematic Parsonian analogy. In this alternative account, professional sociology, social theory, policy sociology, and public sociology become understood as historically constituted conditions of possibility for legitimating the institutionalization of sociological inquiry within European modernity.

The question then becomes understanding how each of the four cognitive styles contributed to this process of academic recognition, without necessarily proclaiming any one as world-historically foundational or mechanically locating them within a formal matrix, as well as recognizing the epistemological and value presuppositions of all perspectives. Even if disciplines were historically given autonomy by the state on the assumption of basic corporate neutrality with respect to more immediate conflicting political ideologies, this relative neutrality could not be legitimately construed as “value-free” in the dogmatic sense. Nor were the potential uses of social inquiry limited to dominant groups because the marginalized and oppressed could also potentially identify with social science given its links with the Enlightenment vision of “emancipation” from oppression in its multiple forms (Morrow 2006). The interpretation of the historical conditions of possibility of sociology can thus be summarized in the following way:

The four faces of sociological inquiry provide the theoretical and practical conditions of possibility for sociology (or any social science) becoming institutionalized in a modern democratic society as a field of autonomous disciplinary knowledge(s) that might inform potential social practice (as both policy and public sociology) in the interest a general post-Enlightenment process of humanization and democratization.

CONCLUSION

Though the implications of such revisions for the institutionalization of public sociology are far-reaching, only two will be mentioned in concluding. First, to reiterate, the revised version points to the potential complementarity of “enlightened” policy sociology and public sociology in the context of radical reformist regimes. The tendency to view the state categorically as the enemy of civil society does not provide the kind of differentiated analysis that is found, for example, in Habermas’s later work on the legal foundations of democracy or even the Foucauldian research on governmentality that questions some classic right-left distinctions (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996).

Second, in rejecting the monopoly of moral questions by critical sociology, it becomes necessary to recognize the unresolved problems of the normative foundations and conflicting value priorities of public sociology. Addressing such issues, for example, would require taking up questions posed by “postmodernist” critical theorists such as Ben Agger (Agger 2000) and Steven Seidman (Seidman 1996). Though Burawoy rekindles the flame of the late-1960s slogan that “if you are not a part of the solution you are a part of the problem,” his model does not adequately respond to postmodernist doubts that “if you think you are part of the solution you are part of the problem.” The revisions to his model proposed here seek to pave the way for addressing how a post-foundationalist critical theory might begin to confront these skeptical challenges to public sociology.

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