SOCIOLOGY IN AN ERA OF FRAGMENTATION:
From the Sociology of Knowledge to the Philosophy of Science, and Back Again

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In this article we revisit Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970). In part, this article is an attempt to apply Gouldner's own lessons about the sociology of knowledge to his own work, situating it with respect to the dominant epistemological unconscious of late 1960s American sociology as well as the broader historical context of a still-vibrant Fordist mode of societalization. Gouldner's critique of positivism was limited because he was still partially caught up within the dominant epistemological framework in American sociology at that time, a formation we call methodological positivism. With thirty years of hindsight, it is not surprising that contemporary readers interested in following up Gouldner's call for a reflexive sociology of knowledge will find certain aspects of his own program unsatisfactory. We propose an alternative sociology of knowledge based on a more explicit philosophy of scientific understanding, namely, contemporary critical realism. We also trace the vicissitudes of the trope of a "crisis in sociology" which Gouldner unleashed into the world and unpack the tensions between the "western" sociology referred to in the book's title and Gouldner's actual focus on the United States.

In *Enter Plato*, the first volume in Alvin Gouldner's ambitious effort to develop a sociology of knowledge, we read that "the task of the historian of social theory is not, as is commonly taught, either to celebrate, to bury—or merely to understand—the past" but rather to "discomfit the present" (Gouldner 1965, p. 167). If we are to follow Gouldner's exhortation, a present-day rereading of *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970) should not be a celebratory hagiography but an effort to interrogate the text seriously, asking about its continuing relevance.

Our own approach involves reading *The Coming Crisis* on two levels. In the first part of the essay, we present Gouldner's arguments about his two central themes: the "crisis" of the discipline of sociology and the role of "positivism" in producing this crisis. We also

reconstruct his two alternative methodologies: the "sociology of sociology" that he employs in the main part of the book and an alternative approach that he calls "reflexive sociology," which is briefly adumbrated in the book's concluding chapter. In the second part of the essay we criticize Gouldner's arguments and methodologies from the stand-point of the contemporary critical realist philosophy of science. We argue that a critical realist sociology of knowledge provides a more acute definition of positivism that can identify the lineaments of actually existing positivism in postwar U.S. sociology and pro-vide a clearer diagnosis of the nature of the putative disciplinary crisis. This approach also provides an alternative philosophical basis that avoids falling into the two opposing camps of positivism or philosophical conventionalism—the doctrine according to which theories are inevitably chosen and rejected due to broadly sociological factors ("conven-tions") rather than considerations of closer fit with the realities they purport to analyze. These were the poles between which Gouldner himself was paradoxically torn and that he combined in sometimes contradictory ways.

There are two main meanings of the verb "discomfit," according to the Oxford English Dictionary. The first and more contemporary definition is "to throw into per-plexity or confusion." Clearly, the central claim in the book's title—that sociology was entering a period of crisis—captured a sense of disorientation in American sociology that has never really abated since 1970, when *The Coming Crisis* was first published. The older definition of discomfit, however, is to "defeat, undo, or overthrow in battle" (com-pare Shakespeare, *King Henry IV*, pt. 1, act 3, scene 2). This second meaning is more closely related to Gouldner's performative project, his attack on what he saw as the pos-itivism dominating sociology in 1970.

THE COMING CRISIS IN WESTERN SOCIOLOGY

The Coming Crisis looks back at an era that was coming to an end, the long period of Parsonian dominance and of the polite or not-so-polite repression of radical voices within U.S. sociology. Indeed, fully half of its 512 pages is devoted to Parsons. Another face of the book was fully contemporary, referring repeatedly to the Vietnam war and "Psychedelic Culture" and offering a leftist critique of the disciplinary welfare state that would have seemed just as out of place during the Parsonian 1950s as in the present-day context of neoliberalism. *The Coming Crisis* was published in 1970, two years after the founding of the "Sociology Liberation Movement" caucus within the American Socio-logical Association and the publication of the somewhat notorious article by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and his militant student comrades at Nanterre (*"tuer les sociologues"* or literally, "kill the sociologists," translated into English under the less bellicose title "Why Sociologists?" [Cohn-Bendit, Duteuil, Gérard, and Granautier 1969]). During these years, the discipline of sociology was itself thrust under the sociological microscope in a series of self-critical and historical studies.[1]

The centerpiece of this late 1960s dimension of *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociol-ogy* is the notion of *crisis*. And it is for its dramatic, even apocalyptic title that the book is probably best remembered today. The crisis within sociology stands as a metonym for an entire series of social and cultural changes that are traced to the 1960s by both the Right and the Left. Gouldner's invocation of a sociological crisis combined a diagnosis of the discipline's contemporary state, a prediction about its future, and a utopian exhortation. His title marked a break with the naive optimism of postwar American

sociology. The trope of a crisis in sociology was not, of course, inaugurated by Gouldner; Siegfried Kracauer and others had spoken of such a crisis in the 1920s.[2] According to our search of the Sociological Abstracts, however, the formula of a crisis in sociology did not appear in American sociology journals during the postwar period prior to the discussion of Gouldner's book. In a sense, it is this multivalent signifier that constitutes the book's most lasting contribution—thanks to, and not despite, the various and mutually contradictory values that have been attached to it during the intervening years. A search of *Sociological Abstracts* from 1964 to the present found at least 150 articles concerning the "crisis in sociology"—all of them following the publication of Gouldner's book (Boudon 1971; Holmwood 1996). One of the most interesting theoretical interventions on this topic comes from Johannes Weiß (1995), who argues that sociology is inherently a "crisis science" because it was spawned by the "great crisis" that produced modernity and therefore mimics that crisis, leading to a "state of permanent crisis" in the discipline. Other sociologists, such as John K. Rhoads (1972) and Michel Wieviorka (1996), have rejected the Gouldnerian diagnosis.

Gouldner's own treatment of the supposed crisis was celebratory, although he also hoped for a reconsolidation of sociology around his program of reflexivity (Gouldner 1985). Other sociologists have celebrated disciplinary crisis as promoting the theoretical, epistemological, and sociological diversity of sociology.[3] Gouldner's diagnosis of fragmentation partly foreshadows discussions of the "postmodern" pluralization of knowledge (Lyotard 1984), although discussions of the incommensurability of theories go back at least to Kuhn (1962). Gouldner's politicist analysis of the development and choice of theories locates him in the forefront of sociology's reception of the conventionalist, post-Kuhnian philosophy of science.

A more established view within American sociology casts the idea of crisis in strongly negative terms. Here the trope of crisis signals a supposed brain drain to other disciplines (Cole 2001a, p. 27; Abbott 1997), an over-politicization of sociology resulting from its abdication of the ideal of value-free science (Coleman 1992; Horowitz 1993; Lipset 2001), and a decline in the professional, scientific respectability associated with more unified disciplines such as American sociology during the Parsonian 1950s, as that era is nostalgically imagined. Andrew Abbott's (1997) critique of the crisis as yielding an unattractive choice between the poles of abstracted empiricism and abstract theory reiterates an important point made by C. Wright Mills (1959) and Pierre Bourdieu (1988-1989). Some bemoan sociology's loss of the "ear of the prince"—a role that "has been almost completely assumed by economics" (Abbott 1997, p. 1150)—paraphrasing Mills' (1959, p. 180) description of abstracted empiricism as "advisor to the king" but inverting the political valence of this supposed loss. (Others would of course rather have the king's entire head rather than just his ear.) Complaints about the supposedly "dilapidated" state of sociology also sometimes betray a nostalgia for a discipline that was once more homogeneous in sociological or "demographic" terms as well. Critics of the putative crisis often call for a rehegemonization of sociology around a single unified theory or methodology. All that is left of Gouldner in such formulations is the powerful trope that he released into the world.[4]

Both the enthusiasts and the critics, as we will argue, have been mistaken about the guiding idea of crisis. Both camps mistakenly focus on the surface-level appearance of pluralization, emphasizing substantive social theory or the political commitments of sociologists, and underestimate the more fundamental epistemological *continuities* in main-

stream U.S. sociology from the 1940s to the present.[5] The late 1960s may have been the beginning of a "long revolution" within U.S. sociology, to adopt a Gramscian phrase from Raymond Williams (1961), but this period cannot be understood as an epistemological *crisis* unless we deprive that word of its usual connotations of sharply punctuated change.

For Gouldner (1970, pp. 158–159), the ongoing crisis was centered around the collapse of Parsonian theoretical dominance. According to a national survey he conducted with Timothy Sprehe, some 80 percent of U.S. sociologists had been favorably disposed to Functional theory in 1964 (p. 168). Of course, many reviewers of Gouldner's *Coming Crisis* questioned whether Parsons had indeed been so central in 1964, much less in 1970 (Chriss 1995, pp. 53n. 1, 86n. 5). But a more significant measure of Parsons's influence is the number of sociologists who felt compelled to address the Parsonian approach, whether critically or otherwise.[6] An analysis of the *Social Science Citation Index* by James Chriss (1995, p. 38) indicates Parsons's clear domination through 1960–1964.[7] But this convergence around Parsons collapsed during the second half of the 1960s.

What would fill the gap left by Parsonian theory? Gouldner sketched three possible futures. One was an increasing theoretical polycentrism. Gouldner (1970, p. 397) suggested that social theory changes as "a consequence of changes in the social and cultural structure as these are mediated by the changing sentiments and domain assumptions and personal reality of the theorist and those around him." New theories are not just the simple expression of such newly emergent structures of sentiment; they also arise from the clash between changed structures of sentiment and preexisting theories.[8] Especially important in the present context is Gouldner's argument that new structures of feeling and domain assumptions "resonate" with specific theories. We will return to this aspect of Gouldner's sociology of knowledge below.

Alongside polycentrism, a second possible future for sociology was linked to the "very rapid growth of the welfare state following World War I" (p. 160). Sociology, in Gouldner's formulation, often functions as the "*N+1 science*," providing capitalism and the welfare state with expert solutions to "noneconomic social problems," including problems with "the other" (p. 161).[9] In some sections of *The Coming Crisis*, such applied work seems to be simply another component of an increasingly fragmented field of sociology. But Gouldner also hinted at a possible future in which professionalized sociologists of all varieties would increasingly understand themselves as "advisors to the King." Even Marxists or critical sociologists might be lured by the "blandishments and pressures of the Welfare State," which presented a countertendency to theoretical polycentrism at a deeper level (1970, p. 445).

A third future was suggested by the book's performative exhortation, its exemplification of a "sociology of sociology." The *Coming Crisis* inaugurates a conventionalist view of the sociological discipline itself, one in which sociologists' movements from one theory to the next (as in the rise and fall of Parsons) are determined by social factors rather than by any sort of correspondence between theory and externally-existing social reality. The book's treatment of Parsons (not to mention the schools of Comte, Homans, Goffmann, Garfinkel, orthodox Marxism, and "N+1" sociology) as socially determined breaks with the naive pre-Kuhnian, naturalist view of social science as a cumulative process of ever-closer approximations to the truth, a view that had dominated American sociology since the 1950s. In addition to the version of the sociology of knowledge on which most of the book is based, Gouldner included a final chapter which proposed an alternative approach called "reflexive sociology." In the second part of this

essay, we will argue that this reflexive sociology represented a more serious break than Gouldner acknowledged with the methodological approach employed in the rest of the book.

GOULDNER'S SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIOLOGY AND HIS REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY

Enter Plato was presented as the first in an historical series of sociologies of social science (Gouldner 1965, p. 172). But while *Enter Plato* sought the intellectual origins of modern social theory in ancient Greek philosophy, its sociology of knowledge and its critique of the methodological positivism that dominated U.S. sociology in 1965 remained largely implicit. (As will be discussed below, what we mean by methodological positivism differs from Gouldner's use of the term "positivism" in *The Coming Crisis*.) Like Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action*, Gouldner's object of analysis is formal social theory itself rather than knowledge, ideology, science, or culture in general. But Gouldner really has a dual purpose, as becomes evident with *The Coming Crisis*. He is interested in accounting for both the *production* of theories and their broader *adoption*.

Gouldner's approach resonates with the distinction in current science studies between "internalist" and "externalist" approaches. Let us define internalist approaches broadly, to encompass not just traditional "progressivist" narratives and philosophies of science but all accounts of science in terms of forces internal to scientific fields, such as Pierre Bourdieu's (1981, 2001) analysis of the scientific "field."[10] Externalist approaches, then, would emphasize science's relationship to forces outside of the academic or scientific fields, including the state, capitalism, and other social and cultural structures. Gouldner does not rely on either strictly internalist or externalist approaches but articulates a range of causal structures operating at differing levels of externality to the site of production of scientific theories.

He suggests further that the effects of all of these causal structures are filtered or concentrated through the subjectivity of the individual scientist or sociologist. Here Gouldner draws on the conventionalist philosophy of science that was (re)launched in the late 1950s, especially the pathbreaking work of Michael Polanyi (1958). According to Gouldner, larger political, cultural, and social forces affect the development of social theory, but only insofar as they are mediated through the domain assumptions and emotions of the individual scientist (Gouldner 1970, pp. 46–47, 398). Gouldner suggests that every social theory has two aspects: its explicit assumptions or "postulations" and its background assumptions. Background assumptions include broad "world hypotheses"— metaphysical assumptions about the world in general—as well as the more limited premises that Gouldner calls "domain assumptions." The latter are premises about a particular "domain" such as society or the individual. Crucially, domain assumptions are *affectively* laden because they are inculcated early in socialization, prior to the "intellectual age of consent," in Gouldner's memorable formulation (1970, p. 32).[11] Gouldner's central argument is that the production or choice of any social theory necessarily depends on "certain prior assumptions about society and men, and indeed, certain feelings about and relations to society and men" (p. 28). Domain assumptions, for Gouldner, "are intellectually consequential" and "theory-shaping" but *not* because they "rest on evidence nor even because they are provable" (p. 35). He argues that every social theory is a *personal* theory as well as a tacit theory of *politics* (p. 40).

Domain assumptions shape the development of theory by making scientists "reso-nate" emotionally with certain theories and not others. More specifically, Gouldner sug-gests that theories change when new categories of people confront existing theories that *do not* resonate with their historically novel domain assumptions. New social groups then transform older theories in ways that bring them into line with their divergent domain assumptions. For example, Parsons is described as being attracted to Max Weber and Werner Sombart because of their anti-Marxism, which resonated with his political domain assumptions. But Parsons was also driven by his own "structure of sentiments" to amend the German sociologists' pessimism and anti-capitalism (p. 180). Thus Par-sons's particular theoretical approach resulted from the complex set of resonances and dissonances between his domain assumptions and previously existing theories.

Gouldner also suggests that a similar model can account for the adoption of specific theories by larger groups. He connects rising interest in Erving Goffmann's work with the sentiments of the new middle classes and dropouts from the new "Psychedelic Cul-ture" of the 1960s (p. 396);[12] growing interest in Harold Garfinkel was associated with the New Left and with youth in general (pp. 394–395); and George Homan's theory was said to resonate with the "assumptions and sentiments" of the "older, more solidly established, propertied segments" of the middle class (p. 396). Gouldner also predicts the end of the entrenched polarization between academic sociology and Marxism, and he connects the increased interest in Hegelian Marxism (p. 438) and "Keynesian and Marxian views" in U.S. sociology (including a "left Parsonianism") with the rise of the New Left and the welfare state. Several years later Gouldner (1973) began explicitly dis-cussing the Frankfurt School in this context, but he does not mention it in *The Coming Crisis*. Gouldner also argued in 1970 that polycentrism stems from the normal differenti-ation of the so-called "seed" group, that is, the students of Parsons and the students of their students (like Gouldner himself, who was a student of Merton). Social theory also changes due to internal "technical development and elaboration" (p. 397), but it is unclear how or why this relates to polycentrism.

If theory development and choice result from domain assumptions, the next step would be to account for domain assumpations. Gouldner does so but in a rather ad hoc fashion.[13] His language often suggests a highly localized, even individualized account of the development of domain assumptions (Therborn 1976). In an explicitly internalist vein, he emphasizes forces "*internal*" to "the intellectual life," to "its own social organi-zation and . . . its distinctive subculture" (Gouldner 1970, p. 512). Such "forces" include internal competition, leading to the need to differentiate from one's intellectual elders. Gouldner also occasionally employs the term paradigm, and clearly has Thomas Kuhn's notion of the "scientific community" in mind (although he does not cite Kuhn). The sci-entific community seems to function as an incubator or reinforcer of affectively-laden domain assumptions (see our discussion of Gouldner's analysis of Parsons, below). Yet Gouldner also refers to economic, cultural, and political forces external to the scientific field in accounting for domain assumptions.[14] This account of the social-structural deter-minants of domain assumptions remains quite vague (e.g. Gouldner 1970, pp. 342–344), especially compared to the detailed social-structural analysis in *Enter Plato* and his later books on Marxism.

The reflexive turn in the last section of the book begins with a critique of the natural-istic equation of the social and natural sciences. Gouldner also rejects the scientism or "methodological dualism" that (1) posits a strict separation between subject and object

of research, (2) reduces social knowledge to mere information, and (3) sees social worlds as mirrored in sociologists' work rather than as "constituted by the sociologists' cognitive commitments and all his other interests" (p. 496). According to Gouldner, "both the inquiring subject and the studied object are ... not only ... mutually interrelated but ... mutually constituted" (p. 493). The aim of the reflexive sociologist "is not to remove his influence on others" but to *understand* his own influence, "which requires that he must become aware of himself as both knower and as agent of change" (p. 497). Reflexive sociology recognizes "that there is an inevitable tendency for any social system to curtail the sociologist's autonomy in at least two ways: to transform him either into an ideologue of the status quo and an apologist for its policies" (as in the case of Parsons, according to Gouldner) or "into a technician acting instrumentally on behalf of its interests" (pp. 497–98). Reflexive sociology "recognizes that the status quo often exerts such influences by the differential rewards ... it provides for scholarly activities acceptable and useful to it" (pp. 497–498). Reflexive sociology thus involves self-scrutiny in order to understand the constitution of one's own domain assumptions and structures of sentiment and the ways these shape one's theoretical preferences.

Gouldner was precocious in his attacks on the notion of "value-free" sociology (see especially Gouldner 1962, 1976).[15] Acknowledging that "men's highest values, no less than their basest impulses, may make liars of them," Gouldner concludes that this was preferable to a "dogmatic and arid value-free sociology" (p. 499). Charles Varela (1994) notes that for Gouldner, objectivism was pathological, a form of what Julia Kristeva (1982) calls abjectification.[16]

CRITICAL REALISM AS PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND AS SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Gouldner embeds his critique of Parsons within a broader attack on positivism in sociology. This lengthy analysis of Parsons allows us to make sense of what Gouldner really means by positivism and to discern his own epistemological domain assumptions. These latter, we maintain, include a residual positivism. Indeed, we will argue that Gouldner's entire interpretation and critique of Parsons as a positivist was fundamentally miscast and that the promise of his own proposal for a reflexive sociology of knowledge cannot be realized until these problems are resolved.[17] To clarify our critique of Gouldner, we need first briefly to develop our own alternative position.

The topic of sociological positivism that Gouldner opens up can only be understood through reference to both the sociology of sociology—his terrain—and the philosophy of science. The critical realist philosophy of science, developed by Roy Bhaskar and others, offers an explicit philosophical basis for (re)constructing Gouldner's proposed project of a reflexive "sociology of sociology" (see Bhaskar [1975] 1997; 1979; 1986; 1989; 1994; Collier 1994; Archer 1995; Archer, Lawson, and Bhaskar 1998; Steinmetz 1998; Chae 2000). Our goal here is neither to recapitulate the entire critical realist position, nor to develop fully the alternative sociology of knowledge based on it, but to present just those elements necessary for a critical reconstruction of Gouldner.[18]

A critical realist sociology of knowledge can be distinguished from two other major perspectives that arose sequentially in the theory of knowledge during the twentieth century: positivism and conventionalism. We need to briefly recapitulate the critical

realist understanding of these terms, given the confusion regarding their definition, a confusion that is found in Gouldner's (and Parsons's) writing.

The version of positivism we discuss here is "methodological positivism." This cluster of practices and discourses has dominated U.S. sociology since the 1950s, although its explicit philosophical defense began to decline in the second half of the 1960s (Steinmetz forthcoming). Methodological positivism can be defined as a conglomerate of three distinct positions: empiricist ontology, positivist epistemology, and scientistic naturalism. Empiricism denies the ontological distinction between a level of appearances and a level of deeper causal structures, rejecting the invocation of any theoretical, abstract, or unobservable structures, entities, or mechanisms (Kolakowski [1966] 1968).[19] Realism, by contrast, accepts the positing of deeper causal structures, that is, theoretical objects or relations which may produce concrete effects but exist at a higher level of abstraction than other objects.[20] Bhaskar's transcendental realism, furthermore, demonstrates the necessary existence of multiple causal mechanisms within any open system (see below).

Analytically separate but closely associated with empiricism is positivist epistemology. Positivism defined as an epistemological position suggests that science should be restricted to verifiable or falsifiable statements about "constant conjunctions" between events or variables (Hume [1748] 1975, p. 76; Carnap [1928] 1974; Popper [1959] 1992; Nagel [1961] 1979; Hempel 1966).[21] Since the world was conceived of ontologically as a closed system, objective knowledge was able to grow through cumulative discoveries of constant conjunctions.

In relation to methodology, methodological positivism can also be characterized as a scientistic form of "naturalism." Naturalism in this context is the doctrine that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world. Scientism is a variant of naturalism that "claims a complete unity" between the natural and social sciences (Bhaskar 1994, p. 89; see also Bhaskar 1989, pp. 1–2). Due to the central place of quantification, experiment, and prediction in the natural sciences, it was assumed that these were appropriate methods and goals for sociology. Scientism also militates against the recognition of the concept-, time-, space- and social relation-dependence of social structures and practices.

"Conventionalism" is the doctrine that the success or failure of scientific theories in achieving acceptance is based on convention, that is, on considerations other than the correspondence between theory and the object of knowledge. Conventionalism has been strongly associated with recent work in the sociology of knowledge and science. While the sociology of knowledge was initiated by Karl Mannheim (1929), its recent popularity under the guise of "constructionism" or "constructivism" (Hacking 1999; Sismondo 1996) has been strongly influenced by Kuhn (Fuchs 1992, pp. 1–4). Kuhn's work has been especially influential in its critique of the positivist image of cumulative knowledge and of the sharp distinction between theory and observation (Kuhn 1970, pp. 11). Some versions of this doctrine are fully compatible with critical realism, which acknowledges the social determination of theory choice (Bhaskar's notion of "epistemological relativism"). But thoroughgoing conventionalism eschews ontological considerations. As Kuhn (1970, p. 173) asks rhetorically, "What must nature . . . be like in order for science to be possible at all?" His response is, "That problem . . . need not be answered."[22] This lack of interest in ontology prohibits thoroughgoing conventionalism from making sense of positivism's shortcomings. Such conventionalism also refuses to consider the

possibility of rational rules for accepting or refuting theories ("judgmental rationality," in Bhaskar's terms). As the penultimate conventionalist Paul Feyerabend (1988, p. 14) put it, with deliberate provocation, "the only principle that does not prohibit progress" in science is "anything goes."[23]

The critical realist position can best be summarized as a combination of ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism (Bhaskar 1998, p. xi). Against positivism and strong conventionalism, critical realism argues through transcendental reasoning that the world must be ontologically stratified, both vertically and horizontally, in order for experimentation to be possible in the natural sciences (Bhaskar 1997). For the scientific experiment to make sense, the world must be an "open system," one in which empirical events are produced by varying combinations of causal mechanisms. If the system were not open, experiments would not be necessary, since constant conjunctions between explanans and explanandum could be directly observed in nature. "Laws" are not empirical statements, according to critical realism; instead, a causal law is the characteristic pattern of activity or mode of operation of the mechanism described in the statement. Only under closed conditions will there be a one-to-one relation between causal law and sequence of events (Bhaskar [1975] 1997, p. 46). In order for the experiment to establish that there are real causal structures existing independently of the events they generate, one must assume that these structures endure and continue to act in the same way outside of the experimentally closed conditions that allow us to identify them empirically. The openness of the natural system means that constant conjunctions cannot be identified at the empirical level (see Table 1).

Critical realism has several implications for the social sciences, including the sociology of knowledge. First, if empirical regularities are not the basic building blocks of laws in the natural sciences, it follows that the same should hold for the social sciences. Critical realism suggests that social science should accept the existence of theoretically-defined deep structures as in the natural sciences, rather than restricting itself to empirical observation. Second, if the natural world is an open system, it follows that the social world must be as well. This means that it will be impossible to generate timeless laws that can predict empirical events. Such a social science would then seek to explain events historically as the result of changing constellations of underlying causal structures, rather than trying to trace them to invariant laws (Steinmetz 1998). Explanation, rather than prediction, would then be the main activity of empirical researchers in the human sciences; the other main activities would be *comparison* across explanatory accounts of specific events and the *theoretical elaboration* of underlying deeper structures (Steinmetz 2002). Third, although the goal of theory is the same in the social and natural sciences—to search and describe causal structures—it must be acknowledged that the meaning of a causal structure in the human sciences is radically different than in the natural sciences. While in natural science the mechanisms under study nearly always exist independently of human activity, this is not true in the human sciences. Social science knowledge continuously intervenes in the working of deeper social structures, and can even be understood as another sort of deeper structure itself, involved in the construction of social reality. The "concept dependence" (Bhaskar 1979, p. 48; Sayer 1992) of social life sets limits on the possibility of naturalism in the human sciences and gives them their distinctive character.[24]

Critical realism's epistemological relativism comes from its distinction between two dimensions of knowledge: intransitive and transitive. The intransitive dimension is the

TABLE 1: DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Dimension of Social Science	Methodological Positivism	Critical Realism	Conventionalist Idealism
Epistemology	Positivism Search for constant conjunctions of events (i.e., general laws)	Conjunctural and Contingent Causality is assumed to be the norm in open systems Distinguish between theory, and explanation	Conventionalism Theories are accepted or rejected due to convention and not to any correspondence with the objects they claim to represent "Anything goes"—no rules for explanation
Ontology	Empiricism Assume irrelevance or non-existence of non-phenomenal level Assume concept-independence of practice Assume time-independence of social-theoretical concepts Assume space-independence of social concepts	Transcendental Realism Assume disjuncture between phenomenal and real levels Assume concept-independence of practice Assume time, and space dependence of social concepts	Idealism Theories of the world create states of affairs in the world
Stance on Scientific Naturalism	Scientism Natural and social sciences are identical Values and facts are radically distinct Sociology as technical Hilfswissenshaft	Critical Naturalism Social sciences differ from the natural sciences in that social mechanisms are only relatively enduring; they resemble one another in that both natural and social systems are open	Critical Anti-Naturalism Social sciences are assumed to be radically different from natural sciences, although some versions are conventionalist in treating the natural sciences as equally socially determined
Methodology	Hempel's Deductive—nomological model Privilege given to quantitative methods, experimentation, etc.	"Critical" denies fact/value distinction Methods should be appropriate to the object of study	"Anything Goes"

realm in which the objects of knowledge exist independently of our consciousness; the transitive dimension is the realm in which our knowledge about the intransitive dimension is produced.

The judgmental rationalism of critical realism tells us how theories should be chosen but not how they actually are chosen. To understand the actual selection of theories, we need a *sociology of knowledge*. Bhaskar's philosophy *permits* this, through its acceptance of "epistemological relativism," but Bhaskar himself does not elaborate a substantive sociology of knowledge. What might a critical realist sociology of knowledge look like?

A critical realist sociology of knowledge would first of all combine the philosophy and sociology of knowledge. Following Mannheim, Ian Hacking argues that a sociology of knowledge is involved in "unmasking" (*enthüllen*), or revealing. This is an activity that avoids the question of the correspondence between knowledge and its objects and considers only the extratheoretical determinations and functions of an idea. This process of unmasking is distinguished from "refuting," which *does* concern the correspondence between knowledge and object (Hacking 1999, pp. 53–58). While strong versions of conventionalism conclude by demonstrating the social determination of scientific and other ideas, the critical realist sociology of knowledge entertains the possibility of a rational adjudication among contending theories, at least as a horizon of activity. The critical realist sociology of knowledge is concerned with tracing the social determination of (scientific) ideas ("unmasking"). But it is also interested in the *philosophical* adequacy of any system of ideas in epistemological and ontological terms and with the *substantive* adequacy of a theory or explanation, that is, with its empirical support. Assessing a theory in philosophical and empirical terms involves Mannheim's refuting dimension. In short, as a philosophy of science, and as a research activity critical realism refutes; as a sociology of knowledge, it unmasks.

Two other aspects of the critical realist sociology of knowledge derive from critical realism's specific ontological assumptions. Like all realisms, the critical realist sociology of knowledge embraces the idea of a difference between surface and depth and therefore allows deeper structures to play a separate determining role. With respect to the analysis of the transitive dimensions of theory formation, critical realism's ontology of the open system leads it to advocate a "conjunctural" method of explanation in analyzing knowledge production. Rather than restricting itself to personal contexts (as in Polanyi) or to scientific communities (as in Kuhn), it incorporates both instances.[25]

GOULDNER READ THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL REALISM

This section reexamines Gouldner's approach from the standpoint of the critical realist sociology of knowledge. This involves both showing how Gouldner sociologically explains the emergence of Parsons and what he calls Parsons's positivism—Gouldner's engagement in the activity of "unmasking"—and how he criticizes Parsons and positivism theoretically (his "refuting"). We then attempt to refute Gouldner's own arguments. Our conclusion is that Gouldner's explanatory strategy—his conceptual apparatus of domain assumptions and their social determinants—is philosophically compatible with the critical realist sociology of knowledge, even if his concrete accounts are sometimes unsatisfactory with respect to historical details. His attempted theoretical refutation of Parsons, by contrast, is philosophically unacceptable, often relying on positivist arguments even while claiming to expose Parsons as a positivist. To understand the sources

of this articulation of conventionalism with methodological positivism, we need to relate Gouldner himself to his social and intellectual environment. In sum, we will utilize Hacking's (Mannheimian) concepts of unmasking and refuting in an immanent critique of Gouldner's book, followed by an external critique.

In *Enter Plato*, Gouldner combines his general interest in explaining social theory sociologically with a focus on the substance of Plato's (nonempiricist) philosophical positions. He initially called *Enter Plato* the first volume in his "sociology of social science" (1965, p. 171); later he relabeled the overarching project a "sociology of sociology" (1970, p. 25). Gouldner reveals his antipathy toward some aspects of the formation that we have identified as methodological positivism. Here he contrasts Plato's notion of *episteme*, which "embodies awareness of the known, of the knower, and of knowing" with *techne*, which consists of "the lessons of experience, of trial and error, of clever skills refined through diligent practice" (1965, p. 268). Episteme is thus closer to what Gouldner later calls reflexive sociology, while techne seems closer to what we call methodological positivism. Gouldner is concerned with the split between humanist and naturalist tendencies in Greek thought and with the overshadowing of the former by the latter (1965, pp. 268-269).[26] Along with this critique of naturalism or scientism, Gouldner also criticizes the Sophist view of the theorist as a producer of "value-free" knowledge for clients (1965, p. 186; see also Gouldner 1962). He also criticizes the empiricism of the Sophists, juxtaposing them to Plato, who mistrusts the senses in proto-realist style (1965: 193).

In *The Coming Crisis* positivism is not understood in philosophical terms but solely through the lens of the sociology of sociology. Positivism is treated here as a political and social theory rather than a position in methodology and epistemology. According to Gouldner, the theoretical origins of Parsons's functionalism can be traced back to the sociological Positivism of Saint-Simon and Comte.[27] Gouldner unmasks their theories as both a response to the "structure" of the "new utilitarian economy" and a rejection of the aristocracy of the old regime. Viewed in this way, Comtian Positivism was, first of all, a form of social utilitarianism that sought to reform and to "socialize individual utilitarianism" (1970, p. 91). In contrast to political economy, Comtian Positivism was concerned above all with remapping the newly emerging "utilitarian" society in ways conducive to reestablishing social order. It therefore emphasized the importance of a shared, *positive*, belief system—hence Comte's Positivist "religion of humanity" (1970, p. 92). Accomplishing this required emotional detachment from the old order—here Gouldner calls attention to the affective dimension of domain assumptions.[28] Comtian Positivism transformed the utilitarian sentiment of detachment into a positive morality, "envaluing" it and giving rise to value-free social theory (1970, p. 102).

Parsons's similarity to Comte is explained as a function of the similarity at the level of their domain assumptions, especially those concerned with the oneness of the social world (1970, pp. 209–210).[29] Like Comte, Parsons found that the older maps of the social no longer resonated with his domain assumptions; his work was an effort to *remap* the social. Comtian positivism's emphasis on social utility is equivalent, for Gouldner, to the concept of function in Parsonian theory; its concern with social whole is closely related to Parsons's (1951) "grand theorizing" and his totalizing concept of the "social system"; its detachment and objectivism are related to the image modern functionalism projects of itself as "politically and ideologically neutral" (Gouldner 1970, p. 333).[30] In his unmasking mode, Gouldner pointed to the sources of Parsons's domain assumptions:

his participation in the Pareto circle at Harvard between 1932 and 1934, the relative insulation of the American university system in general, and of Harvard in particular, from the environing society, and the postwar development of the welfare state (1970, pp. 149, 169, 317).

Gouldner's book is more than a dispassionate unmasking in the genre of the sociology of knowledge; he also proposes a detailed refutation of Parsons. But this refutation is not carried out in terms of a clearly articulated philosophical position; rather, it falls back on an unexamined methodological positivism. Indeed, the terms of this critique reveal Gouldner's own epistemological domain assumptions.

First, and most importantly, Gouldner criticizes Parsons as a Positivist. Gouldner had in mind a particular version of positivism, namely, the tradition growing out of Comtian Positivism. As social theory and political thought, this tradition is fundamentally conservative, focused on social order and the consolidation of power in the hands of the social elites (1970, pp. 331–332), and it is indifferent to exploitation. But Gouldner seriously misinterprets the meaning and role of positivism in twentieth-century U.S. sociology. As Christopher Bryant (1975) has noted, there are at least two distinct traditions of positivism: French Positivism, which Gouldner discusses; and the strand of positivism running from Locke and Hume, through Karl Pearson, Ernst Mach, and logical positivism, and finally through to mid-twentieth-century thinkers such as Carl Hempel (1966), Ernest Nagel ([1961] 1979), and sociologist George Lundberg (1939), who translated this philosophical tradition into terms acceptable to sociologists.[31] Gouldner virtually ignores the impact of this second strand, from Locke to Nagel, which was much more important for the version of methodological positivism that dominated U.S. sociology after World War II. Comtian Positivism differed from sociology's methodological positivism in two main ways. First, it was *not* strictly empiricist. Second, it had a weaker commitment to the "constant conjunctions of events" epistemology that was revived at the end of the nineteenth century in American, British, German, and Viennese positivism. One of its central similarities with twentieth-century positivism was its pronounced scientific naturalism.

This misunderstanding leads Gouldner to a problematic diagnosis: he equates the fall of Parsonian functionalism with the end of positivism. But the situation was rather different. In fact, methodological positivism remained intact and was even reinforced after 1970—through processes too complicated to discuss here, but not reducible to Gouldner's theme of the rise of the welfare state. Moreover, the "polycentrism" that emerged after the fall of Parsonian grand theory involved the proliferation of theoretical perspectives that were in the main quite compatible with methodological positivism, from Homans to "multivariate Marxism."[32]

Second, Gouldner criticizes Parsons's work for being "devoid of almost any kind of data" (1970, p. 169). Parsons's emphasis on wholeness and "system" is criticized for being "purely formal," meaning that empirical investigation is impossible (p. 214). Parsons's conceptualizations are thus not to be understood merely as scientifically instrumental or as useful for research but as ideological (p. 209). Indeed, Gouldner insists that Parsons is not so much a substantive social theorist as a grand metaphysician (p. 207).

Thus, while Gouldner was trying to refute Parsons as a Positivist, we see here that he was relying on arguments that were themselves positivist. According to Gouldner, one of the major problems in Parsons's work was its lack of empirical data. When Gouldner criticizes functionalism's abstract character, he unwittingly relies on an empiricist rejection of ontological depth. For critical realism, by contrast, the ontological difference

between concrete events and deeper structures means that "abstraction" is an indispensable part of science. The rejection of "grand" theory is misconstrued; philosophically speaking, there is only one level of "theory"—theories about real causal structures, or mechanisms.[33] The mechanisms of social science may well only exist in certain spatiotemporal or cultural/conceptual settings, but this does not make them "middle-range" theories. For critical realism, theory cannot be juxtaposed to theories of different "ranges" but to explanation. Indeed, the notion of "middle-range theory" makes little sense within critical realism. Theories are pictures, images, or stories about causal structures. Since there is no ontological basis for distinguishing a middle range of reality, the idea of middle-range theory seems meaningless.

Here Gouldner is close to his thesis advisor, Robert Merton. Starting in the late 1940s, Merton began to develop a "program for concentration on 'theories of the middle range,'" as Parsons (1968, Vol. I: ix) put it approvingly. In his extremely influential paper on "theories of the middle range," Merton (1968, p. 46) suggested that broad theories could not be "effectively developed before a great mass of basic observations has been accumulated," directly reversing Parsons's earlier program. Although Merton insisted that such middle-range theories were "more than . . . mere empirical generalization" (p. 41), they were not necessarily theories of real causal structures (an understanding that would have been compatible with a realist understanding of "theory"). Though vague on this issue of what theories were really theories of, Merton insisted that middle-range theories were "close . . . to observed data" (p. 39), suggesting that he did not hold to a genuinely stratified realist ontology of social reality. By acknowledging that a given middle-range theory could be "consistent" with a wide range of divergent "broad theoretical orientations" (such as Marxism, functionalism, and behaviorism), Merton pushed this notion of the "middle range" closer to an empiricist definition of theory. Indeed, middle-range theories were summarized as "verifiable statements of relationships between specified variables" (p. 52)—and not as pictures or models of real theoretical mechanisms that might or might not give rise to events at the level of the empirical. Merton said that middle-range theories can be "consolidated into wider networks of theory," but this does not really make sense within a nonpositivist or critical realist framework. According to critical realism, it is not the case that multiple "lower-level" theories are consolidated into higher-level theories but rather into more concrete explanations. After all, any theory, by definition, has the ambition of grasping a causal structure. When multiple theories are combined, it is not to create a higher-level theory but to explain events or phenomena at the level of the empirical, that is, events that are codetermined by a conjunction of mechanisms. Since the social is an open system, with no possibility of "closure" (that is, no possibility of blocking the operation of all causal mechanisms other than the one of interest), such combination, consolidation, or overdetermination is the norm in the phase of explanation.[34]

Of course, Gouldner (1970, p. 82) rejects empiricism at various points. But he sees the period of the 1940s and 1950s, under Parsons's influence, as one in which the earlier empiricism was reversed and grand theory began to overwhelm empirical research (pp. 42–43). The fact that Gouldner himself falls back on empiricist arguments reveals how incorrect this diagnosis was. Indeed, empiricist positivism was doxic at the time in American sociology.[35] Even Mills (1959) polemicized against "grand theory" and not just "abstracted empiricism."

Third, Gouldner (1970, pp. 214, 229) criticizes Parsons for being indifferent to "parsimonious" causal models, prediction, and deterministic theories that "postulate the independent causal significance of certain social factors."[36] Gouldner prefers what he calls a "stratified system model" that focuses "attention on the differential causal influence of the numerous variables that operate together in a system" (p. 230). But he fails to notice that the precondition of "parsimony" in social explanation is an empiricist ontology that sees the social as a closed system. Gouldner did not differentiate between underlying causal structures—which, according to the critical realist position discussed earlier, may well exist "independently"—and empirical or concrete social phenomena, which, as Parsons rightly insisted,[37] will typically be complexly overdetermined.[38]

A REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY?

The final section of *The Coming Crisis*, with its proposal for a reflexive sociology, has seemed most attractive to recent commentators (Fuhrmann 1984; Flacks 1989; Levesque-Lopman 1989; Varela 1994). Yet this section is not actually continuous with the sociology of sociology deployed in the first 477 pages of the book. Rather, the approach sketched in the final section is more compatible with critical realism than with the sociology of sociology used in the rest of the book, but it is still problematic, albeit in different ways.

While in the rest of the book Gouldner often seems to accept the premise of value-free sociology, writing, for example, that "sociologists commonly confuse the moral with the empirical" (1970, pp. 26, 333), the final chapter is unambiguously opposed to the idea that fact and value can be clearly separated. "Information" cannot be conceived of as neutral (p. 492). He also rejects a simple naturalism (p. 491). Through his reception of *verstehen* sociology, Gouldner seems to embrace a version of concept-dependency (pp. 492–493). His insistence on the need for historical sensitivity also alludes to some version of time dependency (p. 507).

Some aspects of this program for reflexive sociology still betray Gouldner's unexamined commitment to methodological positivism. His discussion of reflexivity is not based in any explicit philosophical or theoretical tradition and seems to assume that theorists can easily gain access to their own domain assumptions. This suggestion of an extremely *thin* model of subjectivity is congruent with Gouldner's eschewal of any sense of ontological depth in other parts of the book. There is a hint of a notion of hegemony in Gouldner's discussion of the ways in which "unpermitted worlds" can be made into "permitted" ones. But Gouldner's account of the ways in which individual social analysts might gain access to their own deep assumptions avoids any notion of psychological layering, much less of the existence of unconscious levels that are inaccessible to simple inspection. Again this reveals the extent to which, in 1970, Gouldner was still in the grip of the methodological positivism that had dominated American sociology since the 1950s. The positivist move within postwar American (and British) psychology and psychiatry to characterize underlying psychic generative structures as *unknowable* had wide-reaching implications in the human sciences (Smith 1986; Smith and Woodward 1996).[39] Gouldner's language of "permitted" and "unpermitted" worlds is fascinating for its simultaneous disavowal and oblique acknowledgment of the Freudian source of ideas of psychic censoring, repression, and resistance. As in Gouldner's misidentification of Parsons's work as the dominant form of sociological positivism, he seems to have

been prevented from recognizing the full epistemological implications of his own ideas in 1970. If we read Gouldner "symptomatically," *The Coming Crisis* is not located firmly on either side of his ongoing "epistemological break" with postwar sociology's method-ological positivism.[40] Gouldner's own desultory attempt at self-analysis in the book is in line with his fairly superficial discussion of reflexivity as the transformation of "unper-mitted" worlds into "permitted" ones. Gouldner fails to be genuinely reflexive, in the sense of situating himself sociologically, historically, and geopolitically.

Perhaps the most glaring sign of Gouldner's own embeddedness within the episteme he was attempting to dismantle relates to the word "Western" in the book's title. Again, it is only possible to fully recognize how problematic this is from an historical standpoint thirty years later, following the rise of new forms of globalization, political realignments of the "West," and theories of postcolonialism and alternative modernities (Gaonkar 2001). Presumably, the West of Gouldner's title is not a geographical signifier but refers to the "North Atlantic" heartland of the formation Gouldner calls "Academic Sociol-ogy," which is juxtaposed here, as in Gouldner's subsequent works, to Marxism, a forma-tion that "achieved its greatest success in Eastern Europe" (1970, p. 111). When analyzing sociology during the postwar period, *The Coming Crisis* generally refers to the United States as a metonym for the rest of this Atlantic "West." It is ironic, therefore, that the polycentrism and turning away from positivism that Gouldner predicted for sociology has been more pronounced in other parts of this "West" than in the United States itself. In a revealing content analysis, C. David Gartrell and John W. Gartrell (1996) find that while two North American journals (*American Sociological Review* and *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*) had roughly the same percentage of "positivistic content" as the European journals *Acta Sociologica* and *Sociology* in the 1967–1970 period, a substantial transatlantic gap had emerged by 1987–1990, with the European journals becoming much less positivist than the North American ones.

Gouldner's unproblematized references to the West and his relative inattention to the global sociocultural influences on intellectual production and styles of thought made it impossible for him to understand the systematic differences between European and North American sociology—not to mention North American versus Latin American, Chinese, or South African sociology. Like the Parsonian approach he was ostensibly criticizing, Gouldner takes the United States as the "normal" case and implicitly sug-gests that the rest of Western sociology will follow the same pattern. He cannot make sense of the differential susceptibility or resistance to methodological positivism in these different settings. The sociocultural and political conditions undergirding methodologi-cal positivism's peculiar strength in the United States are not thematized. In order to understand why positivism was so much more durable in United States sociology than even in Western European sociology, one would need to reconstruct the conditions lead-ing to methodological positivism's consolidation during the post-WWII period. Only then could one begin to understand the nationally and regionally varying relations to this matrix of conditions and the ways in which this produced different susceptibilities both to positivism and to its eventual crisis.

RECONSTRUCTING GOULDNER'S ACCOUNT OF "WESTERN" SOCIOLOGY

It is impossible in an essay of this length to do more than adumbrate such a reconstruc-tion of Gouldner's historical account. The causal core of such a retelling would be the

postwar American version of Fordism. This term is understood here as a society-wide mode of regulating not just production (as in the original industrial system pioneered by Henry Ford) but also consumption, political governance, and aspects of subjectivity (Jesssop 1990; 2001; Steinmetz 1997b). In *The Coming Crisis*, Gouldner insistently calls attention to the postwar rise of the welfare state, which is part of the formation we call Fordism. Fordism relied heavily on positivistically packaged social knowledge, and this knowledge in turn flowed through the arteries of the Fordist state and back out again as policies that helped create a society that indeed tended to represent itself in terms of constant conjunctions of events and homogenized and depthless subjectivities (Hirsch and Roth 1986). Fordism "resonated" (to use Gouldner's useful term) with some of the key assumptions of methodological positivism in sociology and in the human sciences more generally, including the concept-, time-, and space-independence of social laws and the refusal of ontological depth (Steinmetz forthcoming).

The collapse of the mainstays of Fordism has in turn removed some of the sociocultural conditions of plausibility for methodological positivism in sociology. Fordism is being replaced by a post-Fordist mode of regulation, organized around the flexibilization of production and time, the diversification of consumer tastes, and the "promotional" self—as opposed to the homogenized, bloc-like subjectivities of Fordism (Wernick 1991). Post-Fordism exacerbates uneven development, tending to direct sociologists' attention to the heterogeneity of temporal pace. While the scale or spatial reach of economic and political practices during the Fordist era typically corresponded to the boundaries of the nation state, post-Fordism has entailed a rescaling of many activities to both local and transnational levels and a corresponding deemphasis on the spatial scale of the nation (Brenner 1998a; 1998b; Jessop 1999).[41] Information, science, and culture have moved to the center of the new socioeconomic formation (Castells 1989; Jameson 1998). Taken together, these post-Fordist shifts make it increasingly plausible, even to social scientists socialized into methodological positivism, that social practices have to be thought as signifying practices, and that their determinants vary historically and spatially.

Although post-Fordism may undermine the spontaneous resonance of the positivist belief in constant conjunctions of events and the naturalist-scientistic understanding of social laws as independent of time, space, and meaning, it may paradoxically render empiricism more, rather than less, plausible. Arguably, empiricism, which can also be glossed as the fetishism of the level of appearances, is an ontology that makes more spontaneous sense than ever. The popularity, or resonance, of poststructuralist and postmodernist criticism directed against "depth hermeneutics" and realist distinctions between events and underlying structures suggests an enhancement of empiricism, a sort of "hyper-empiricism." The increasing currency of philosophical empiricism might further be seen as resulting from post-Fordism's own emphasis on the ephemeral and fleeting, as David Harvey (1989) has suggested. To take one example, the widespread post-Fordist imperative to perform a promotional version of the self could be understood as one source of the resonance of the "postmodern" theory of identities as something voluntarily adopted and performed. This vision of the performative self stands opposed to modernist approaches in which the self is relatively enduring and complex, with deeper (unconscious) levels linked to nonidentical surface (conscious) levels via multiple entailments and reciprocal transformations. Empiricism thus needs to be disentangled from positivism, even if the postwar formation we call methodological positivism intertwined them. Contra theories that see positivism either as inevitable and endemic to *all* modern capi-

talist societies (Horkheimer 1995) or as the "spontaneous philosphy of science" for
those who are dominant in the scientific field (Bourdieu 1981, p. 282), we suggest that
empiricism might be the more enduring cultural structure and epistemological common
sense of the scientists.

The postwar consolidation of sociology's methodological positivism was driven by
several other conditions. One was the massive wartime and postwar expansion of gov-
ernment funding for science that became available to social sciences willing to mimic the
natural sciences (Alpert 1954; 1955; 1957; also Kleinman 1995). Another was the circula-
tion of key actors among government agencies, university sociology departments, and
freestanding social science research institutes (Turner and Turner 1990). A final feature
of American culture that tended to strengthen the methodological positivist position
within sociology during the post-1945 years was the conflict over the interpretation of
the role of science in the rise of Nazism and other forms of totalitarianism. Adorno and
Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1944] 1986) opened with a devastating cri-
tique of positivist science and then moved through a series of steps to an analysis of Nazi
anti-Semitism. But the prestige of science increased so dramatically in the postwar
period that such critiques became increasingly quixotic. Indeed, many countered that it
was the *absence* of a modern scientific culture, rather than science itself, that had con-
tributed to fascism. Suspicion was cast retroactively upon the entire nonpositivist tradi-
tion running from Hegel through the German Romantics to Marx, Dilthey, and the
critical theorists of the interwar period (including Adorno and Horkheimer themselves).
This approach was especially damaging to antipositivist arguments, since most of these
thinkers had arisen in a German-speaking context and could therefore be associated
with the narrative of German exceptionalism, according to which Nazism was a product
of irrationalist trends in the German philosophical tradition (e.g. Stern 1961; Mosse
1964); see also Steinmetz 1997a).[42]

The conditions that underpinned methodological positivism in the postwar United
States were thus partially specific to this national and historical context and cannot be
generalized to Europe. Fordism and post-Fordism are general concepts, but their
national, regional, and local instantiations vary (Lipietz 1984; 1991; Jessop 1989; Bren-
ner 1999). One would also have to consider national differences in educational and sci-
entific systems, intellectual traditions, and the relationship to the United States as
political hegemon and center of a global culture. Suffice it to say that some European
contexts might not have been so conducive to methodological positivism in the absence
of U.S. scientific and cultural (not to mention political and economic) domination. This
involved mainly the indirect forms of emulation and the compulsion to compete within
international scientific fields that were dominated by the United States. Some, but not
all, of the conditions underpinning methodological positivism in Europe disappeared as
American influence and allure declined during the Vietnam war. Although we cannot
begin to trace the waxing and waning of methodological positivism in postwar European
sociology, we would certainly want to look to the sequence of social movements that
began in the late 1960s as one potential source of change.

It can be argued, of course, that Americanization is even more pronounced today
than ever before in the spheres of culture and science, and one might expect this to lead
to a realignment of European and U.S. sociology. Yet as Fredric Jameson (1998b) and
others have noted, the quantum leap in cultural Americanization during the last decade
has also led to reactive (though not necessarily "reactionary") alliances between Euro-

pean populations and their states against these trends. Such resistance varies from country to country and context to context, but Jameson's idea of an alliance is crucial in contexts with mainly public universities and curricula that are determined politically. An example of this is the movement for "post-autistic" economics that erupted in September 2000 among French economics students and faculty, who signed a petition "demanding reform of the curriculum to incorporate a 'plurality of approaches adapted to the complexity of the object studied'" and claiming that "mathematics had become an end in itself, resulting in an 'autistic science with no relation to real life'" (Jacobsen 2001, p. 12). We do not intend to reduce this movement simply to a resistance to Americanization (compare Solow 2001); indeed, French economists also figure among its main targets. More interesting in light of Jameson's thesis is the way in which the French state allied itself with the movement. The French education minister responded to the protest by appointing an economist to work with student representatives to draft a report on the reform of the national economics curriculum and also agreed "to propose some new courses oriented to 'the big problems,' for example unemployment, and the economy and the environment" (*post-autistic economics newsletter*, 1, September 2000; extra, December 19, 2000). Such positioning against intellectual trends that are at least partially identified as American in origin is one reason not to expect Gouldner's "West" to move in epistemological lockstep. These kinds of disjunctures can help to explain the different trends in European and North American sociology discovered by Gartrell and Gartrell (1996). They may also help to explain why Gouldner's prediction of a crisis of positivism was ironically more correct for Western Europe than for the American context on which it was implicitly focused. All of this suggests that Gouldner's somewhat parochial equation of "the West" with the United States is not an adequate starting point for making sense of the historical sociology of sociology.

Gouldner's project is a fascinating document of its period, indicating the grip of methodological positivism's *doxa* as well as the struggle of one of the most probing minds of that era to effect an epistemological break with it. Above all, Gouldner pointed to positivism as a problem and triggered a string of important analyses of positivism during the 1970s. He was also a precursor of more recent discussions of reflexivity and more skeptical self-analysis within sociology. His deployment of the concepts of domain assumptions and resonance and his attempt to articulate the levels of the personal or psychic, the disciplinary/institutional, and the macrosocial in accounting for intellectual change are particularly fruitful for current thinking in the sociology of knowledge and science. *The Coming Crisis* is still relevant, but for reasons slightly different than Gouldner would have anticipated three decades ago.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. Friedrichs's *Sociology of Sociology* was also published in 1970, followed by Boudon's *La crise de la sociologie* (1971), Herpin's *Les sociologues américains et le siècle* (1973), and Schwen-

dinger and Schwendinger's *Sociologists of the Chair* (1974). The journal *Insurgent Sociologist* began publishing in 1971 and ran articles exploring the connections between American sociology and corporate capitalism (e.g., Gedicks 1975). Another dimension of this self-critique concerned racism and sexism within U.S. sociology; see the collection by Ladner (1973). The years 1970, 1973, and 1976 saw the largest number of publications on the history of sociology prior to the late 1980s, when the new sociology of science/knowledge and history of sociology began to emerge (Bryant 1985; Bannister 1987; Ross 1991).

2. Kracauer (1995, p. 213) wrote in 1923 that "the crisis of the sciences, which is by now a topic of commonplace discussion, is most visible in the empirical sciences such as history and sociology."

3. This view is vividly captured by the title of an article by Pierre Bourdieu: "Vive la crise! For Heterodoxy in Social Science" (Bourdieu 1988–1989)

4. For discussions of further dimensions of the alleged crisis in contemporary American sociology, see *Sociological Forum* 9 [1994]), Cole (2001b), and Horowitz (1993).

5. On the continuing dominance of methodological positivism in U.S. sociology, see Smelser (1986) and Steinmetz (forthcoming); for a fascinating but somewhat Pollyannaish assessment of positivism's supposed decline by a nonpositivist, see Flacks (1989).

6. This was the case in the 1950s (Mills 1959), early 1960s (Davis 1960; Black 1961), late 1960s (Friedrichs 1970), and even into the 1980s (Alford and Friedland 1985).

7. Chriss did not conduct a parallel citation analysis for the 1950s. See also Gouldner's (1973) response to the flawed argument against the thesis of Parsonian dominance by Lipset and Ladd (1972).

8. See Gouldner (1970, p. 7) for one example of his argument that conflicts arise between new structures of sentiment and those which are "historically deposited" in older theories. Nowhere in his text does Gouldner credit Williams (1961) for the concept of a historical "structure of sentiments"; yet Williams had proposed the concept of a "structure of sentiment" at least nine years earlier, in *The Long Revolution.*

9. The phrase "the other" as Gouldner uses it did not have the specifically racial or (post)colonial connotations that it has in much contemporary social theory. The interpretation of sociology as an "N+1" science was originally introduced in Gouldner (1970, pp. 91–93). Here Gouldner seems to be suggesting that sociology originated as the science of the *social*, that intermediate space between the capitalist economy ("middle-class utilitarian culture" in the terminology of Gouldner's pre-Marxist phase) and the state which was theorized by Hegel and during the first half of the nineteenth century (Donzelot 1984; Steinmetz 1993). His formula also alludes to sociology's role as an academic mop-up crew for social problems. Finally, the concept of N+1 science connotes an intellectual division of labor: sociology focuses on "intellectual leftovers, on what was *not* studied by other disciplines" (Gouldner 1970, p. 93). See also Gouldner (1968, pp. 109–110) on social-reforming sociologists as doing "a kind of engineering job, a technological task to be subject to bland 'cost-benefit' or 'system-analysis.'"

10. See Breslau (2001) for this expanded definition of internalism and Fuller (1993) for the narrower definition.

11. Gouldner's notion of background assumptions differs in this respect from Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, which continues to evolve historically over the course of an individual's lifetime and as the subject moves from field to field. Furthermore, habitus is *embodied* rather than being simply linked to "emotions." Gouldner makes a few enigmatic references to a Freudian sort of analysis that would account for each generation's need to overthrow the preceding one—something like a Bloomian "anxiety of influence" (Bloom 1973).

12. In this context, Gouldner (1970: 444) also mentions the growing interest in other perspectives, such as "Howard Becker's work on deviance," which he had criticized two years earlier (Gouldner 1968).

13. Examples of the domain assumptions analyzed by Gouldner include those of Saint-Simonians after the French Revolution, of Parsons in the 1930s, and of the New Left and "Psychedelic Culture" during the 1960s.

14. Consider Gouldner (1970, p. 398), where dispositions are said to arise from the "structure" of social and cultural systems.

15. On the specific political conditions in Wilhelmine Germany that led to the rapid convergence of the German Sociological Society around the doctrine of *Wertfreiheit*, see Rammstedt (1988).

16. Varela's (1994) sloppy article fails to credit Kristeva for the notion of abjectification.

17. Since our topic is Gouldner, we will not develop a critique of Parsons here. To anticipate the argument that follows, however, we conclude that Parsons moved from a position that was relatively hostile to positivism in the prewar period to one that was increasingly accommodated to the postwar consensus around methodological positivism. But recent work on Parsons, especially by Niklas Luhmann (1989) and his "postmodern" acolytes, has moved him in a nonpositivist direction.

18. The term "critical realism" was first used by the American philosopher Roy Sellars (1916), but Sellars' work has not been noticed by present-day critical realism and differs from it in important ways. A fuller application of the critical realist approach to postwar American sociology can be found in Steinmetz (forthcoming).

19. This rejection of deeper structures is related to a broader hegemony of epistemology over ontology during the history of the philosophy of science since the seventeenth century (Somers 1998).

20. Although critical realism uses the term "mechanism" we prefer the term "deeper structures." The word mechanism has mechanistic connotations, and its use by critical realists reflects a residual scientism. All of the alternative terms (conceptual entities, deep structures, explanans) are problematic for different reasons within the human sciences. The terminology of the abstract and the concrete calls attention to different levels of *generality*. The unconscious, for example, is an abstract object because it is operative across a range of different concrete or empirical symptoms.

21. Later positivism introduced a nonobservable dimension in order to solve the dilemma of pure inductivism, but this dimension was confined to the nonscientific *context of discovery*, while the scientific *logic of justification* was still restricted to empirical observations (Hacking 1983, p. 19; Friedman 1953). Nonobservability should not, in any case, be the key distinction between empiricism and critical realism.

22. Kuhn extended Michael Polanyi's notion of convention from tacit, personal knowledge to the scientific community, unintentionally opening the door to Feyerabend's radical epistemological relativism.

23. Critical realism is not the only approach, obviously, that accepts the idea of a socially determined context of theory production while calling programatically for a more controlled context for theory choice. But critical realism links this to its most important ontological concept, that of the open system (see next paragraph).

24. Bhaskar (1979) also points to the greater degree of time-, space- and practice dependency of deeper causal structures in the social sciences.

25. Bhaskar's critical naturalism (1979) distinguishes ontologically between the psychological and social levels. This would suggest that Gouldner was on the right track with his attempt to interrelate domain assumptions, structures of sentiment, and their structural determinants. But he did not theorize the psychological mechanisms in any detail.

26. "There is a serious danger today that we will lose our elemental ability to read, even as we learn how to operate high-speed computers" (Gouldner 1965, p. 169).

27. We will capitalize "Positivism" when referring to the tradition in social theory that originates with Comte and use the lower-case version when speaking of all other philosophical traditions, including those associated with logical positivism as well as the practical 20th century variant in American sociology referred to here as methodological positivism.

28. Utilitarian culture had already "fostered acute sentiments of detachment," according to Gouldner (1970, p. 102).

29. Gouldner (1970, p. 138) also notes that Parsons' theory integrated "German Romanticism" with its focus on morality and the individual actor.

30. The genesis of Parsons's domain assumptions is unclear in Gouldner's account, as is their connection to Parsons's theory. Parsons's Protestant background is not thematized directly, even though Gouldner has sections on "Religion and Morality in Functionalism" and the "Piety of Functionalism."

31. Bryant (1985; 1989) calls this second lineage "instrumental positivism"; we call it methodological positivism, since some recent versions of it were not instrumental in the conventional sense of that term and were qualitative rather than quantitative and statistical.

32. In fact, as Chriss (1995) argues, Homans was particularly influential because his exchange theory could be easily used for quantitative research (see also Turner 1974). And since Gouldner equated sociological positivism with functionalism, which was one of the *least* scientistic of the various social theories, he lost sight of the central role of scientism in both Comte and the sociology of the 1960s.

33. See Bhaskar (1997) for the important discussion of mechanisms as things having powers that may be unexercised or exercised unrealized, or realized but not perceived.

34. Merton refers to Bacon and Mills as his philosophical antecedents, whereas the classical antecedents for a critical realist understanding of science might be Hegel and Marx, for ontology, and Kant for transcendental reasoning (see Bhaskar [1975] 1997, 1994).

35. See Steinmetz (forthcoming) for a development of this historical argument in empirical detail.

36. Gouldner (1970, p. 187) also objects to Parsons's voluntarism, which operates as a randomizing rather than a structuring force in his view.

37. Although Parsons (1968, p. 2: 730) described his own position as "analytical realism," it is unclear whether he embraced a realist ontology of deeper structures. His realism was first of all epistemological, opposed to the Weberian view of scientific concepts as "useful fictions"; but it was also ontological, objecting to the empiricist equation of scientific concepts with "concrete phenomena." See also Parsons (p. 2: 772), where the term "mechanisms" is put in quotation marks (but probably to differentiate his approach from those modeled on classical mechanics).

38. See Parsons (1968, p. 2: 757). Gouldner later compared Parsons and Althusser (Gouldner 1976, p. 22). He was probably thinking of similarities between Parsons's stress on interdependence and Althusser's concepts of overdetermination and *Darstellung*. A critical realist approach would understand these related if not identical concepts in both Parsons and Althusser as containing an important element of truth.

39. See Will (1984) on deep psychological constructs as a form of "forbidden knowledge" within empiricist postwar psychiatry and antipsychiatry. Our rejection of the empiricist proscription on depth does not necessarily require acceptance of psychoanalysis, but the latter does exemplify *methodologically* a critical realist approach to psychic processes (Collier 1994, pp. 217–224).

40. The concept of the epistemological break or rupture (*coupure epistémologique*) was first developed by Bachelard (1947) and redeployed in different ways by Foucault (1966) and Althusser and Balibar (1968). (See the latter also for the concept of a "symptomatic reading"). Our use of the notion of epistemological break does not sigal an embrace of Bachelard's entire framework, which, as Bhaskar (1975) has noted, is in some ways still empiricist.

41. The effects of the events of September 11, 2001, on this emerging formation could not be foreseen at the time of writing (November 2001); but see Hardt (2001) and Steinmetz (2001).

42. Of course the mobilization by the Nazis of Nietzsche as well as Heidegger's own cooperation with the Nazis and his active anti-Semitism contributed to this perceived association between the German antipositivist tradition and totalitarianism.

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