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Mediating Justice: Toward A Critical-Reflexive Sociology

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Mediating Justice: Toward a Critical-reflexive Sociology

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

George Christopher Gondo
December 2011

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Dedication

To Charlie, may your head rest on warm keyboards for eternity.

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ABSTRACT

Today, an increasing number of sociologists incorporate the theme of social justice within their work and strive to contribute to efforts to improve existing social conditions. In their view, sociological work that actively engages in issues related to social justice exemplifies 'the promise' of sociology and represents a means of refocusing and reinvigorating the discipline at a time of perceived crisis. Yet, a growing body of evidence questions whether previous efforts to use sociology as a mechanism of improving social conditions have been successful. In this thesis, I rely on the works of Alvin W. Gouldner to examine the relationship between sociology and the pursuit of social justice. Specifically, I contend that Gouldner's works reflect an awareness of the problematic nature of such projects while attempting to reconstruct the practice of sociology in a manner that addresses its shortcomings. Thus, Gouldner's body of work deepens our understanding of the problematic nature of using existing social scientific paradigms to pursue particular conceptions of social justice while attempting to formulate a vision for a new kind of social science more suitable for such a task.

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Chapter One – Introduction

“Ich habe meine Gründe vergessen.”
– Nietzsche, quoted in Mannheim
Ideology and Utopia (1985: 20)

Through-out the world today, we are witnessing an increase in groups, movements, and protests calling for social change. In the last year, the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, consisting of widespread protests and social upheaval demanding social, political, and economic reforms, toppled authoritarian regimes across Northern Africa and the Middle East. Today, within the United States and many European nations, a variety of groups and movements have risen in response to the prolonged recession following the 2008 financial crisis calling attention to a diversity of issues ranging from the role of corporate power within society, rising inequality and forced austerity measures which further erode an already weakened social safety net, to increasing government intrusion in our daily lives. These movements and groups represent a cross section of society, both in terms of their political ideology and the issues promoted. Yet, what is common to all is a sense of injustice that motivates them.

These movements attest to the continued relevance of social justice within contemporary society, as well as highlight its contested nature and the communal desire to improve social conditions through human activity. The idea to improve social conditions is a powerful and omnipotent feature of modern society. Such

motivations are evident in the advertising slogans of commercial products and the companies that make them¹, the non-profit and charitable organizations that we volunteer for or donate to, our political institutions and economic and financial institutions. On a societal level these desires are often codified into conceptions of social justice which seek to offer coherent explanations for the particular arrangement and structure of advantages and disadvantages within society – whether these be conceived of as the distribution of goods and bads in society or political and cultural recognition within the institutions of society.

While the contested nature of social justice may lead some to question the continued relevance of the topic, theories and conceptions of social justice play a vital role in defining social issues that need to be addressed and what steps are to be taken to address them. In this sense it is important to develop a theory of justice that conforms to what we as a society think of ourselves and guides what we would like to become. Having an inappropriate theory of justice can just as easily obscure social problems and deepen the problematic nature of contemporary society as it can alleviate them and make inroads toward the realization of a qualitatively superior social order (Barry 2005).

This thesis explores the relationship between American sociology and social justice. Many contemporary sociologists believe that sociological research has

¹ Some examples include Bayer Pharmaceuticals - whose slogan is “Science for a better life” – Mitsubishi Electric – whose slogan is “Changes for the better”.

historically played a role in the pursuit of social justice ideals and believe that this commitment to social justice should be continue to guide sociological work. This thesis poses the following question: if American sociology has historically been used a vehicle to produce knowledge about the social world that aids efforts to improve social conditions and address social problems, then why do conditions deteriorate at what appears to be an accelerating pace and attempts to improve social conditions exacerbate and deepen the constellation of social problems confronting American society? The current debate within American sociology concerning the discipline's role in promoting social justice appears misplaced, once we connect current social problems confronting society to past efforts to advance social justice. Given this situation, it is increasingly apparent American sociologists who are serious about advancing social justice *should* focus their efforts toward understanding how sociological research contributes to our inability to effectively resolve social problems, and improve social conditions, and how the practice of sociology in the United States would have to be altered in order for such projects to be pursued².

² Through-out this thesis several different conceptions of social justice will be considered. However, I define social justice as a mechanism for either challenging or legitimating existing social structures. This view of social justice, while too broad for practical purposes guiding social activity, recognizes both the ideological and utopian potentialities found within particular conceptions of social justice. Such a view of social justice is heavily influence by Karl Marx's writings pertaining to social justice and morality, particularly within *The German Ideology* (see - Marx, Karl. 1978a. "The German Ideology." in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the analysis of the relationship between social justice and sociology within this thesis is deeply indebted to the Marxian tradition, which primarily finds inspiration in Marx's writings, unlike the various schools of Marxist thought, which conceives of it as a political blueprint from transforming society.

Sociology and Social Justice

Today, an increasing number of sociologists seek to incorporate the theme of social justice within their work and strive to contribute to efforts to improve existing social conditions³. To these sociologists, social justice is an integral part of the discipline's history (Feagin 2001a; Howard 2003; Perrucci 2001). In their view, sociological work that actively engages in issues related to social justice exemplifies 'the promise' of sociology and represents a means of refocusing and reinvigorating the discipline at a time of perceived crisis (Davis 1994). Yet, a growing body of evidence raises questions over the efficacy of past efforts to use sociological research as a mechanism for improving social conditions.

Increasingly, the possibility that the pursuit of social justice ideals under the aegis of sociological research has contributed to the problems facing contemporary society is becoming more and more evident (Dahms 2008). For example, the distributive justice framework, which has become synonymous with the pursuit of social justice within modernity (Barry 1989; Jackson 2005), simultaneously produced a level of economic abundance for some social groups while contributing to a dizzying array of environmental problems (Schnaiberg and Gould 1994; York, Rosa and Dietz 2003) and promoting a mental framework incapable of thinking in non-economic terms (Foster 2002; Paehlke 2003), that hinders our ability to develop real and lasting solutions to these problems.

³ The discussion of the relationship between sociology and social justice primarily exists within American sociology. As such, the analysis within this thesis is limited to American sociology.

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the types of problems confronting contemporary society challenge the capabilities of existing social scientific paradigms to fully comprehend them and design strategies for their effective resolution (Latour 1993). Problems such as global warming, petroleum/fossil fuel dependence, persistent economic inequality, racism, gender discrimination, sexual equality, simultaneously exist within multiple social spheres. Recent debates concerning conceptualizing social justice acknowledge the complexities of contemporary social problems and have attempted to create hybrid notions of social justice that sufficiently account for these complexities (Fraser 1998; Fraser 2000; Fraser and Honneth 2003). These debates reflect an awareness that past conceptions of social justice have largely failed to achieve their stated goals and may have even contributed to a deepening of social problems (Fraser 2000; Fraser 2007). Yet, such developments have yet to be mirrored within sociology, or many of the other social sciences. Thus, the development of new social scientific paradigms becomes a necessary precondition for sociologists committed to the development of a social justice-themed sociology.

However, sociologists must better understand the problematic nature of past efforts to infuse sociological research with strategies to pursue particular conceptions of social justice before attempting to development new social

scientific paradigms. To this end, critiques of the social sciences formulated by Theodor W. Adorno and Karl Mannheim⁴ offer a useful starting point⁵. Both Adorno and Mannheim recognize the association between the social sciences and the desire to improve social conditions. Yet, both figures did not think that the social sciences possessed the capacity to realize this aspiration. Instead, each focused on the epistemological and methodological shortcomings of existing social scientific paradigms and how these approaches to producing social scientific knowledge undermine social science's promise. In particular, Adorno and Mannheim focus on the centrality of the subject (individual) and object (society) relationship to the pursuit of social justice, reformulating it in a manner that denies the unification of theory and practice demanded by social justice projects (Adorno 1976 and 2005a; Mannheim 1985; Williams 2004). Their critiques suggest that the practice of social science must be reconstructed in a way that recognizes and addresses the persistent gap between theory and practice that results from the mediation between the individual and society. Yet, neither produced an acceptable version of social science that sufficiently accomplished this task.

⁴ Of course, many differences exist between Mannheim and Adorno's work. For an excellent summary of the differences between Mannheim and Adorno's theoretical positions see Jay, Martin. 1996. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923 - 1950* Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press..

⁵ The importance of Mannheim and Adorno to the discussion surrounding the inability of efforts to promote social justice to achieve their stated goals and objectives will be the focus of a later section of the thesis.

Both Adorno and Mannheim agreed that the failure of sociological research to meaningfully contribute to improving social conditions stems from the inability of sociologists to recognize the presence of a persistent gap between theory and practice that denies such ambitions. This deficiency, and our inability to recognize it and formulate strategies explicitly designed to address it, represents a fundamental flaw within sociological paradigms and the practice of sociology. According to their critiques, the majority of sociologists who seek to advance social justice fail to understand how the most basic features of social life deny the most fundamental aspect of social justice – the unification between theory and practice – and neglect to acknowledge how these processes are replicated within the practice of sociology itself. In effect, sociology seeks to disavow its social dimension.

It is clear, then, that sociologists must seek to understand why past efforts to use sociological research to produce knowledge relevant to improving social conditions have failed to yield their desired results. Any future effort to revitalize this tradition within American sociology must first understand the specific role sociological research had in undermining our ability to pursue strategies that seek to resolve social problems in a manner that improves social conditions. Such questions *should* be the first that sociologists who profess a commitment to social justice consider and reflect upon. Yet, such questions are largely absent from the current debate on the relevance of social justice to sociological

research. Instead, sociologists prefer to ask why *individuals* pursue a course of action that undermine efforts to realize social justice ideals (Howard 2003) or blame specific sociological paradigms (ie., Funcationalism or positivism) (e.g., Feagin and Vera 2001b) – if the question is even considered at all⁶.

A renewed appreciation of Alving W. Gouldner represents a promising step in this direction. Within his work, Gouldner explicitly explored the inability of American sociology and Marxism to meaningfully contribute to improving social conditions and sought to uncover how the practice of each thwarted this goal. In this sense, Gouldner engaged in an analytic approach that is sorely missing from the contemporary discussion on the role sociological research plays within efforts to pursue social justice ideals. That this discussion comes at a time when Gouldner's work has received little to no serious attention is particularly troubling. The absence of a contemporary revival of Gouldner's work suggests that mainstream American sociologists do not want to seriously consider the ways in which sociological research may undermine efforts to improve social conditions, nor the problematic nature of the practice of sociology. Instead, what little recognition Gouldner receives within this discussion suggests that supporters of framing sociological research in terms of social justice understand the central

⁶ There are, of course some exceptions to this most notably the work of C. Wright Mills (see - Mills, Wright C. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.), Moishe Postone (see - Postone, Moishe. 1998. "Re-thinking Marx (in a Post-Marxist World)." in *Reclaiming the Sociological Classics: the State of Scholarship*, edited by Charles Camic. Malden, MA: Blackwell.), Harry Dahms (see - Dahms, Harry F. 2005. "Globalization or Hyper-Alienation? Critiques of Traditional Marxism as Arguments for Basic Income." *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 23:205-76.), Robert Antonio (see - Antonio, Robert J. and Bonanno, Alessandro. 2006. "Periodizing Globalization: From Cold War Modernization to the Bush Doctrine." *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 24:1 - 56.).

problematic of such projects Gouldner focused on within his work – the divide between theory and practice – has been miraculously and permanently resolved. This perspective fails to understand that both the problem of the relationship between theory and practice is a permanent feature of such projects that is historically, culturally, and politically contingent. By default, these sociologists actively try to refute the dynamic nature of modern society (Dahms 2008), a position that thwarts the actualization of social justice.

In this thesis, I rely on the work of Alvin W. Gouldner to critically examine the relationship between sociology and the pursuit of social justice. Though his critique of value-free social science (Gouldner 1962) is occasionally cited as an inspiration for the type of politically engaged research such projects require (Feagin 2001b; Wadsworth 2005), Gouldner formulated critiques of both American sociology and Marxism that intimate the problematic nature of using the social sciences to promote particular conceptions of social justice. Specifically, I contend that his work reflects an awareness of the issues posed by Adorno's and Mannheim's critiques of the social sciences, while containing a vision for reconstructing the practice of sociology that, while incomplete, attempted to address these issues. Thus, Gouldner's work deepens our understanding of the problematic nature of using existing social scientific paradigms to pursue particular conceptions of social justice while attempting to formulate a vision for a new kind of social science more suitable for such a task.

Method

This thesis uses the work of Alvin W. Gouldner to construct a meta-theory about sociology's ability to meaningfully contribute to the advancement of social justice ideals that promote qualitatively superior forms of social organization, which are characterized by being more just and democratic societies. Though an atypical method, metatheory has long been an unrecognized methodological tool within sociology (Ritzer 1990). Metatheory is often utilized in order to examine the presuppositions that lie behind the surface of a theory, or are made in the pursuit of social facts (Morrow 1994). Such analysis deepens our understanding of extant theoretical and research paradigms and can be beneficial for the creation and establishment of new, and implied better, theoretical and research models (Ritzer 1990). For my purposes here, metatheory will both scrutinize the prerequisites for using social science to promote social justice with the hope of deepening our understanding of the relationship between social science and the desire to improve social conditions and coming to the precipice of formulating new ways of pursuing the creation of social scientific that may permit such lofty aspirations.

Such an analysis reflects a commitment to the basic tenets of both the sociology of knowledge and the tradition of critical theory. Despite the rather significant differences between the two, both schools of thought recognize the existence of

presuppositions that contaminate our understanding of the social world and seek to establish modes of thinking that reflect an awareness of their presence. For the sociology of knowledge, these beliefs emanate from our historical - social location and prevent the creation of a scientifically guided political life (Mannheim 1985). Critical theory, however, is not content with such a reductionist understanding between knowledge and social location and forges a more complex understanding of this relationship based on the notion of social totality (Horkheimer 1972). Yet, both of these traditions employ metatheory as a method for producing knowledge about the social world.

Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters each focusing on a particular aspect of my argument. In the second chapter, I offer a brief analysis of the relationship between sociology and social justice. In this section I will demonstrate how critiques of the discipline reveal the problematic nature of using existing sociologic paradigms to pursue research agendas that seek to meaningfully contribute to the realization of social justice ideals and improving existing social conditions. Next, I focus on the work of Alvin W. Gouldner, exploring how Gouldner acknowledged that the methodological and epistemological shortcomings of the discipline prevented it from realizing its liberative and emancipatory potential. Finally, I explore Gouldner's thoughts on how sociology

could achieve such lofty aspirations by considering his vision of a reconstructed sociology and the type of social scientific and theoretical practices that would create the necessary preconditions conducive to the establishment of liberative and emancipatory social scientific paradigms.

In the next chapter I will offer a brief overview of the relationship between sociology and the pursuit of social justice and demonstrate how critiques of the discipline reveal the problematic nature of these efforts. Due to spatial constraints, I shall focus on delineating how the theme of social justice played a central role in the development of particular sociological paradigms at three historical junctures: 1) the emergence of sociology during the 19th century, 2) the apex of American sociology during the post-World War II era, and 3) the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Specifically, I will explore how the emergence of sociology in the 19th century contributed to a conceptual shift in how the topic of social justice was to be approached within modernity and how particular sociological paradigms support conceptions of social justice formulated by political philosophers – in particular John Rawls (1999), David Miller (1999), and Iris Marion Young (1990)⁷. My goal here is to clarify how

⁷ Traditionally, the topic of social justice has been the focus of political philosophy. Due to the level of uncertainty that surrounds justice claims it is necessary to appeal to the work of political philosophers in order to treat the topic of social justice with coherency. Conceptions of social justice must possess a level of complexity that allows them to be applied to an extraordinarily broad range of topics and social institutions – from distribution of advantages and disadvantages through-out society(see – Barry, Brian. 1989. *Theories of Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press. - to gender relations in the home (see – Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*: Basic Books.. Focusing on the theoretical conceptions of social justice formulated by John Rawls, David Miller, and Iris Marion Young allows particular sociological paradigms (i.e. – post – WWII Functionalism, contemporary mainstream

conceptions of social justice have historically been a part of sociological research by grounding certain sociological perspectives in particular conceptions of social justice. Finally, I will briefly outline how Adorno's (1976b) and Mannheim's (1985) critiques of sociology help us understand the flawed nature of these projects.

Despite assertions that the pursuit of social justice ideals have historically been a part of the discipline of sociology (Feagin 2001b; Perrucci 2001; Wallerstein 1997), precisely how sociologists have contributed to the advancement of particular conceptions of social justice remain unclear. Given the contested nature of the concept (Miller 1974; Miller 1976), it is insufficient to broadly appeal to claims of promoting social justice without offering more detail about the meaning of social justice (Laclau 1996), making it necessary to incorporate some of the contributions political theorists have made to our understanding of social justice. This chapter provides the foundation for the remainder of my argument.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I explore Alvin W. Gouldner's relationship to social justice-themed sociological paradigms, focusing on how the problematic aspects of these projects formulated by Adorno and Mannheim figure into his work. While sociologists who seek to establish social justice as a guiding theme

quantitative research, and politically active left-ish/progressive sociological research) to specific, coherent expressions of social justice, which view social justice in radically different terms. John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1989) provides a coherent defense of the welfare state, as imagined in post-WWII America, as the guarantor of social justice. While both Miller (1999) and Young (1991) present competing theories of social justice in the vacuum left by the erosion of the welfare state as a politically viable mechanism for ensuring social justice.

of sociological research view Gouldner as an inspiration for such projects (Feagin 2001b; Wadsworth 2005), Gouldner's own work reflects a deep skepticism regarding the ability of such projects to realize their intended goals given existing social scientific paradigms. Instead, Gouldner developed a critique of social justice-themed sociological research that engaged the epistemological and methodological critiques of these projects formulated by Adorno and Mannheim in a way that concretely expressed the flawed nature of the social sciences in both its bureaucratic and partisan forms. I contend that his critiques of the relationship between the welfare state and western sociology in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Gouldner 1970) and Marxist sociology (Gouldner 1980; Gouldner 1985) offer insight into the inability of these paradigms to acknowledge the disconnect between theory and practice and represent an attempt to address the complex relationship between the individual (subject) and society (object) that perpetuate this gap.

In the fourth chapter, I examine Gouldner's thoughts on how the discipline of sociology could be reconstructed in order for the discipline to realize its liberative and emancipatory potentialities. Despite his criticism of welfare state and Marxist sociology, Gouldner did not deny the possibility of an emancipatory sociology. Instead, his work contains elements of a vision for a reconstructed sociology based upon the principles of reflexivity (Gouldner 1970) and his notion of the 'Dark side of the Dialectic' (Gouldner 1976) that held out hope for the

establishment of sociological practices that may be conducive to such aspirations.

Since Gouldner contended that history had surpassed our ability to utilize existing strategies for addressing social problems (Gouldner 1980), it would run against the spirit of his own work to demand a rote application of his ideas to sufficiently address the problems of today. Yet, it is the very spirit of his work and thought that is needed. I conclude by examining some of Gouldner's own shortcomings and suggest some logical steps that flow from a consideration of his work and what sociologists can do to revive its essence.

Chapter Two – A Brief Examination of the Relationship Between Sociology and Social Justice

In this chapter I will briefly examine the relationship between sociology and the pursuit of social justice and demonstrate how critiques of the social sciences reveal the problematic nature of such projects. My focus here is to outline how particular conceptions of social justice influenced the development of sociology at three distinct historical eras: 1) the emergence of the discipline during the 19th century, 2) the apex of American sociology during the post-World War II era, 3) the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. Finally, I will illustrate how Adorno and Mannheim's critiques of sociology and the social sciences deepen our understanding of why these projects failed to produce the desired results, stating the issues future sociologists must address in order to embark on similar projects.

The current discussion of establishing a social justice-themed sociology, inspired speeches delivered by disciplinary leaders to professional sociological societies (Feagin 2001a; Howard 2003; Perrucci 2001), lays out an ambitious agenda. At heart, this movement attempts to address a fundamental problem within the discipline – the absence of a central subject upon which a cohesive and cumulative body of research can be constructed (Dahms 2007; Davis 1994) that appeals to a broad audience. Increasingly major funding agencies have questioned the merit of social scientific research (Mervis 2006), leading to a

sense of anxiety among sociologists over the purpose and task of the discipline and how to gauge its relative successes and failures (Dahms 2007).

Superficially, it makes sense for sociologists to focus on questions and issues related to social justice. Conceptions of social justice are intrinsic to society and possess a level of complexity that lends itself to the many different perspectives and substantive areas comprising the discipline of sociology. Sociological accounts of social justice issues already exist within an increasingly broad array of substantive areas of the discipline, among them criminology (Williams 2004), social stratification (Davis 1944; Kelley 1993; Marshall 1993), social psychology (Shepelak 1989), environmental sociology (Frey 2003), and even research methods (Jasso 1999), bolstering the notion that the theme of social justice can serve as a unifying theme within an increasingly fragmented discipline (Phillips 2001).

Yet, it remains unclear what sociologists mean when they talk of social justice. While the current discussion of the role of social justice ideals within the discipline emphasizes the relationship between the idea of social justice and Leftist and progressive politics (Fasenfest 2009; Feagin 2001a; Feagin 2001b), social justice is a contested concept that is continually debated from a variety of political perspectives (Miller 1974 and 1976). Furthermore, the current discourse of social justice within sociology, which relies heavily on Marx's vision of social

science articulated in his *11th Thesis on Feuerbach*, is either unaware or ignores both Marx's apparent ambivalence about the concept of social justice (Marx 1978a; Wood 1972) and the role social justice can play in the legitimation of existing social conditions to the exclusion of visions of radically transforming society (Jackson 2005). What is clear, however, is that the emergence of sociology in the 19th century coincided with a transformation in conceptualizing social justice.

The Birth of Modern Society and the Conceptual Shift in Social Justice

The idea of social justice can be traced at least as far back as Plato's *Republic* (Barry 1989). While political theorists debate the specific meaning of social justice, it is generally accepted that the task of social justice is to justify the distribution of advantages and disadvantages in the social order. However, the majority of contemporary conceptions of social justice differ substantially from how Plato or Aristotle approached the subject, despite repeated claims of theoretical and conceptual continuity with the previous theories of justice. The scope of social justice and the actions necessary for its realization distinguishes ancient conceptions of social justice from those formulated in modernity.

For much of the pre-modern era, social justice referred to constructions of a virtuous or ideal social order, one that was in accord with its stated values or

inherent characteristics (e.g., Aristotle 1962; Plato 2003). These idealist notions of social justice sought to guide the development and transformation of the existing social order by promoting a vision of what society should look like and providing a justification for that particular form of social organization. To this end, social justice fulfilled a teleological purpose within society, representing a set of ideals to aspire to in the course of social transformation and development. Thus, achieving social justice was not something that was possible within the existing state of affairs. Its very purpose served to challenge the existing social order by questioning the structural and institutional relations of society (Young 1981).

Yet, the emergence of modernity during the 19th century revitalized interest in social justice and transformed the subject of justice resulting in a more limited notion of justice concerned less with fulfilling a teleological function and more with guiding the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the existing social order (Fleischacker 2004; Jackson 2005; Miller 1999). Early formulations of distributive justice largely attempted to shore up the immature social order amid increasing criticism over the existence of persistent economic, political, and social inequalities that contradicted the democratic and free-market values that formed the normative basis for modernity. Thus, the modern idea of distributive justice attempted to legitimize rather than transform the existing social order.

The work of early sociologists like Comte (1953) facilitated the growth and development of distributive conceptions of social justice. Comte's works intimated a concern for ensuring social stability that undergirded notions of distributive justice. While acknowledging the existence of social problems, Comte believed in the perfectibility of society via incremental improvements guided by value-free social scientific research, based on the methodology of the natural sciences, which would determine the natural laws of society as well as those aspects amendable to alteration via human interventions. This social scientific paradigm provided supporters of distributive justice with the technical means to explore their particular vision of social justice as well the research basis to support the interventions it required (Miller 1999).

Social Justice and Post-World War II American Society

The development of the welfare state policy apparatus represents one of the most significant consequences stemming from the solidification of the distributive justice paradigm. The idea of the welfare state established the double movement that characterized the function of the state within liberal democratic societies, tasking the nation-state with simultaneously guaranteeing social, political, and economic equality and facilitating economic expansion and growth (Polyani 2001). It should come as no surprise, then, that the development and growth of American sociology is deeply connected to the welfare state (Hicks 2005) nor

that the golden age of American sociology coincided with the height of the welfare state within American public policy. Many early sociologists, such as Lester Ward (Ward and Commager 1967) and Jane Addams (Addams 1910), used their work to promote the growth and development of the welfare state and defend it against attacks from *laissez-faire* theorists influenced by Herbert Spencer (1969), whose Social Darwinism is often considered a representation of justice as desert (Miller 1976).

Yet, the relationship between sociological research and the welfare state policy apparatus did not fully mature until the post-World War II era. During the post-World War II era, the ascendancy and solidification of positivism as the dominant sociological paradigm combined with the rise of increasingly large, complex bureaucracies to form a mutually supportive relationship that redefined American society⁸ (Mills 2002; Steinmetz 2005). The two shared several key features that established, what was at the time, an unprecedented level of collusion between business, government, and social scientific research.

First, the conception of social justice that buttressed the bureaucratic structure of the welfare state in the post war era possessed a commitment to objectivity similar to the value-free social science promoted by early American positivists.

⁸ For a more complete understanding of the transformative impact the rise of large bureaucratic structures had on modern society see - Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1976. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial. And Weber, Max. 1964. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: The Free Press.

Expressed by the theory of social justice most explicitly connected to the welfare state as an original position in which the guiding principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance (Rawls 1999), the idea that the manner in which we arrive at an agreed upon basis for the allocation of advantages and disadvantages remains free from influence from actual social conditions established the very preconditions that allow for the resulting system of distribution to be considered fair. Such a method attempts to sever the individual from the social context in which she exists, in a manner reminiscent of the cleavage between the subject and object that forms the epistemological foundation for the value neutral research paradigm that characterized mainstream American sociology of the time. Just as the concept of the original position permitted the idea of 'justice as fairness' for politico-theoretical understandings of social justice, for many sociologists borrowing this rigid divide between subject and object from the natural sciences legitimated sociology as a science (Kellner 1997; Steinmetz 2005).

In addition to this commitment to objectivity, both the welfare state and mainstream post-War American sociology shared a common outlook concerning the existence of persistent inequalities. Society, Rawls suggests, can never fully and consistently comply with the principles of justice. Therefore, we must accept an imperfect justice, provided that the social and economic inequalities are to everyone's advantage and attached to positions all members of society can

attain (Rawls 1999). Sociological research in the area of social stratification expresses the same willingness to accept persistent patterns of inequality that seemingly violate our sense of social justice and the normative foundations of society. Herbert Gans perfectly illustrates this perspective in his essay, 'The Positive Functions of Poverty' (Gans 1972). In this essay, Gans applies the logic of functionalism – that we should expect the persistent features of society, even those considered social problems, to perform some positive social function – to the topic of poverty, framing the problem of poverty as mutually advantageous to the larger social order.

The entwinement of sociological research within the welfare state apparatus profoundly affected the discipline, rewarding sociological perspectives that pursued research agendas commiserate with the needs of policy makers and institutions tasked with promoting the welfare state's agenda. Sociological research, as a result, increasingly focused on quantitative methodology, an approach famously characterized by C. Wright Mills (Mills 1959) as abstract empiricism for its single-minded obsession with adhering to a particular method over producing results that improves our knowledge of ourselves and the social world we inhabit. Despite the continual erosion of welfare state policies in the United States during the 30 years, sociologists remain committed to developing quantitative research programs, with the discipline as a whole becoming more rooted in quantitative research than perhaps ever before. The wealth of

quantitative research performed by sociology plays an important role in one of the newer theoretical perspectives on social justice.

Social Justice at the Twilight of the Welfare State

As the erosion of welfare state policies continues within the United States, new conceptions of social justice compete for the type of broad acceptance the welfare state enjoyed for so long. Yet, these emerging perspectives on social justice must contend with a substantially different milieu. For much of modernity, the state assumed the role of ultimate arbiter of social justice. However, an increasing commitment to neo-liberal policies within western democratic societies and the effects of globalization have significantly weakened the ability of governments to address social problems (Ohmae 2004). As a result, a greater emphasis is placed on the role individual social actors and/or social movements play in the pursuit of social justice. Despite this orientation, sociological research continues to play a role in these theoretical formulations of social justice.

Quantitative Sociology and Contextual Social Justice

One of the conceptions of social justice aspiring to replace the welfare state as the dominant framework for approaching issues related to social justice challenges us to think about the contextual elements that influence our perceptions of justice and injustice. Acknowledging the ideological foundations of

social justice (Miller 1974), this emerging approach to social justice seeks to use social scientific research to understand how people actually think about justice in their everyday lives (Miller 1999). While initially examining the relationship between particular societal-types and principles of social justice (Miller 1976) using Weber's (1964) idea that certain social structures correspond to certain ideas, contemporary contextual notions of social justice present a more flexible understanding of justice. They argue that the principles of desert, need, and equality function differently depending on the specific social context to which they are applied (Miller 1999). These theorists rely extensively on social scientific research, especially the work of sociologists, to support their interpretation of how people apply the principles of social justice in the course of their daily lives. In particular, this perspective incorporates a great deal of sociological and social psychological research focusing on people's beliefs about social stratification (eg., Kluegel 1986; Kluegel 1981), distributive justice (eg., Shepelak 1986), and inequality (eg., Kelley 1993).

Using sociological research in this manner exemplifies Judith Howard's suggestion that sociological research focused on social cognition and symbolic interaction can promote social justice. In her presidential address to the Pacific Sociological Association, Howard (2003) argued that micro-sociological research provides insights into individual cognition and behavior that subvert institutional interventions aimed at reducing inequality and promoting social justice. The bulk

of this research represents a direct continuation of positivist methodology, attempting to establish quantitative measures of both injustice (eg.,Jasso 1999) and perceptions of injustice (eg.,Kluegel 1995) that mimic the natural sciences⁹.

Social Justice as Social Transformation: Counter-systemic Approaches to Social Justice

One of the more intriguing conceptions of social justice developed in the last twenty five years attempts to reframe the question of justice, focusing on the role cultural and institutional practices play in perpetuating injustice instead of the allocation of advantages and disadvantages (Young 1990). Formulated by critics of the welfare state seeking to revitalize idealist notions of social justice, this understanding of social justice, firmly rooted in the ideals of the 1960's New Left, expresses a firm commitment to enhancing human emancipation and liberation from oppression, exploitation, and domination. The welfare state, they argue, represented an inefficient and ineffective means of ameliorating inequalities that promoted a false consciousness among disadvantage social groups which deepened the repressive nature of modern society in order to enhance social stability and subvert the democratic process (Offe 1981; Young 1990). Rather than addressing the root cause of social inequalities, they suggest that the welfare state created a one dimensional society that discouraged active

⁹ It should perhaps be considered more than coincidence that the increasing quantification of sociological research coincides with the perception that economic concerns trump social and environmental problems, for more on this see - Paehlke, Robert. 2003. *Democracy's Dilemma: Environment, Social Equity and the Global Economy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

participation in public life by extending the logic of consumerism into increasingly more areas of social life and undermining opposition via the promotion of an increasingly affluent standard of living (Marcuse 1991).

In lieu of the welfare state, identity-based approaches to social justice align themselves with social movements comprised of marginalized and exploited social groups to promote a radical pluralist democracy that acknowledges and celebrates group difference (Laclau 2001). Whereas the welfare state promoted social stability, these social movements often seek a radical transformation of the institutional and organizational structure of society, finding inspiration in Marx's 11th *Thesis on Feuerbach* (1978b). Despite implicating value-free social science for its involvement in the repressive nature of the welfare state, this social justice paradigm has inspired many social scientists to explore issues related to social justice. Their call for radical social transformation finds expression within particular sociological perspectives that seek to reinvigorate the discipline's counter-systemic legacy.

In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Joe Feagin (2001a) urged his fellow sociologists to return to the discipline's roots and renew their commitment to exploring the theme of social justice within their work.

Feagin (2001a; 2001b) utilizes recognition-based interpretations of social justice as a foundation for promoting counter-systemic perspectives within sociology that

seek to eliminate oppression and exploitation while creating more just and egalitarian societies. In particular, Feagin and Vera's notion of *Liberation Sociology* (2001b) urges sociologists to side with oppressed and marginalized social groups via a participatory research model that actively involve these groups in the research process, eschewing any notion of value-free research.

Mind the Gap: Critiques of the Social Sciences and the (Im)Possibility of a Social Justice-Themed Sociology

Though these examples of how sociological research supports particular conceptions of social justice represent a diverse cross section of the discipline, in terms of methodological approaches and substantive concentrations, certain commonalities exist between them. In particular, the idea of social justice infers unification between theory and practice to ensure that the stated goals and objectives are achieved and unintended consequences do not result. This is an especially important feature of conceptions of social justice that desire radical social transformation (Williams 2004). Yet, the proliferation of social problems resulting from efforts to pursue social justice indicates that a gap exists between how we theorize social justice and the actual practice of pursuing these ideals. Thus, contemporary sociologists who desire to create a sociology concerned with advancing social justice may well wish to consider why past attempts to promote social justice did not achieve their stated goals and objectives. More importantly,

sociologists should seek to understand the specific role sociological research played in the frustration of such projects.

Critiques of the social sciences shed some light on fundamental problem facing such projects. In particular, the works of Theodor W. Adorno (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) and Karl Mannheim (1985) explored the failure of the social sciences to fulfill their stated goal of improving social conditions in a way that aids our understanding of the problematic nature of contemporary attempts to center sociological work around the theme of social justice¹⁰. Their bodies of work suggest that the failure of the social sciences to improve social conditions is inextricably linked to deeper questions surrounding the epistemological and methodological foundations of existing social scientific practices, in both its positivist and partisan forms. These critiques suggest that the reconstruction of social scientific practices is a necessary precondition to realizing the promise of social science.

Both Mannheim and Adorno attack the purported objectivity of positivist sociology, suggesting that this type of methodological approach to the study of

¹⁰ Of course, many differences exist between the work of Adorno and Mannheim; see Jay, Martin. 1996. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923 - 1950* Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press. and Held, David. 1980. *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. for an overview of the relationship between Adorno and Mannheim and the substantive differences – and similarities - between their theoretical perspectives. Gillian Rose also offers an excellent account of the substantive differences, and similarities, between Adorno's theoretical perspective and the sociology of knowledge – see: Rose, Gillian. 1976. "How is Critical Theory Possible? Theodor W. Adorno and Concept Formation in Sociology." *Political Studies* 24(1):69 - 85.

society is impossible and does not improve our understanding of society. For Adorno (1976b), value-free social scientific research willingly submits to the administrative needs of society by focusing on an increasingly atomized set of social facts that are inconsequential to furthering our knowledge of society while oblivious to how it is conditioned by the social totality. Yet, it is precisely this commitment to objectivity that categorically prevents such research from recognizing or addressing the subjective nature of its work. As Adorno writes in the “Introduction” to *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*:

“Positivism, to which contradictions are anathema, possesses its innermost contradiction unbeknown to itself, in the following: namely, that it adheres to an objectivity which is most external to its sentiments and purged of all subjective projections, but thereby simply becomes all the more entangled in the particularity of mere subjective instrumental reason.” - (Adorno 1976a)

Mannheim shared Adorno’s disdain for the idea of a value-free social science, stating that “... no real penetration into social reality is possible through this approach [positivism] (1985:44). Likewise, he recognized the extent to which our knowledge of the social world and our attempts to understand it are intimately connected to it.

Yet, Mannheim and Adorno's critiques of positivism did not translate to an acceptance of explicitly partisan social science. Both felt that social scientific approaches that pursued a particular agenda and aligned themselves with the interests of particular groups failed to sufficiently recognize the extent to which they are molded by their objective social conditions. Mannheim writes, that "...the reverse – the greater the bias, the greater the objectivity is not true (1985:46)." He later expands upon this position, directly implicating the kind of political-partisan social scientific research demanded by Feagin's notion of *Liberation Sociology* (2001b), stating that "[t]hose persons who talk most about human freedom are those who are actually most blindly subject to social determination, in as much as they do not in most cases suspect the profound degree to which their conduct is determined by their interests (1985:48)." For Adorno, the drive to pursue particular interests creates a disposition favoring action over theoretical reflection and contemplation thereby denying our ability to explore moral questions (Adorno 2001).

The critiques of value-free and partisan social science formulated by Adorno and Mannheim point toward a common fundamental problem within the epistemological and methodological foundations of the social sciences which prevents them from achieving their desired goal of producing knowledge relevant to improving social conditions and advancing the idea of social justice. Specifically, Adorno and Mannheim indicate that the complex and interwoven

relationship between the individual (subject) and society (object) denies the unification between theory and practice such projects require. Value-free social science rests upon the epistemological assumption that the knowing subject can produce knowledge independent of the precise social-cultural-historical context in which such activity occurs. On the other hand partisan social science, while acknowledging the impossibility of objectivity, takes this to the other extreme, using the existence of bias and the embeddness of our actions as justification for producing knowledge with the expressed purpose of advancing particular interest (eg.,Becker 1967). Yet, neither paradigm addresses the mediation between our subjective selves and the objective social conditions stressed by Mannheim (eg.,1985) or Adorno (eg.,Adorno 2005a; 2005b).

In essence, both Adorno and Mannheim affirm that establishing a thoroughly critical sociology, understood as a sociology that calls attention to the processes by which the individual (subject) and society (object) are mutually constituted and simultaneously mediated (Rose 1976), represents a necessary pre-condition for the discipline to pursue its self-anointed task of improving social conditions. Yet, neither produced a sufficient vision for how social scientific practices could accomplish this task. Mannheim's (1985: 300 - 306) notion of relationism too closely resembles the murky waters of relativism he hoped to avoid and does not provide a sufficient foundation upon which to advance a morally charged argument required by strategies to pursue notions of social justice (Goldman

1994). Likewise Adorno's (1973) quest to develop an anti-system founded on non-identity thinking dismantles the foundations of existing social scientific paradigms.

The spirit of these critiques led to an increased concern with epistemological issues within much of the work produced by the '60's generation and rejuvenated the willingness of sociologists to develop and explore theoretical perspectives and research strategies that seek to develop a non-dichotomous understanding of the subject/object relationship (Cerrullo 1994)¹¹. Among these, Alvin W. Gouldner's work stands out. His willingness to explicitly explore how the methodological and epistemological deficiencies within existing social scientific paradigms prevents sociology from realizing its stated purpose distinguishes his work from many of his peers, and makes it especially relevant to the discussion of establishing a social justice themed sociology. In the following chapter, I wish to explore this aspect of Gouldner's works.

¹¹ Perhaps best represented by Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of a reflexive sociology particularly his concepts of 'practice' and 'habitus' – see Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic J. D. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. – and Anthony Giddens' structuration theory – see Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chapter Three – Alvin W. Gouldner and Social Justice: Exploring the Tragedy of the Social Sciences

In this chapter, I utilize Alvin W. Gouldner's work to explore the problematic aspects of incorporating a concern with social justice within sociological research. While some sociologists seeking to establish social justice as the guiding theme to sociological research view Gouldner as an inspiration, Gouldner's works reflect a deep skepticism regarding the ability of such projects to realize their stated goals and purposes via existing social scientific paradigms. Within those works that he produced during the end of his life, Gouldner developed a tragic vision of social science (Chriss 2002) that concretely expressed the flawed nature of the social justice-themed sociological research in both its bureaucratic and partisan forms.

Gouldner's critiques of both the relationship between American sociology and the welfare state (Gouldner 1970) and Marxism (Gouldner 1980; 1985) reflect a shared concern with Adorno and Mannheim's critiques of the social sciences over the effect our mediated social existence has upon these projects. Like Adorno and Mannheim, he acknowledged that the relationship between theory and practice represented a crucial problem for both academic sociology and Marxism (Gouldner 1973b: 97). However his work differs from theirs in one key dimension. Rather than concede sociology's liberative potentiality, I argue that Gouldner's work presents a vision for reconstructing the practice of sociology in a

manner that holds out hope for the establishment of a sociology capable of enhancing human emancipation and liberation.

The (mis)perception of Gouldner's relationship with social-justice themed sociology

As sociologists debate the discipline's role in advancing the theme of social justice, the work of Alvin W. Gouldner has failed to experience a significant revival similar to C. Wright Mills (Lemert 2005), with whom he is occasionally compared. Many current sociologists (eg., Collins 1991; Feagin 2001b) embroiled in this debate view Mills' notion of the *Sociological Imagination* (1959) as a source of inspiration for their project and his later political writings (Mills 1958; Mills 1960) as exemplars of how sociologists can overtly engage in politically motivated research¹². Despite this, some sociologists do view Gouldner's works as important precursors to the recent discussion on social justice themed sociology. In their book *Liberation Sociology* (2001b), Feagin and Vera reference Gouldner's most famous work, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), and suggest that their work completes Gouldner's prognostication of a paradigmatic shift within sociology away from structural-functionalism, with its

¹² Mills' work is also frequently mentioned within the debate on establishing a public sociology. For an overview of the debate on public sociology and its relationship to 'social justice-themed sociology' see Buroway, Michael; Gamson, William; Ryan, Charlotte; Pfhol, Stephen; Vaughn, Diane; Derber, Charles; Schor, Juliet 2004. "Public Sociologies: A Symposium from Boston College." *Social Forces* 51(4):103 - 30.; Agger, Ben. 2000. *Public Sociology: From Social Facts to Literary Acts*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield. And Nickel, Patricia. 2009. "Public Sociology and the Possibility of Governance." *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 26.

emphasis on maintaining social order, and toward sociological paradigms that draw inspiration from the Marxist tradition. Still others (Wadsworth 2005) view Gouldner and other participants in the 'paradigm wars' within sociology as important contributors to the establishment of participatory action research models, which figure heavily into contemporary partisan sociological research.

Gouldner's own body of work contains a number of elements that seemingly support this interpretation. In particular, his early work focusing on establishing an applied sociology (Gouldner 1957) that 'mends the rift between policy maker and social scientist' (Gouldner 1956: 180) indicates a willingness to explore how sociological research could serve the needs of the welfare state and inform the development of public policy. Furthermore, Gouldner (1962) formulated a widely influential, and widely misinterpreted by his own account (Gouldner 1973d), critique of value-free social science that inspired a generation of sociologists to engage in research that actively sided with marginalized social groups.

Yet, such an understanding of Gouldner ignores what is perhaps his greatest contribution to sociology and social theory, what has come to be known as his 'Last Project' (Antonio 2005). Gouldner's body of work that spanned the last decade of his life covered a stunning array of topics – the rise and decline of Functionalist sociology (Gouldner 1970), the role of technology and ideology within modernity (Gouldner 1976), new class theories exploring the capacity of

intellectuals to foment radical social change (Gouldner 1979), and a critical appraisal of Marxism (Gouldner 1980; Gouldner 1985). Yet, the question of whether sociology, in either its Western academic form or as Marxism, could realize its ambition to facilitate the emergence of qualitatively superior societal forms remained a consistent feature of this impressive body of work and guided its development.

Specifically, within this project, which spans from *The Coming Crisis* to the posthumously published *Against Fragmentation* (Gouldner 1985), Gouldner critically explored sociology's ability to realize its liberative and emancipatory potential. As he writes in the introduction to *The Coming Crisis*:

“ [s]ociology has a dialectical character and contains both repressive and liberative dimensions. The extrication of and further development of its liberative potential will depend, in important part, on the penetration of an historically informed critique of sociology as a theory and as a social institution.” (1970: 12)

Within these works, Gouldner developed critiques of American sociology's relationship with the welfare state and New Left social movements that highlight their problematic nature while reflecting an awareness of the epistemological and methodological flaws that Adorno and Mannheim suggest prevent such projects from realizing their stated goals and objectives.

Gouldner's Critique of Social Justice-themed Sociological Research

“The new academic practicality, in the social studies, for instance, is not concerned with the broken-up human results of the social process: the bad boy, the loose woman, the un-Americanized immigrant. On the contrary, it is tied in with the top levels of society, in particular with enlightened circles of business executives. For the first time in the history of their discipline, for example, sociologists have become linked by professional tasks and social contacts with private and public powers well above the level of the social-work agency.”

– C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, p. 54 (2002)

Within the pages of his book, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), and his rebuttals to the books many critics (Gouldner 1973b), Gouldner developed an insightful critique of the relationship between sociology and the welfare state, highlighting how the needs of the welfare state shaped the development of sociology during the course of the 20th century and altered the types of research questions formulated by sociologists and they were to be pursued. The institutional, political, and financial power of the welfare state provided social scientists, including sociologists, with an unprecedented level of funding and prestige, designating them with the all-important task of developing research agendas that explored the problems facing modern industrial societies and producing knowledge that aided the construction of strategies to address them.

Yet, despite the close relationship between post-World War II Functionalist sociology and the welfare state, Gouldner perceived a hidden tension between functionalism and welfare state policy initiatives that created conditions for a perpetual state of crisis within sociology. Functionalism's emphasis, according to Gouldner, on individual morality and self-regulating social structures conflicts with the welfare state's emphasis on state-intervention. In order to resolve this tension, Gouldner believed that elements of Marxism and Functionalism would converge, producing hybrid sociological paradigms that would undermine Functionalism's hegemony while forever altering the intellectual temperament of both theoretical perspectives and their ability to fulfill their stated purpose of creating new, and presumably superior, societal forms.

Specifically, for Gouldner, the envelopment of American sociology within the welfare state policy regime severely limited the research agenda pursued by sociologists and shifted discipline's overall orientation. By becoming dependent on financial and institutional support from the welfare state, sociologists increasingly served as the technical foundation for exploring and addressing the problems resulting from industrial society to the exclusion of other research agendas (Gouldner 1970). Sociological research during this era displayed a tendency to develop research agendas and pursue research questions involving social problems which the welfare state was either prepared or able to address. This manner of sociological research, Gouldner argued, possessed a specific

type of limited critical perspective aimed at unmasking competing policy interventions rather than critically engaging the social totality (Gouldner 1970: 350). Ultimately, Gouldner chided welfare-state sociology for serving the administrative needs of the welfare state, echoing the critiques of the welfare state assembled by theorists associated with the Frankfurt School – especially Marcuse (1991).

It is ironic that many sociologists (e.g., Becker 1967) used Gouldner's (1962) critique of 'the myth of value-free social science' as a justification for establishing an avowedly partisan sociology that champions disadvantaged social groups, a type of sociological practice exemplified within the relationship between the welfare state and sociology Gouldner critiqued. While Gouldner stressed the impossibility of exorcising one's values and personal biases from sociological work, he hardly approved of developing an explicitly partisan sociology which he felt served the professional interests of sociologists, describing it as 'a sociology of and for the new welfare state' (Gouldner 1973: 49). Instead of a partisan sociology, which entails an attachment to the interests of a particular social group or political party, Gouldner (1973: 116 – 120) stressed the importance of maintaining a commitment to particular values and ideas.

In his rebuttal to critics of *The Coming Crisis* (Gouldner 1973b) and his work on Marxism (Gouldner 1980), Gouldner explored the problems of partisan social

science more fully, especially as it relates to harnessing social science to the needs of 'the Movement' as well in its Marxist form. For Gouldner, such efforts possess a hidden dimension that reflects the value-free mantra that they wish to replace. Namely, partisan sociology and Scientific Marxism rely on a belief that the *methods* of value-free social science – e.g., survey methodology, quantitative data analysis, etc. – are value neutral. Yet, Gouldner maintained that by borrowing these methods without significant alteration, partisan projects unknowingly reproduced many of the problematic features of society they wish to change.

This aspect of Gouldner's work remains especially pertinent to the contemporary discussion of establishing counter-systemic perspectives within sociology. Exemplified by Feagin and Vera's notion of a *Liberation Sociology* (2001b), this movement embodies many characteristics of the partisan sociology Gouldner critiqued (i.e., openly siding with marginalized social groups, an affinity for Marxism, etc.), including a continued reliance on the research techniques within mainstream (i.e., value-free, positivist social science). Despite engaging in a critique of positivism on the grounds that its value-neutrality permits it to be used to further the systems of oppression and domination, Feagin and Vera (2001b: 29) assert that these same methods can be used to enhance human emancipation and liberation. Rather than attempting to construct alternative methods for establishing knowledge about the social world that aids the

construction of attempts to transform it, liberation sociology relies on the notion of participatory action research which continues to use standard social scientific methods only replacing large corporation and government bureaucracies with community groups and activist organizations.

Critique of Sociology and the Problem of Theory and Practice

The relationship between theory and practice represents a focal point of Adorno and Mannheim's critiques of social scientific paradigms used to pursue conceptions of social justice. Gouldner displays a similar concern with the relationship between theory and practice through-out his 'Last Project'. According to Gouldner, '[t]he *Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* was, despite its length, meant primarily to begin a discussion concerning the proper relation of sociology to society, and therefore of theory to practice (Gouldner 1973b: 83). In fact, to Gouldner, the relationship between theory and practice represents ' . . . the central problem facing all sociologies today, both academic and Marxist (Gouldner 1973b: 93)'.

For Gouldner, academic sociology and Marxism face a common problem that manifests differently within each. Both project a self-understanding based on a presumed unification between theory and practice that fails to translate into the actual practice of either. Practically, both academic sociology and Marxism

assume that the application of a particular course of action and practices results in the realization of a set of predefined goals and objectives. Yet, Gouldner's critical analysis of American sociology and actually existing socialism indicates that neither successfully achieves their stated goals and objectives. Like Adorno and Mannheim, Gouldner's critiques suggests that a persistent gap between theory and practice exists within both American sociology – in both its value-free and partisan forms and Marxism – that undermine their ability to achieve their stated goals and objectives.

The interaction of the welfare state and American sociology, Gouldner insists, sought to remedy social problems via technologically driven interventions designed to maintain the basic institutional structure of society – and by extension the social sciences (Gouldner 1970: 161). Yet, in order to reconcile positivism's indifference toward the state and the welfare state's view of the state as the ultimate arbiter of social ills, academic sociology created the conditions conducive to the production of radical sociological perspectives that undermine the discipline's relationship with the welfare state. The radical sociological paradigms which spawned from a convergence between academic sociology and Marxism promoted critical perspectives (e.g., the New Left) on American society that surpassed the prescribe criticality demanded by the welfare state and ultimately questioned its validity (e.g., Marcuse 1991).

This divide between theory and practice is particularly problematic for Marxism and partisan sociology, which places a special emphasis on the unification of theory and practice. Within Marxism, the doctrine of praxis provides the justification for the actions of Marxist social movements and the policies of socialist parties. Yet to Gouldner, Marxism's doctrine of praxis obscures the structure of domination and internal social inequality within Marxism and the privileged role of intellectuals in an professed proletariat movement, in addition to promoting a ritualistic incantation of existing Marxist thought at is detrimental to its further development and historical evolution (Gouldner 1974).

Gouldner On Subject and Object

Following Adorno and Mannheim, Gouldner viewed the divide between theory and practice as a by-product of the relationship between the individual (subject) and society (object). While the doctrine of praxis suggests that it is possible for our thought and action to exist independent of social context, throughout his Last Project Gouldner continually explored the way in which the individual (subject) and society (object) are intimately related. Gouldner's writings on the topic focus on the 'mutually interrelated and mutually constituted' (Gouldner 1970: 493) nature of the subject/object relationship. For social science, conceptualizing the subject/object relationship in this manner must translate to an awareness that

individuals – including social scientists – ‘exist as both subject and object’ (Gouldner 1973b: 101).

The Concept of Mediation in Gouldner’s Works

Gouldner’s portrayal of the subject/object relationship reflects an awareness of the mediated nature of our social existence. Although, never directly addressed within his work, the concept of mediation permeates his analysis of post-World War II sociology and Marxism. In particular, Gouldner emphasized how the social organization of American society in the post-World War II era contributed to the formation and hegemony of a particular type of sociology, stating at the beginning of *The Coming Crisis* that ‘social science is a part of the social world as much as a conception of it’ (Gouldner 1970: 13). For Gouldner (1973b: 95), *The Coming Crisis* focuses on how the domain assumptions and sentiments of theorists act as a mediating force between the theorist and the social world. Yet, these domain assumptions themselves are a by-product of the relationship between the theorist and the larger society (Gouldner 1970: 25 – 35).

Reconstructing Sociology as a Way of Transforming Society

Recognizing the mediated nature of our social existence led Gouldner to emphasize the need to reconstruct the practice of sociology, in both its western, academic, and Marxist forms, in order to realize its liberative potentialities. While he neither denied the possibility of an emancipatory sociology nor dismissed the potential for sociologists and sociological research to contribute to the realization of more desirable social conditions, Gouldner emphatically maintained that existing sociological paradigms were not capable of this task. Both academic sociology and Marxism, in his view, failed to develop sufficient strategies to address the irrational elements contained within each. Instead, Gouldner believed that the reconstruction of the practice of sociology represented a necessary precondition to establishing the conditions which would permit sociologists to contribute to efforts to transform the social order in a way that fosters human liberation and emancipation.

The need to reconstruct sociology results, in part, from Gouldner's understanding of the mediation between subject and object and the implications this relationship has on the practice of sociology, especially one that seeks to bring about social change that improves social conditions. Gouldner rightfully understands the practice of sociology to be a representation of society, thus any change within the practice of sociology would translate to some change within the larger social

order. As he writes in his essay *The Politics of the Mind*, '[c]learly, we cannot have a reconstructed society without a critical revamping of our established ways of thinking about society (Gouldner 1973b: 83).' For him, the construction of a new society could not be accomplished in the absence of attempt to reconstruct the practice of sociology.

Addressing the mediation between the individual and society, to Gouldner, required restructuring the way sociologists and social theorists organized themselves. As he states, "my assumption is that it is organization, social organization, that provides the key mediation between social theory and social practice. Sociology does not need a Karl Marx or an Isaac Newton; it needs a V.I. Lenin (Gouldner 1973c: 80)." Gouldner clarified his exhortation of Lenin, citing the latter's organizational genius and elaborating that this use underscored the 'need to focus time and thought on clarifying the requisites of the community life of social theorists (Gouldner 1973a). Sociologists and social theorists needed to organize themselves into theoretical communities which would permit them to understand the conditions for limiting the irrational and ideological elements of the work and control influence from false consciousness. These collectives would be tasked with 'creating a rift with the social world' in order to struggle against 'the institutions and conditions that maintain [the dominant definitions of social reality]' and 'design and construct theoretical communities that nourish and support rational discourse in sociology and social theory (Gouldner 1973b: 79).

Historical developments within western society also lead Gouldner to pursue a reconstructed practice of sociology. Gouldner felt that the ability of existing social scientific and theoretical frameworks to address social and political problems had been surpassed by the socio-historical conditions in which he lived (Gouldner 1980: 27). The continuation of social problems thought to have been addressed within the proposed remedies provided by these frameworks demonstrates their inability to improve social conditions. It is only through the development of critiques of their positions, strategies, and organizational structures that inform the process of reconstructing sociological practices that these frameworks are of any use to the project of improving social conditions. Gouldner maintained that 'every society is a social reality in part constituted by a kind of everyday social theory, and that therefore the critique of society and of theory are inseparable (1973a: 84).'

In this sense Gouldner's work not only addressed the core issues facing the establishment of a social justice-themed sociology Adorno and Mannheim expose through their critiques of the social sciences, but in some ways mirrored the general thrust of Adorno – and his fellow members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory – and Mannheim's respective body of work. This aspect of Gouldner will be further pursued in the next chapter. Within this chapter I will highlight some of the more thematic similarities between Gouldner and Adorno and Mannheim, as well as their differences. Finally, I will examine how these

differences manifest within Gouldner's notion of a reflexive sociology and 'the Dark Side of the Dialectic' and what they imply for the future of sociology.

Chapter Four – Reflexive Sociology and the Emancipatory Potentiality of Sociology

*“I do not believe that social science will ‘save the world’ although I see nothing at all wrong with ‘trying to save the world’ – a phrase which I take here to mean the avoidance of war and the re-arrangement of human affairs in accordance with the ideals of human freedom and reason. Such knowledge as I have leads me to embrace rather pessimistic estimates of our chances. But even if that is where we now stand, still we must ask: If there **are** any ways out of the crises of our period by means of intellect, is it not up to the social scientist to state them?”*

– C. Wright Mills *The Sociological Imagination* (1959: 193) [emphasis in original]

This chapter explores Gouldner’s vision of a reconstructed sociology, which he felt represented the best hope for realizing the discipline’s liberative and emancipatory potentiality. Specifically, I will demonstrate how this vision provides vital insight to the establishment of a social justice-themed sociology. Gouldner’s vision, despite its seemingly incomplete and fragmented nature, reflects an understanding of the problematic nature of such efforts and represents a serious and sustained attempt to develop strategies for addressing them. This vision benefits from Gouldner’s engagement with both critical theory and the sociology of knowledge, which enables him to address the substance of their critiques while eschewing their unsatisfactory conclusions. In short, Gouldner maintained that establishing a ‘reflexive sociology’ that seeks to attain a new form of objectivity and directly engages the irrational elements of our attempts to

understand the social world holds out the possibility for realizing the liberative potential of social science and social theory.

Similarities and Dissimilarities between Adorno, Manneheim and Gouldner

The similarity between Gouldner's 'Last Project' and the work of Adorno and Mannheim extends beyond a shared concern for the relationship between theory and practice or recognition of the mediated nature of social life. Much of Gouldner's own analysis within his 'Last Project' is heavily indebted to the theoretical traditions Adorno and Mannheim represent and reflects a serious engagement with the problems presented by both. His brand of 'outlaw Marxism'¹³(Gouldner 1976) which explored the 'Dark Side of the Dialectic' (Gouldner 1975) facilitates an understanding of Gouldner's work as a purely American-ized sociology of knowledge or critical theory.

Gouldner openly expressed an affinity for Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, calling him the 'father of us all' in the beginning of *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* (Gouldner 1976: 22), the first book in the 'Dark Side of the Dialectic' trilogy. Mannheim's brand of sociology of knowledge permeates Gouldner's

¹³ Gouldner's use of the term 'outlaw Marxist' to describe himself and his theoretical perspective belies the influence Marxism and Marxian thought had on his own work. While it is tempting to view his early work as reflecting Functionalism's inherent conservatism, even then Gouldner felt he was a part of the Marxist and Marxian traditions (see - Stein, Maurice R. 1982. "Alvin W. Gouldner: The Dialectic of Marxism and Sociology - the Buffalo Years." *Theory and Society* 11(6):889 - 97.).

analysis of the institutional and organizational structure of both sociology and Marxism. In fact, the 'systematic analysis of the institutional organization within the framework of which intellectual activity is carried on', described as the primary concern of the sociology of knowledge by Louis Wirth (1985) in his preface to Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1985), could just as easily describe Gouldner's own work.

Gouldner also affirmed the 'lasting, if hybridized influence' (Gouldner 1976: 22) of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, with whom he worked alongside as a graduate student at Columbia (Jay 1982) and whose work he called 'the most creative school of social theorists in the twentieth century' (Gouldner 1973: 424) at the beginning of his 'Dark Side of the Dialectic' trilogy. His understanding of the divide between theory and practice is deeply indebted to their analysis of and theoretical reflections on the collapse of the Enlightenment Project (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Equally, his insistence that 'outlaw Marxists' need not offer a positive doctrine as a 'ransom' for their critique, but should persistently critic any and all positive doctrines to find their limits (Gouldner 1976: xvi) resembles the Frankfurt School's notion of a negative dialectic and its emphasis on negative thinking (Adorno 1973; Marcuse 1960).

The fact that Gouldner grappled with many of the similar issues and problems that characterized some of the very best social theoretical analysis of the 20th century underscores the importance of his contribution to both sociology and social theory. Yet, it is the dissimilarities with both Adorno and Mannheim that make Gouldner's theoretical perspective work intriguing for sociologists who wish to heed the call of the discipline's prophetic tradition (Friedrichs 1970). Within his engagement with the question of the relationship between theory and practice and his attempt to address the effect of mediation, Gouldner sought to fashion a vision for a reconstructed practice of sociology and social theory that he believed capable of providing sociologists and social theorists with the capacity to address the irrational elements of their work. Both his notion of a reflexive sociology and his exploration of the 'Dark Side of the Dialectic' offer insight into how he felt the practice of sociology could be reconstructed so as to help men 'in their struggle to take possession of what *is* theirs – society and culture – and of aiding them to know who they are and what they want (Gouldner 1970: 509).'

Gouldner's desire to establish theoretical communities highlights his divergent perspective on the role of intellectuals and the intelligentsia from Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. While both men shared a concern over the role of this social group played within the struggle to transform society, their analysis of, and attempt to come to terms with, the problematic features of sociology and social theory's normative foundations led them to draw incompatible conclusions

regarding intellectuals and the intelligentsia. According to Mannheim (1985: 153 - 164), only a class-less stratum of “socially unattached intelligentsia” possessed the capability of developing a sensitivity to the dynamic and holistic nature of society that allows us to diagnose social ills free from the mediating effects of society. In contrast, Gouldner explored the structural, historical and institutional conditions facilitating the rise of a critical class of intellectuals. This new class which in spite of being self-interested and flawed, promoted a culture of critical discourse that insisted on reflexivity as a part of discourse (Gouldner 1979).

Equally, further exploration into Gouldner’s concept of ‘the Dark Side of the Dialectic’ reveal important differences with the theoretical perspective promoted by the Frankfurt School, especially Adorno. Rather than submit to a ‘bitter negative dialectic’, Gouldner uses his exploration of the irrational aspects of Marxism to draw out the caged, ‘nightmare’ system that exists in all theoretical systems and to attempt to develop a new type of objectivity for the social sciences that understands this tragic side (Chriss 2002). These aspects of Gouldner’s thought not only mark a difference with the Frankfurt School’s notion of critical theory, but also represent key features of his conception of a reconstructed sociology.

Gouldner's Vision of a Reflexive Sociology and the Pursuit of Social Justice

According to Gouldner, his vision of a reflexive sociology represented a crucial step toward the realizing sociology's liberative potentialities (Gouldner 1973b). He maintained that this approach to the study of society improved sociologist's and social theorist's ability to acknowledge and come to terms with the mediated nature of social life. His vision of a reflexive sociology, while perceived as a fragmented and incomplete framework primarily expressed in the final chapter of *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Lemert 1982), is central to his desire to reconstruct the practice of sociology.

While the idea of Reflexive Sociology is the focal point of the final chapter of *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Gouldner 1970), the treatment of the topic there offers only a partial outline of what this approach to sociology would look like. Here much of the discussion of a Reflexive Sociology emphasizes its ability to draw out and scrutinize the domain assumptions within sociological research which contaminate our ability to understand the social world and devise strategies to address its problematic features. Examining his treatment of reflexive sociology within his other works, and how these works relate back to his notion of a reflexive sociology, reveals a much fuller vision of this approach to

sociology and deepens our understanding of how it is essential to the future prospects of the discipline.

In a reply to the critics of *The Coming Crisis*, Gouldner (Gouldner 1973b) directly connects the project of reconstructing a reflexive sociology to the larger project of reconstructing society, giving the project the important task of establishing the prerequisites for rational discourse about the social world. Unlike the methodological dualism that characterizes mainstream, value-free, sociology, a reflexive sociology willingly acknowledges the presence of outside influences on social scientific research. Yet, rather than seek ways for eliminating these influences, which would deny the mediation of the subject and object, Gouldner (1970) seeks to enhance our self-awareness of these influences so that their effect on our understanding of society and ourselves can become part of the larger discussion regarding its future course and direction. Maintaining a recognition of the mediation between the individual (subject) and society (object) represents a key feature of Gouldner's reflexive sociology.

While theoretical collectives provided the organization structure within which intellectual activity aimed at altering existing social conditions is to be pursued (Gouldner 1973b), his notion of reflexivity represented the intellectual perspective that characterizes the work within these collectives. The two are deeply connected. Without developing a self-awareness regarding the inherent

limitations of our theorizing about the world, there is little reason to hold out hope that such theoretical collectives would possess the prerequisite characteristics for engaging in rational discourse. These collectives are merely an organizational tool that seeks to address our mediated social existence. They still must possess a shared understanding of the mediated relationship between the subject and object, which is an essential feature of a reflexive sociology (Gouldner 1976: 11).

By possessing a disposition toward understanding the interconnectedness of our individual selves and the larger society, a reflexive sociology, according to Gouldner, remains vigilant of a gap between theory and practice. Its recognition of the historically evolving character of sociology and social theory within a historically evolving society (Gouldner 1970: 507) establishes the need to continually explore the gap between theory and practice within the specific historical, cultural, and political contexts in which it exists. A reflexive sociology requires an analytic outlook that is aware of its historically contingent nature and possesses a willingness to continually re-analyze its conclusions and actions based on changes in the larger social structure. In essence a reflexive sociology possesses an analytic disposition that is never in repose, but remains engaged with the larger social structure in which it is embedded.

Yet, Gouldner's conception of a reflexive sociology is not merely an approach to sociology or a technique to the study of society, rather Gouldner views it as a

total *praxis* representing a way of life¹⁴. To bracket off the non-academic aspects of the lives of sociologists and social theorists would run counter to understanding ourselves and our intellectual framework as the result of the mediation between the individual and society. Thus, Gouldner extends the realm of concern for a reflexive sociology to include seemingly mundane topics involving university life and professional associations. In so doing, Gouldner reminds us that it is the social world closest to us that impact us the most. Yet, it is also in those areas closest to us that we possess the greatest ability to change (Gouldner 1970: 503).

Gouldner's reflexive sociology is also connected to his notion of 'the Dark Side of the Dialectic'. It is through the discussion of a reflexive sociology that Gouldner begins to construct his outlaw Marxist persona and formulate his Dark Side of the Dialectic trilogy. Yet, the type of new objectivity that Gouldner attributes to this analytic disposition – the openness to hostile information (Gouldner 1975) – first finds expression within the concluding chapter of *The Coming Crisis* (Gouldner 1970: 499). The Dark Side of the Dialectic trilogy also represents a continuation of the same analytic approach used in *The Coming Crisis* – a demystification of Marxism with an understanding that it has failed to produce the human liberation it has promised (Gouldner 1976: xii).

¹⁴ When viewed this way, Gouldner's notion of a reflexive sociology bears some similarities to Gillian Rose's concept of 'the broken middle' (see - Rose, Gillian. 1981. *Hegel Contra Sociology*. London: Athlone.). Both considered their analytic approach to be a way of life constantly mindful of the gap that exists in our ethical and moral activities (see - Tubbs, Nigel. 2000. "Mind the Gap: The Philosophy of Gillian Rose." *Thesis Eleven* (60):42 - 60.).

Exploring the Dark Side of the Dialectic

Gouldner presents two conceptions of ‘the Dark Side of the Dialectic’ within his body of work. One is embodied within the metaphor of Marx’s illegitimate son, Henry Demuth, and his explorations of the irrational side of Marxism within his ‘Dark Side of the Dialectic Trilogy’. The other, expressed in an earlier article, presents an understanding of the dark side of the dialectic project as an attempt to create a new objectivity. Despite their seemingly disparate nature, it is necessary to understand how these depictions of the ‘the Dark Side of the Dialectic’ are connected in order to fully understand the concept. Considering the concept only in relation to his critique of Marxism promotes an understanding of this perspective that is too similar to Mannheim’s ‘Marxian critique of Marxism’ in *Ideology and Utopia* (1985), or overemphasizes the influence of the Frankfurt School’s ‘Negative Dialectic’¹⁵ on Gouldner’s own theoretical perspective.

Gouldner’s ‘Dark Side of the Dialectic’ trilogy engages in a negative critique of Marxism that explores the problems of assuming the unification between theory and practice. As Gouldner writes in the preface of *The Dialectic of Technology*

¹⁵ While the concept of Negative Dialectic is most closely associated with Adorno and his book of the same name, other members of the Frankfurt School cast the general thrust of their collective project of critical theory – to the extent that they attempted to create and promote a unified perspective of critical theory (see Held, David. 1980. *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. for differences on between their individual types of critical theory) – in terms of promoting negative thinking (see Marcuse, Herbert. 1960. *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.)

and Ideology, the first installment of the trilogy, this 'larger project, is a demystification of Marxism ... an exploration of the limits of Marxist consciousness (Gouldner 1976: xii).' A core tenet of his dark side of the dialectic is that all human activity can be characterized in terms of its contradictory nature – especially those actions that seek to transform society or improve existing social conditions. Such actions, Gouldner suggests, possess an inherent contradiction – a tension between the whole and the part – which serves as a mechanism for partisan groups to promote their transformative projects as being beneficial to all social groups despite being grounded within the interests of a particular social group. This tension legitimates the moral foundations of such projects while obscuring their true socially mediated origins, which is a necessary precondition for the former.

The chapter on 'Nightmare Marxism' in *The Two Marxisms* (1985) perhaps best exemplifies the analytic results of the dark side of the dialectic. In this chapter Gouldner writes:

“Every theoretical system has another system inside it struggling to get out. And every system has a nightmare: that the caged system will breakout. ... The systems struggling to get out are not only threats to the parent system’s identity but are also necessary to it. The cage and the caged help form one another; the repressed systems also help make the repressor system what it is.” –
(Gouldner 1980: 380)

By exploring the 'dark side of the dialectic', Gouldner uncovered Marxism's caged system – that the rise of socialism does not transfer power to the hands of the proletariat, but rather establishes the state as the dominant force in society. In this nightmare Marxism, the demise of the bourgeoisie leads to an increase in human domination rather than the emancipation and liberation of mankind. Thus, to explore the dark side of the dialectic means to acknowledge and analytically engage in a theory's caged system, recognizing that every system possesses the inclination to undermine its stated goals and objectives.

Prior to developing the 'Dark Side of the Dialectic' trilogy, Gouldner presented a different conception of the dark side of the dialectic, one that did not limit itself to

an exploration of Marxism, but capable of being applied to all theoretical and scientific frameworks. The subtitle of the article, 'Toward a New Objectivity', emphasizes the purpose of developing this type of analytic method. Far beyond a mere engagement with Marxism, Gouldner sought to develop a new objectivity based on an awareness of 'the limits that interests and desire impose on rational discourse' (Gouldner 1975: 7) rather than a false notion of neutrality. This perspective sought to encourage an openness to accept the reality of our historical situation and to speak the bad news regarding how this affects transformative projects aimed at alleviating some social ill.

The conception of the dark side of the dialectic developed within this article further differentiates Gouldner's work from the 'bitter negative dialectic' of Adorno and the Frankfurt School. To Gouldner, the type of negative dialectic developed by Adorno leads to a 'burned out deadness, without hope for a future (Gouldner 1975: 13).' He contrasts this with his conception of a 'dark dialectic' which acknowledges the grim nature of our historical situation, the failure of historical alternatives and their internal contradictions, and concedes the bleakness of the perceptible future. Yet, this dark dialectic presents a way to re-think these alternatives in order to recapture what is good and useful within them by recognizing 'the bad news' and acknowledging- our mistakes.

Gouldner's notion of the dark side of the dialectic is especially important to movements seeking to radically transform society, such as those emphasized by Feagin and Vera's notion of *Liberation Sociology* (Feagin 2001b). Such unapologetically partisan agendas possess a tendency to over exaggerate research and information favorable to their cause or effort in hopes of further garnering support or demonstrating their efficacy. They are also likely to overlook their internal flaws and dismiss attempts to develop any measure of self-criticism. Indeed, self-criticism is often seen as detrimental to these movements in that it is viewed as promoting division within the movement and fostering further fragmentation of the left.

Conclusion

What the analysis within this thesis should make clear is that the contemporary discussion surrounding the role sociological research plays in producing knowledge useful to the pursuit of social justice fails to appreciate some of the most fundamental aspects of both sociology and social justice. A central premise of the discipline of sociology is that people are affected by social conditions. Yet, the discourse of social justice attempts to deny the presence of this feature within efforts to advance social justice – and within our understanding of society. To infer that the unification between the theory and practice of social justice can occur within the context of a highly flawed and unjust society illustrates this point. Even if sociologists recognized the extent to which our understanding of the social world is conditioned by our existence within that same social order, it is doubtful that sociologists committed to social justice recognize how this is fundamentally problematic nature for such projects – especially those that seek to radically transform the existing social order.

Thus, if sociologists are truly serious about using their work to improve social conditions, the practice of sociology would reflect an awareness that such projects always possess irrational elements which limit their ability to achieve their stated goals and objectives. In this sense, this type of sociological practice would be characterized by an awareness that social justice can never be fully attained, that, at a minimum, some residual injustice will always be present due

to inherently flawed nature of such projects. A central focus of this practice of sociology would be on the effect of social mediation on such projects, as well as a commitment to continually exploring the gap between theory and practice. The goal of this would be to produce sociological knowledge that reflects on, rather than representing a reflection of, the current state of American society.

Practicing sociology in the manner described above would necessitate a different definition of social justice then delineated at the beginning of this thesis. If sociologists acknowledge the impossibility of social justice, then it would be more useful to define the pursuit of social justice negatively. To say that sociology is concerned with social justice, then, would mean that the practice of sociology reflects an awareness that the potential for producing injustice pervades all aspects of activities carried out in the name of social justice. Thus, a truly social justice-themed sociology would be one that focuses on the existence of contradictions between facts and norms, rather than producing a set of social facts in support of particular normative claims.

A re-appreciation of Alvin W. Gouldner's work and his contribution to American sociology would make a significant contribution to establishing this type of sociological practice. This thesis is born out of a desire for such a project to take hold and represents an initial contribution to its development. This project would

have to try to reproduce the spirit of Gouldner's theoretical perspective while eschewing some of the more problematic aspects of his body of work.

While Gouldner's work offers many insights into both the problematic nature of using existing social scientific paradigms to construct a social-justice themed sociology, his own work possesses a number of shortcomings and flaws that make a verbatim revival of Gouldner undesirable. Yet, the overall spirit of his work – particularly as it is embodied in his attempt to establish a reflexive sociology and his exploration of 'the Dark Side of the Dialectic' – merit a revival much in the same way the renewed interest in the work of C. Wright Mills displayed by sociologists, social theorists, and intellectual historians seeks to accomplish more than a rote application of 'the sociological imagination' (Lemert 2005). Much of this recent work on C. Wright Mills attempts to re-evaluate the general thrust of Mills' based on our current knowledge that what we have long accepted as the defining interpretation of Mills is extremely flawed (Dandaneau 2006; Summers 2007) and demonstrates how the spirit of Mills' work can help us understand our current circumstances (Dandaneau 2001). Likewise, a revival of the basic spirit of Gouldner's work may help sociologists in their quest to fulfill the discipline's essential task – producing knowledge about society that leads to improving social conditions. However, such work must be mindful of Gouldner's own shortcomings.

In spite of the lengthy critiques of positivism and functionalism, Gouldner's work retains far too much of what he saw as most problematic for these types of sociological paradigms for his work to represent a verbatim guide for establishing an emancipatory sociology capable of liberating sociology, and by extension society, from its repressive tendencies. His own critique of Parsons contains a number of flaws that highlight some of the errors and limitations of his analysis. In particular, Gouldner never fully broke free from the methodological positivism that characterized his earlier works (Steinmetz 2002). This hidden trace of positivism within his work is apparent in his attack on Parsons's work for an apparent lack of empirical data (Gouldner 1970: 207 – 209). Likewise, he conflates positivism with functionalism, seemingly oblivious to the depth of positivism's penetration within the unconscious of American sociology in the post-World War II era (Steinmetz 2005).

Gouldner's vision for a reconstructed sociology relies on a weak notion of objectivity. It is perhaps insufficient to say that the social sciences can attain a newfound sense of objectivity merely by being open to hostile information and the bad news about their activity and involvement in the world (Gouldner 1985). This simplistic notion of objectivity glosses over the epistemological challenge of proving our truthseeking claims. Thus, reviving the spirit of Gouldner's work would have to be preceded by an attempt to revise his notion of objectivity in order to give it more a substantial epistemological foundation.

Furthermore, the passage of time itself has rendered certain aspects of Gouldner's work obsolete, and given birth to new problems that Gouldner could not possibly have foreseen, nor accounted for within his body of work. Gouldner famously wrote that social theorists theorize 'within the sound of guns' and amidst a 'crumbling social matrix of paralyzed urban centers and battered campuses' (1970: vii). Yet, sociologists and social theorists today theorize to the hue of flat screen computer monitors and constant connectivity provided by smartphones and social networking sites within the matrix of an increasingly simulated existence (Baudrillard 1994) that suggests that the need for society to reconcile reality with the image it projects of itself (ideology) may no longer be of consequence.

Clearly it is unlikely that a relentless critique of functionalism and Parsonian grand theory, or of the pitfalls of the entwinement of sociological work and the welfare state, represent what is most needed within sociology today. Instead, it is perhaps most pressing to understand the short comings of Gouldner's own generation of social theorists and sociologists, who have now come to occupy prestigious positions within the discipline and represent the established theoretical perspectives. While this generation produced what is perhaps the last great body of theoretical work within the social sciences, and produced many of the sociological and theoretical perspectives competing for hegemony today, their work must also be seen as contributing to the inability of the social sciences

to sufficiently address the myriad problems facing modern society today. In fact, the recent global economic crisis, and our inability to develop coherent strategies to resolve it, exemplifies the ineffectualness of contemporary social science. Thus, it is the spirit of Gouldner's work, and not a rote regurgitation of it, that is most needed today.

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