

The Sociological Prospect

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Résumé de l'article

Au moment de son émergence comme nouvelle science sociale, la sociologie a été caractérisée par la coexistence de schémas de pensée disparates et contradictoires. Depuis deux décennies, un important travail est en cours afin de construire des fondements plus solides à de futures théories sociologiques. Ce texte présente une vue d'ensemble de certains paradigmes de la discipline et attribue une place distincte au marxisme en tant que théorie explicative majeure encore loin d'être dépassée. L'avenir de la sociologie est entrevue à travers une période de renouveau probable que l'auteur espère n'être pas trop lointaine.

The Sociological Prospect*

Tom BOTTOMORE

From the time, a century ago, when sociology was constituted as a new social science, it has been characterized by the coexistence of quite distinct, disparate and often conflicting schemes of thought. Marx, Weber, Durkheim, the evolutionists in sociology and anthropology, as well as many lesser figures, under the influence of different intellectual traditions and socio-political circumstances, all developed their own conceptions of the scope and method of the discipline and formulated, from within these diverse paradigms, explanatory propositions of greater or lesser generality and persuasiveness. As Szacki¹ has remarked, 'sociology as a scientific discipline has never formed an organic whole' and its development has 'been strongly multi-linear', so that a question always remains about how far there is 'a real cumulation of knowledge'.

1 The development of sociological thought

The multiplicity of paradigms has not only persisted but increased and in the past two decades, sociology as a whole has come to appear as a totally de-centered medley (or, less politely, a hodge-podge) of ideas in which, at best, a vague notion

* En même temps que le texte que nous publions, Tom Bottomore déposait la version finale de son livre *The Socialist Economy: Theory and Practice*, à paraître chez Harvester-Wheatsheaf, en 1990. Il y discute entre autres de plusieurs questions mises de l'avant par les réformistes en Union Soviétique aujourd'hui et suggère la formation de gouvernements de coalition, une orientation d'ailleurs adoptée présentement dans la majorité des pays d'Europe de l'Est. Nous convions le lecteur à lire ce livre dans le prolongement du présent article. Par ailleurs, Tom Bottomore travaille à la réécriture de son ouvrage sur les classes sociales, en y introduisant une analyse des bouleversements que vivent en ce moment les pays d'Europe de l'Est: il devrait paraître à l'automne 1990, chez Simon and Schuster.

¹ J. Szacki, 'The history of sociology and substantive sociological theories', in T. Bottomore, S. Nowak and M. Sokolowska (eds), *Sociology: The State of the Art*, London, Sage, 1982.

of the 'social', as contrasted with the 'economic' or the 'political', plays some kind of unifying role.

The consequences of this situation are evident in many areas, some of which I shall briefly consider before approaching more directly the question of how sociology may develop in the future. First, there has emerged a greatly heightened interest in the history of sociology and especially in its major thinkers, whose works are continually reassessed and reinterpreted. From one aspect, this has little to do with the development of sociological theory but is simply a form of historical study: intellectual or cultural history, or the history of ideas. I do not intend to denigrate this kind of study or to question its interest; after all, I have done a fair amount of it myself. Furthermore, the reinterpretation of earlier schemes of thought itself entails some theoretical reflection, and a historical and critical analysis may sometimes be deliberately conceived as an element in a new theoretical construction. This is clearly the case, for example, with Habermas's recent work² in which an exhaustive critique of the idea of the rationalization of the modern world, from Weber to Parsons, leads to the outlining of a new theory of rationalization which itself, however, involves some kind of 'return to Marx'.

Dissatisfaction with the motley and disorderly state of sociological thought has led, secondly, to an intense preoccupation with problems of method and, more generally, with the philosophy of science. Much of what now passes for sociological theory is in fact either preliminary to it, an exploration of the conditions of possibility of any systematic social knowledge, or a second-order reflection upon the philosophical foundations of past theories and paradigms³. In this field, as in the history of sociological thought with which it is to some extent interwoven, an amazingly varied and extensive literature has appeared during the past two decades in which positivism, scientism, realism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, structuralism, conceptions of human agency and social action, and other related or derived views are expounded, criticized, revised and reformulated with the intention of providing a more secure basis for the sociological theories of the future, at least in the sense of a more assured criterion for distinguishing between central and peripheral problems or, more broadly, between 'good' and 'bad' theories.

These methodological disputes have entered into the core of sociological thought today⁴, and the conceptions of the various schools, in prescriptive and

² J. Habermas, (1981) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2 vol., 1984, 1987.

³ T. Benton, *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

⁴ W. Outhwaite, *New Philosophies of Social Science*, London, Macmillan, 1987.

programmatic forms, have, to a considerable extent, taken over from the construction of substantive theories. What should also be remarked is that the present methodological controversies revive and often reiterate earlier debates. The critique of positivism began long ago, as did the hermeneutic interpretations of social life, the opposition between 'individualist' and 'collectivist' explanations, and the *Methodenstreit* (originally in economics) between the advocates of pure theory and those who defended an empirical, historical method. It is indeed striking how far the preoccupation of many present-day theorists with the history of sociological thought and with the philosophy of science reveals an 'eternal recurrence' of the same central problems, so that we can not only say that the development of sociology is multi-linear but also that it has a cyclical character. One example of this is the revival of very wide-ranging and complex debates about individual action in relation to social structure, in other sciences as well as sociology and notably in economics, where the influential model of rational choice analysis has a clear relation to earlier formulations of 'methodological individualism'⁵. In sociology, the controversy over individual and social structure has followed a tortuous but recognizable path since the turn of the century: from Simmel's⁶ contrast between the individual as a product of society and as an autonomous being, as well as Weber's emphasis on the interpretation of individual action, to the opposition between a 'sociology of social system' and a 'sociology of social action'⁷. Out of this long dispute there have developed such new conceptions as Touraine's view of sociology as the study of collective action or practices (succinctly expounded in Touraine⁸), and exemplified in the new social movements, and at the same time as a specific kind of intervention in the social process; and Giddens's concept of 'structuration' to describe the process of social reproduction in which the interaction of social actors and the long-term reproduction of institutions, as well as contingent historical factors, play a part⁹.

Undoubtedly, historical studies, critical reflection on the major sociological thinkers of the past and philosophical explorations of the 'logic of sociology'

⁵ The term was first used, I think, by Schumpeter (1908) in the context of Austrian marginalist theory and the *Methodenstreit*.. See B. Hindess, *Choice, Rationality and Social Theory*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1988.

⁶ G. Simmel, 'How is Society Possible?', in H. K. Wolff (ed.), (1908) *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1959.

⁷ A. Dawe, 'Theories of Social Action', in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet (eds), *A History of Sociological Analysis*, New York, Basic Books, 1978.

⁸ A. Touraine, *Pour la sociologie*, Paris, Seuil, 1974.

⁹ Giddens's conception, in turn, has affinities with the ideas of 'destruction' and 'restructuration' expounded by G. Gurvitch (*Traité de sociologie*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1958), though it is more elaborately developed in the context of a different paradigm from that which Gurvitch outlined in his analysis of the various 'levels' of social life.

contribute in various ways to the development of sociological thought, often enough in the direction of confirming its diversity or displaying its cyclical course but sometimes, as I have suggested, by preparing the way for an alternative, substantive theory. In Britain, Giddens's sustained effort to establish a new sociological paradigm has in fact followed such a course, beginning with a critical reconsideration of earlier sociological thinkers¹⁰, incorporating much methodological reflection¹¹, and issuing in the construction of a new theoretical scheme¹² which is intended to provide a framework for the formulation of some explanatory propositions concerning actual modern, and perhaps also earlier, societies.

More recently, Giddens¹³ has set out his views on the future of sociology in nine theses which provide a convenient starting point for my own reflections on the sociological prospect. In the first place, I do not think it is at all likely that sociology will 'increasingly shed the residue of nineteenth and early twentieth century social thought'¹⁴. The growing interest in the history of sociological thought and the multiplying reinterpretations of the 'classics' suggest an opposite conclusion. Rather, it is the sociological conceptions of the 1950s and their residues which have been, or are being, shed. However, my main argument is a different one. Among the sociological theories of the nineteenth century which remain vigorously alive, Marxism holds a preeminent place. It is, at least in some of its forms, the most powerful explanatory theory yet constructed in sociology, and a great deal of the history of sociological thought can be written in terms of the confrontation and argument between Marxism and other theories. This also suggests some qualification of Giddens's second thesis, to the effect that a new synthesis will emerge¹⁵. The nature of this synthesis is only briefly indicated and it seems to involve a methodological stance rather than a substantive theory; a stance, moreover, which too easily dismisses alternative views in referring to the 'dissolution of naturalistic conceptions of sociology'¹⁶ at a time when the very influential, realist philosophy of science presents strong arguments for naturalism, also relating it to Marxism¹⁷. For my part, I do not think a new

¹⁰ A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

¹¹ A. Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, London Hutchinson, 1976; A. Giddens, 'Positivism and its critics', in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet (eds), *op.cit.*

¹² A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984.

¹³ A. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 29-32.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁷ R. Bhaskar, 'Entries on 'Determinism' and 'Realism'', in T. Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983.

synthesis is at all likely in the foreseeable future. Indeed, I have a very different conception of the development of sociology; I see it as a continuing contest between rival theories which are to be judged ultimately by their explanatory power and, to some degree, by the vigor and interest of the research programmes which they generate¹⁸ Much of the confusion in recent sociology arises, I think, from a failure to grasp the essential function of theories in explaining the phenomena (entities, events, processes) in a particular domain and, hence, also defining the central problems of that domain; also, it substitutes for theory, in this sense, an explication of concepts and methodological explorations.

2 The marxist theory of modern society

From this standpoint, Marxism, where it has not itself been diverted into philosophical speculation or transformed into a purely political doctrine, occupies a distinctive place as the source of major explanatory propositions. Beginning from the concept of a mode of production as the form in which human beings, as part of nature, interact with their natural environment, the theory sets out to explain the structure of different forms of society and the transitions from one form to another. Much of this, of course, has been contested or rejected outright, especially with regard to earlier forms of society and historical stages; but with reference to modern history, Marxist theory has produced major explanations of the course of social development which are very far from being overthrown or surpassed: regarding the rise of capitalism, the growth of the labour movement in the nineteenth century, the later development of the capitalist economy¹⁹, the nature of economic crises, the role of the capitalist state in imperialist expansion, and the connection between imperialism and war in the twentieth century²⁰. In these fields and others, the Marxist theory of modern society has profoundly

¹⁸ On this latter point, I follow to some extent the arguments in I. Lakatos, 'Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programmes', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

¹⁹ In R. Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981 (1910)) for example, and his later discussion of 'organized capitalism', as well as in some more recent commentaries on Marx's *Grundrisse*, on which K. Kühne, (Economics and Marxism, London, Macmillan, 1979, vol. 1, p. 5) observes that 'despite his reticence on the future of society, Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, did at least sketch the transformation of the social system as far as the era of automation'.

²⁰ See J. A. Schumpeter's essay on imperialism, which recognized the importance and, with some qualifications, the accuracy of the Marxist analysis: 'On the Sociology of Imperialisms', in *Imperialism and Social Classes*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1951 (1919); *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 6th edn, London, Allen & Unwin, 1987 (1942).

influenced later research and analysis to a much greater extent than any alternative theory (I shall consider below some particular aspects of that influence) and, notwithstanding all the critical assaults that have been made upon it since the beginning of this century, I do not think there has yet emerged a new theoretical scheme with comparable explanatory powers.

This is not to say that Marxism is now securely established as a comprehensive or dominant social theory, still less as an infallible guide to social action. For one thing, Marxism itself, through unceasing reinterpretations often influenced by conceptions introduced from other schemes of social scientific thought and from new philosophies of science, has become increasingly diverse and can probably now best be viewed as a broad paradigm within which very different theoretical orientations are possible. One such orientation, which I have implicitly adopted here and explicitly developed elsewhere, is that which elicits from the diffuse body of Marxist ideas a naturalistic sociological theory in which the notion of an underlying structure of social life, constituted primarily by the mode of production, has a central place.

However, this conception of Marxism as a distinctive sociological theory poses a series of questions. It has to be judged, like all sociological theories, by its explanatory powers and this raises, in the first place, the contentious issue of the nature and scope of sociological explanation in general. I have argued above that Marxist theory has explained many important phenomena and processes in the development of modern societies; however, the explanations are by no means as secure or uncontested as would be desirable in a mature science of society. Like other sociological explanations, they cannot be strengthened or weakened by any kind of experiment; therefore, they have to be judged by the standards of what is possible in the social sciences, taking into account the complexity of the object of study and the specific factor of conscious human action, by individuals and groups, within a social structure. Long ago, in discussing social change, I observed that the continuity of a society is much affected by the emergence of new generations which are never completely socialized 'in the sense that they exactly reenact the social life of their predecessor', but are innovative in partly contingent ways²¹. This constituent feature of human societies, which is at the center of the apparently inexhaustible debate about human agency and social structure, can best be conceptualized, I think, by saying that there are real structures of social life which are not, however reducible to the events which they generate, the actual pattern of events also being influenced by diverse contingent factors. Social determinism has then to be conceived as 'the tendencies of mechanisms rather than as the invariant conjunctions of events', and social laws as setting limits rather

²¹ T. Bottomore, (1962) *Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1987, 3rd edn, p. 281.

than prescribing 'uniquely fixed results'; it can plausibly be maintained that Marx's own method, as well as the method of much later Marxist sociology, is realist in this sense²². The limits of sociological theory indicate that sociological explanation, as I have frequently argued, needs always to be complemented and often corrected, no doubt, by detailed historical investigations; I shall return later to this question which has a particular relevance to Marxist theory.

Beyond these issues concerning the overall credibility of a naturalistic Marxist sociology, which needs especially to be pursued through a comparison of the range and plausibility of Marxist explanations with those of other sociological theories, there are specific criticisms of the incompleteness of Marxist theory, two of which I propose to consider here. The first is that Marxist analysis has consistently neglected and failed to recognize the importance of the nation state in the development of modern societies. Unfortunately, much of the criticism itself neglects the contribution that Marxist social theory has in fact made to an understanding of nationalist movements and the rise of nation states. It is particularly surprising that the critics should have ignored so completely the major study by Otto Bauer²³ which sets out, in some detail, a Marxist theory of the development of nation states and anticipates, in several respects, a good deal of later writing on the subject, as the following excerpt will illustrate: 'every new economic order creates new forms of state constitution and new rules for demarcating political structures [...] with the development of the capitalist mode of social production and the extension of the national cultural community [...] the tendency to national unity on the basis of national education gradually becomes stronger than the particularistic tendency of the disintegration of the old nation, based upon common descent, into increasingly sharply differentiated local groups'²⁴. It is also worth noting that many later writers adopted a quasi-Marxist view of the formation of nation states in the nineteenth century, associating it with the rise of the 'third estate'²⁵ and the expansion of capitalism²⁶, although others have chosen to relate it to industrialism rather than capitalism (without any great gain in explanatory power) while emphasizing, as Bauer did, the important role of national education²⁷.

²² R. Bhaskar, *op.cit.*

²³ O. Bauer, (1907) *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Vienna, Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1924, 2nd edn.

²⁴ Translated in T. Bottomore and P. Goode (eds), *Austro-Marxism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 102-109.

²⁵ H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York, Collier Books, 1967.

²⁶ C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975.

²⁷ I have discussed various analyses of nationalism and the formation of nation states in T. Bottomore, *Political Sociology*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, chap. 5.

Marxism has also contributed in another way to a theory of the nation state and international conflict through the theories of imperialism, notably that of Hilferding²⁸ which emphasized the enhanced role of the nation state in the development of the capitalist economy. Hilferding went on to trace the growth of state intervention in the economy after the First World War, in an economic system which he called 'organized capitalism', and in his last writings began an analysis of the 'totalitarian state economy', as a phenomenon which made necessary a radical revision of the Marxist theory of the state to take into account the 'growing independence of state power'²⁹. I am not saying that these various writings constitute a systematic Marxist theory of nationalism and the nation state, but they do provide many more elements of such a theory than most critics seem to have realized; elements which are certainly capable of development into a more adequate theoretical scheme which would take account, as other theories generally do not, of the diverse historical circumstances determined, to a large extent, by the class structure in which modern nation states were created and of the differences between the types of nation states which now exist: the capitalist state, the socialist state, and the state in countries of the Third World.

A second lacuna in Marxist theory up to the present time, however, is the absence of any thorough analysis, not just of the socialist state but of socialist society as a whole. The early Marxists could not, of course, undertake any such study because no socialist society existed, though they may perhaps be criticized for not having more seriously considered, during the first decade of this century when the growth of mass socialist parties in some countries made the transition to socialism a practical issue, how this kind of society, particularly a socialist economy, would actually function — how it would be organized and regulated, and what the distinctive institutions of this new civilization would be. In any case, the existence of socialist societies since 1917, and on a world scale since 1945, as well as the course which their development has followed, pose major questions for sociological analysis and particularly for Marxist sociology. So far, however, studies in this field have occupied a very small place in Marxist theory and the principal analyses have been made from other theoretical standpoints, often Weberian in inspiration, as, for example, in Raymond Aron's account of the two forms of development of industrial society³⁰ and the contrast he draws between the

²⁸ R. Hilferding, (1910) *Finance Capital*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, part V.

²⁹ R. Hilferding, *Das historische Problem*, Unfinished manuscript, 1941, first published in *Zeitschrift für Politik* (New Series), vol. 1, 1954 and partly translated in T. Bottomore (ed.), *Interpretations of Marx*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988.

³⁰ This issue was also approached in another way, further influenced by Marxist thought, in B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, New York,

unified elite in the state socialist societies and the plurality of elites in the Western capitalist democracies. I shall not attempt to predict how a Marxist theory of socialist societies might develop in the future, but two things at least are clear. First, the subject is of major importance; and in the present conditions of rapid change, it poses a host of new questions, some of which raise particular difficulties for Marxist sociology, notably with respect to social classes and historical transitions. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that class structure and class relations have changed significantly in the capitalist societies (though classes have not disappeared, least of all the capitalist class), the main problem is the re-emergence of classes (according to many studies, from Djilas³¹ to Konrád and Szelényi³²) or at any rate, quite certainly, of a governing elite in the state socialist societies. How can Marxist theory explain this phenomenon? Or rather, what reconstruction of the theory is needed in order to analyze the process adequately and can this be accomplished without profoundly changing the whole Marxist paradigm? The answer is not clear, neither is there a convincing, alternative theory of classes and elites which we could confidently adopt, although there is still much that we can learn from Mosca, as a recent study by Albertoni³³ shows, and from Schumpeter's³⁴ essay on classes.

The problem of historical transitions is equally difficult. The revolutions of the twentieth century did not create socialist societies in the sense which Marx, the early Marxists or most socialists attributed to the term and the question is whether, and in what way, Marxist theory can explain the kind of social development which did actually take place. Any such explanation can only come from a much more systematic elaboration of the theory of the nation state, as I have already indicated, as well as a more developed sociological analysis of revolutions which so far exists only in a fragmentary form. The most recent changes in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe pose further problems. It is not excluded that if the communist monopoly of power comes to an end in some of these countries (as has already happened in Poland) there will be a partial, perhaps in some cases an extensive, restoration of a capitalist economy and it may be argued, though this is not my own view, that the whole conception of 'socialism with markets' points in that direction. However, if the development of society in the socialist part of the world does follow such a course, it is evident

Beacon Press, 1966. This book presents a study of the three main routes to the modern industrial world.

³¹ M. Djilas, *The New Class*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1957.

³² G. Konrad and I. Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1979.

³³ E. A. Albertoni, *Mosca and the Theory of Elitism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

³⁴ J. A. Schumpeter, (1927) 'Social Classes in an Ethnically Homogeneous Environment', in *Imperialism and Social Classes*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1951.

that the Marxist theory of history, even if it is conceived as stating 'tendencies' which may or may not work themselves out, will need radical revision in ways that seem to me, however, still unclear and disputed.

The problems of Marxist sociology in explaining the more recent development of both capitalism and socialism should, in any case, be seen in the context of the kinds of explanation which alternative theories are able to generate; from this point of view, I consider it very unlikely that Marxist theory will, in the foreseeable future, lose its distinctive character, be completely superseded, or be absorbed into some 'new synthesis'. On the contrary, as the preceding discussion suggests, I expect the diversity and, to a large extent, the diffuseness of sociology to persist, though it is to be hoped at least that it will not increase; it will no doubt continue to be influenced by historical studies of the discipline, reinterpretations of the classics, and controversies in the philosophy of science. The most significant advance that might be made, in my view, would be a more systematic comparison of the explanatory powers of different theories, as well as the underlying assumptions of different paradigms and, in general, a more deliberate effort to bring rival theories into confrontation with each other, difficult though that may be.

3 The relevance of interdisciplinary studies

The difficulties might be diminished somewhat, however, if we were to examine sociological theory in relation to particular areas of enquiry where it impinges upon other disciplines. From the beginning, sociology, as a putative general science of society, was closely involved with other more specialized fields of research: Marx and Weber roamed freely across disciplinary boundaries and Durkheim founded the *Année Sociologique*, as a journal in which sociologists could be kept informed about research in the special sciences and acquire 'the materials from which sociology must be constructed'. The initiative for such interdisciplinary ventures has come mainly from sociologists and, over the past forty years, as I recollect, there have been very frequent declarations of the need for more interdisciplinary studies and some organized projects inspired by this view, though it is not clear that such work has actually expanded significantly or that much breaking down of the conceptual and theoretical barriers between disciplines has occurred in most cases. What is evident, I think, is that the major sociological thinkers have been deeply involved with more specialized fields of enquiry and that Marxism, in particular, has been an important unifying influence in the social sciences.

Three areas of study seem to me especially relevant to the future development of sociology. The first is history, which has a central importance in any

worthwhile sociological theory in providing both the initial basis of knowledge for an analysis of the inescapably historical character of social reality and a means of testing, however difficult or imperfect that process may be, the validity of sociological generalizations. For its part, sociology has undoubtedly influenced historical studies. It is perhaps too much to say that Marxism alone engendered modern economic and social history but it was certainly the major factor in their development, 'creating a wholly new attitude to social and historical questions'³⁵, and its potent influence is apparent in a great variety of historical writings by the *Annales* school and the British Marxist historians in such journals as the *International Review of Social History* and *Past and Present*, in the growing field of labour history, and in recent studies of the capitalist 'world system'³⁶. At the same time, Marxism also stimulated historical studies from other standpoints and, in Max Weber's work, a different kind of historical sociology which inspired many later studies, among them those of Raymond Aron. At the present time, two major issues confront historical sociology: namely, to analyze on one side the postwar development of capitalism, which has been more rapid and less subject to the perturbations of the business cycle than in any previous period, and on the other side, the development of socialism up to the most recent radical changes; and, from such an analysis, to elicit some kind of explanation, however tentative and limited, of these massive historical transformations.

The task is no doubt daunting and formulated here too much in the style of 'grand theory' for some sociologists; but then grand theory, at least in some of its forms, is, in my view, the *raison d'être* of sociology. It also entails an incursion into another specialized area, economic sociology, which I consider one of the most important for the future development of sociological thought. Again, Marxism holds a rather special place in this field. Marx's political economy was already an economic sociology, later developed by Marxist thinkers in the theories of imperialism, of economic crises, of organized capitalism and state monopoly capitalism, and of 'underdevelopment' in the Third World, giving a major impetus to economic history, as I have indicated, and having a profound influence on the economic sociology of Max Weber and Schumpeter. The revival of Marxism in the 1960s imparted a new vigor to economic sociology and it may be argued that, as a result, a closer relationship between economics and sociology began to emerge, as is suggested by Swedberg³⁷. Two major issues, in particular, should now engage the attention of sociologists. One is the structure and developmental tendencies of capitalist economies in the late twentieth century, studies of which

³⁵ I. Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, 4th edn, p. 116.

³⁶ I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.

³⁷ R. Swedberg, 'Economic Sociology: Past and Present', *Current Sociology*, vol. 35, no 1, 1987.

would encompass a sociology of markets (including labour and financial markets), comparative analyses of the degree and kind of state intervention in the economy of different countries, and investigations in the sphere of 'ecological economics'³⁸. The other is the structural characteristics of the socialist economies and the processes of change in them; a subject which requires wide-ranging studies of different forms of collective property, of management and participation, and sociological analyses of economic and social planning which have as yet hardly begun to emerge³⁹. One way of conceiving the longer-term aim of the studies I suggested, would be to say that what is needed is a new version, half a century later, of Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*; but that no doubt depends upon the appearance of another Schumpeter. In the meantime, there is plenty to occupy sociologists in pursuing more limited objectives in this exceptionally important field of enquiry, the themes of which ramify into many other areas of sociological concern, such as classes and elites, bureaucracy, and political regimes.

The last of these subjects belongs to a third field of specialized enquiry — political studies — where sociology has played an increasingly important part, to such an extent that it is doubtful whether any significant distinction should now be made between political sociology and political science. At an early stage, sociologists developed theories of the state, of elites and ruling classes; they studied bureaucracy, parties and interest groups (and more recently, social movements), elections and electoral systems, and the nature of democracy; later they examined totalitarianism and contributed, though in a more limited way, to studies of revolutions and counterrevolutions, war and the relations between nation states. These subjects are as important today as they have ever been and several of them are, I think, crucial to the development of sociological thought at the present time, particularly for Marxist sociology. The analysis of the modern state in terms of its growth as an increasingly independent power which intervenes extensively in economic and cultural life, is one of the subjects which should become a more central issue for political sociologists, as seems indeed to be happening to some extent; while from another aspect, the international system of

³⁸ J. Martinez-Alier, *Ecological Economics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

³⁹ Thirty years ago, the International Sociological Association devoted one session of its Congress to a symposium on 'Sociological aspects of social planning', with contributions by Myrdal, Bettelheim and Ossowski (*Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology*, London, International Sociological Association, 1959, vol. II, part II); but the many interesting issues that were raised seem never to have been pursued in a systematic way, although there are useful short accounts of planning in Western and Eastern Europe in the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1968, vol. 12), and a fairly substantial economic literature on planning in individual countries.

nation states needs to be more thoroughly studied, from historical and sociological perspectives, in contexts which range from total war (or preparation for it) to the peaceful construction of supra-national organizations⁴⁰. A second subject which is now especially important for sociological analysis, is that of democracy in the modern industrial societies, both capitalist and socialist. This encompasses a considerable range of issues concerning 'participatory' and 'representative' democracy, the conceptions of 'social democracy' and 'citizenship', the role of social movements and, more generally, the importance of the institutions and organizations of 'civil society' and 'democratic culture'. These issues, for various reasons, now attract much greater attention; a recent collection of studies by sociologists and political scientists⁴¹ examines many of them in relation to the capitalist state; but so far as I know, there is as yet no comparable work, much to be desired, on democracy and the socialist state. It is obvious that in this field of study, as in historical and economic sociology, there are issues of the greatest importance at the present time which sociologists can fruitfully explore through research, theoretical analysis, and confrontation between different explanatory schemes.

4 The future of sociology

In spite of the current fragmentation and confusion that prevails in sociology, therefore, I do not take a pessimistic view of the future of the discipline. A greater concentration of attention on substantive problems (not only, of course, in the areas I have chosen for discussion here), a closer relationship with other social sciences, and a greater emphasis on the systematic development of theories and paradigms whose resulting explanatory propositions can be more distinctly and precisely compared and debated will, I think, ensure not only survival but revival. My own orientation is that of a neo-Marxist sociology, and I hold to this position, as I have indicated earlier in this essay, because of the immense fruitfulness of Marxist thought in the social sciences, its impressive array of explanatory propositions, and the possibilities inherent within this orientation for new discoveries. Marxist social theory, in its broadest sense, will always be contentious and that, not only among Marxists; but that is how it should be in the domain of sciences which, in addition to the questions that arise from their own internal development, have to deal with historically changing phenomena suffused with ideological interpretations. It is not surprising that the progress of sociology

⁴⁰ On this, see the particularly interesting discussion by C. Thorne, 'Societies, sociology and the international', in W. Outhwaite and M. Mulkay (eds), *Social Theory and Social Criticism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

⁴¹ G. Duncan (ed.), *Democracy and the Capitalist State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

should appear discouragingly slow, sometimes non-existent, and trapped in a cyclical movement. Fortunately, there are also periods of renewal and of what Durkheim, in another context, called 'creative effervescence'. We may hope that such a period is not too far away.

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Résumé

Au moment de son émergence comme nouvelle science sociale, la sociologie a été caractérisée par la coexistence de schémas de pensée disparates et contradictoires. Depuis deux décennies, un important travail est en cours afin de construire des fondements plus solides à de futures théories sociologiques. Ce texte présente une vue d'ensemble de certains paradigmes de la discipline et attribue une place distincte au marxisme en tant que théorie explicative majeure encore loin d'être dépassée. L'avenir de la sociologie est entrevue à travers une période de renouveau probable que l'auteur espère n'être pas trop lointaine.

Summary

Sociology emerged as a new social science characterized by the coexistence of disparate and conflicting schemes of thought. Since two decades, very important work has been done to provide a more secure basis for sociological theories of the future. The paper presents an overview of various paradigms and gives a distinctive place to Marxism as a theory having produced major explanations still far from being surpassed. The future of the discipline is seen through a possible period of renewal which, it is hoped, is not too far away.