Florian Znaniecki

The Objectives of Social Sciences

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The primary objective of every science is its own systematic development. For every science which deals with empirical reality, this means the progressive discovery and the logical organization of theoretically valid knowledge concerning the order of relationships between a specific category of data, methodically selected and abstracted from the illimited variety and complexity of human experience.

In this sense, every social science has a distinct primary objective of its own; and at the present stage of the development of these sciences they can have no common primary objective which they can even tentatively approach. None of these sciences has reached within its own limits a level of methodical selection, abstraction and systematization comparable to that of general biology, not to speak of physics. Try to organize into an approximately coherent system the problems and results of behavioristic psychology, Gestalt psychology, and Freudian psychology, not to mention the older, but not forgotten, schools. Try to combine into a logically consistent science the sociological theories of the French school, of Wiese-Becker, of MacIver, and of Lundberg. Let lawyers attempt to unify coherently the theories of law of Duguit, Davy, Stammler, Roscoe Pound, Morris Cohen, and Llewellyn. Systematize the economic theories underlying those seventeen or so different explanations of "the depression" which have been advanced during the last decade. Let educators harmonize the theories of the educational process of Paulsen, Durkheim, John Dewey, and President Hutchins.

No doubt, each of these sciences has a valid and coherent knowledge which serves as common center of these divergent theories. But so long as the inner unity of each is only a distant goal, a theoretic synthesis of all of them is an impossibility. This is clearly demonstrated by the history of sociology, whose original ambition was precisely to achieve such a synthesis. Even though the majority of sociologists have by now resigned this ambition and are actually engaged in building sociology as a special science, a minority still follow the nineteenth-century pattern. Any one who wishes to sample their results should read carefully the textbook called "Sociology" by Ogburn and Nimkoff and try to reconstruct its logical order.

Philosophy of history and, on a smaller scale, anthropology furnish additional proofs that a theoretic unification of the social sciences is as yet only a dream, not an objective. For instance, in Sorokin's *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, the major methodological premises are probably the soundest any philosopher of history has ever devised; yet his conclusions are as arbitrary and subjective as those of St. Augustine or of Spengler. Lest any one should cherish the illusion that it is possible to synthetize rationally the results of various sciences, at least when they draw their data from the cultural life of one particular society, let me refer you to the recent synthetic attempts of anthropologists. Even in studying a preliterate society with its relatively simple culture, we cannot reach a systematic theory of the combination of psychological, social, economic, technical, linguistic, aesthetic, religious, and magical phenomena which compose such a culture, except by the use of the simplistic idealization which is characteristic of men of letters rather than of scientists.

Consequently, the assumption that by combining the results of various social sciences we can reach a theoretically valid and coherent knowledge concerning, for instance, American society, with the tremendous complexity of its culture, calls for psychological explanation rather than criticism.

Of course, all special social sciences have a common meeting-ground in history, archeology, and anthropology, and between any two social sciences lie many borderland problems. But each science approaches such problems from its own point of view and defines them in its own way. It needs the results of other sciences to solve them, but it reorganizes and utilizes these results for its own theoretic purposes. In turn, its results may be utilized by other sciences for their theoretic purposes. This kind of cooperation is going on all the time. And the more thoroughly, conscientiously, systematically each science attends to its own business, the more useful its results are to other sciences.

This inability to organize systematically the contributions of several social sciences to a common theoretic problem is well exemplified just at this moment by the various encyclopedic studies being made as to the nature, causes, and effects of war.

Under such conditions, it is a serious transgression of the principles of intellectual honesty - not to speak of educational principles - for social scientists to offer university students or the public at large a *pot-pourri* of fragments arbitrarily selected, superficially simplified, and loosely combined as if it were an intellectual symphony of valid, essential, and logically connected truths. The transgression is aggravated by the fact that most students and the vast majority of the public do not know the difference, never having been trained in coherent theoretic thinking about social phenomena.

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However, there are other, indirect objectives which all social sciences share and for the achievement of which integrated work is not only possible, but indispensable. Each of these sciences tries to serve and all of them together can serve the progressive realization of practical social ideals. Many scientists would think of these objectives as supreme; their prinary theoretic objectives would be merely instrumental for such ultimate ends, in accordance with Comte's formula: "Savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour pouvoir."

We have a splendid model of such integrated work in modern medicine, where specific theoretic results achieved by human anatomy and physiology, bacteriology, entomology, botany, chemistry, physics, geography, each working in accordance with its own premises and standards, are selected and rationally organized for the ultimate pur pose of promoting human health.

The comparison of our own efforts with those of medicine is instructive, for it shows that the social sciences are more backward in the methods of cooperative application of their theoretic knowledge than in the methods of theoretic research and gystematization. This is partly due to outside factors whereas a physician is socially expected to function both as a man of action and a man of knowledge, using knowledge to guide action, the social scientist is rarely allowed to function as a leader in action, while leaders in social action seldom have any scientific knowledge or even see the need of it for practical guidance. But a part from this old and familiar obstacle in the way of roalizing the practical objectives of the social sciences, the social scientists themselves have failed so far to integrate methodically the possible applications of their knowledge with reference to social ideals.

Their task is indeed more difficult than that of members of the medical profession, who need not reflect critically about their ultimate ends: taking for granted that health is good and sickness is bad, they can concentrate on the selection of means for the promotion of health and the elimination of sickness. Whereas social scientists cannot take any social values for granted, especially ultimate values for which they might all work together. Social ideals vary greatly, and acceptance of any ideal as the supreme one presupposes a critical and selective synthesis of all important human values. Such a synthesis has always been the function of philosophy; and now, for many reasons, it is incomparably more important than ever. Of course, every one philosophizes at this time: but a Socrates is not necessary to show us how inconsistent and superficial home-bred or even college-bred philosophers are, if they have not been thoroughly educated in coherent, long-range thinking about the vast diversity of human values.

Therefore, social scientists and social leaders need first and foremost a great, inclusive philosophy of social life to guide them. It should be a philosophy looking toward the future, for we are facing a world of increasingly rapid and chaotic changes and must know whither to direct this flood of changes. But it is impossible to think intelligently about the future without a knowledge of the past.

Thus, the philosophy we need must be founded on the history of human values and we may expect American philosophers to collaborate with American historians in creating it. Beginnings have already been made, but time presses.

Once we have agreed on our ultimate practical objectives, specialists in various social sciences can concentrate on cooperative studies of the means by which these objectives may be most effectively approached.

Let us take a familiar example: the problem of an international legal order. Whereas the legal order of a nation is the product of a long and continuous evolution, deeply rooted in its entire culture, the cultural foundations of an international order are laid by rational social technology. This means that legal and political planning must take into consideration those existing social forces which can be utilized to make such a plan effective, as well as those which are bound to interfere with its realization, and adequate techniques must be invented to bring the first kind of forces into action and to counteract the second kind of forces. But only a few of these forces are scientifically known to lawyers and political scientists. Most of them either have been or can be methodically investigated by other special sciences, each dealing with a specific aspect of collective human life. Psychology, sociology, educational theory, economics, religionistics, human geography, anthropology, and history contain, each separately, some indispensable knowledge which can be applied in devising essential and effective techniques. Without their cooperative guidance, any attempt to maintain an international order will inevitably fail.

The desirability of an international order is accepted by most social philosophers and scientists, for this is one of the practical objectives on which there is the least disagreement between competent thinkers. The problem is mainly, if not entirely, a problem of means. And here, as a sociologist, I find fundamental deficiencies in every plan for an international order which I have seen so far, due to the fact that the planners are ignorant or neglectful of some of the most powerful forces of in-group solidarity, inter-group antagonism, and inter-group cooperation which sociology has been investigating. Likewise, a psychologist, a theorist of education, an economist, a religionist, a human geographer, an anthropologist, a historian, when critically analyzing these plans in the light of the discoveries of his own science, will certainly find other fundamental deficiencies, also due to ignorance or neglect. This indicates how undeveloped the collaboration still is between social sciences in the pursuit of common ultimate objectives. Its development calls for a tremendous amount of work, and this work must be guided by thorough and original methodological reflection.

F. W. Znaniecki