



CHANGE, RATIONALITY AND POLITICS

Some Basic Problems of Method and Theory in
Contemporary Socio-Political Science⁽⁺⁾

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the connections between basic epistemological problems in the social sciences and the objective of elaborating a theory of politics capable of dealing adequately with the question of change. After discussing some inconsistencies and methodological difficulties in a recent book by Perry Anderson, taken as an example of certain current lines of thought in the social sciences, it examines in some detail the propositions of three outstanding contemporary scholars: Jean Piaget, Karl Popper, and Jürgen Habermas. The impasses of and convergences between these three authors are then confronted with recent works of the approach known as the rational choice model, whose contributions and difficulties are briefly evaluated.

RESUME

O trabalho explora as conexões entre problemas epistemológicos básicos das ciências sociais e o objectivo de elaboração de uma teoria da política capaz de lidar eventualmente de maneira satisfatória com a questão da mudança. Após a exposição das inconsistências e dificuldades metodológicas contidas em volume recente de Perry Anderson, tomado como exemplar relativamente a certas modas correntes das ciências sociais, examinam-se com alguma minúcia as propósitos de três destacados estudiosos contemporâneos: Jean Piaget, Karl Popper, e Jürgen Habermas. Os impasses e as convergências detectados na discussão desses três autores são, ao final, postos em confronto com os esforços recentes da corrente conhecida como a abordagem da "rational choice", cujas promessas e dificuldades se procura avaliar brevemente.



I

Some of the most important problems of a theoretico-methodological nature to demand our attention are still problems conventionally found in the confrontation between Marxism and other persuasions in the field of social sciences. This is not to deny the so-called crisis of Marxism, of which the proliferation of different "schools" -- as recently noted by Norberto Bobbio in a particularly effective intervention in the corresponding debates¹ -- is clearly evidence. It is rather to acknowledge that some of the issues around which contemporary Marxists struggle, either within or without academic circles, are certainly issues to be faced by the social sciences as such. The methodological problems associated with history and change stand high among them.

A recent work by Perry Anderson, himself a distinguished and unorthodox Marxist scholar, provides an interesting point of departure for dealing with such problems. I refer to Lineages of the Absolutist State, published for the first time in 1974.² Anderson deals in a brilliant and learned way with the nature and development of the Absolutist State in Europe. The overall process of transition from feudalism to capitalism (indeed, the general problem of transition from one mode of production to another) is of course also a concern of the book, and Anderson devotes several thoughtful pages of his conclusions to it. His general point, in his own words, is that "the concatenation of the ancient and feudal modes of production was necessary to yield the capitalist mode of production in

Europe -- a relationship that was not merely one of diachronic sequence, but also at a certain stage /the Renaissance/ of synchronic articulation".³ This is repeatedly described in such terms as "the specificity of European history" and "the unique passage to capitalism /that was/ possible in Europe" and put in correspondence with the "singularity" that the European state-system acquired.⁴ Anderson is emphatic in trying to dissociate his interpretation from several analytic or explanatory models more or less frequently used in connection with such themes. Thus: "...to grasp the secret of the emergence of the capitalist mode of production in Europe, it is necessary to discard in the most radical way possible any conception of it as simply an evolutionary subsumption of a lower mode of production by a higher mode of production, the one generated automatically and entirely from within the other by an organic internal succession..."; "...the advent of the capitalist mode of production in Europe can only be understood by breaking away with any purely linear notion of historical time..."; "contrary to all historical assumptions, time was as if at certain levels inverted /again, an allusion to the Renaissance/ between /classical antiquity and feudalism/, to release the critical shift to /capitalism/"; "contrary to all structuralist assumptions, there was no self-moving mechanism of displacement from the feudal mode of production to the capitalist mode of production, as contiguous and closed systems". Specifically with regard to the contrast between the fates of European and Japanese feudalism, since the latter "did not generate a native capitalism of its own momentum",

Anderson points out that "there was thus no inherent drive within the feudal mode of production which inevitably compelled it to develop into the capitalist mode of production".⁵

At first sight, beside the plausibility of the "concatenation" thesis from a substantive point of view, the reservations formulated by Anderson seem to be nothing but the commendable manifestation of a flexible methodological posture. To some, it may even seem a little boring to stumble again on the reiteration of the need to avoid some well known sins, although non-Marxists may see in the fact that this need is emphatically acknowledged by a Marxist scholar a healthy aspect or consequence of the so-called crisis of Marxism.

However, a number of questions arise if we pay some further attention to Anderson's text and reflect for a moment. To start with, in spite of all the strictures against "organic" or "mechanic" determinisms or against "inherent drives", Anderson does not abstain from such propositions as "the Roman Empire... was... naturally incapable of a transition to capitalism", or "the very advance of the classical universe doomed it to a catastrophic regression"⁶ -- propositions which, of course, imply precisely the notion of some sort of "inherent" or "organic" determination. Moreover, Anderson is trying to explain a certain process (the emergence of capitalism in Europe) and not just to tell a story, even though this process is taken to correspond to a unique experience or "event" -- and that attempt is made by resorting to the idea that an element of necessity affirms itself in the process. Indeed, Anderson

not only explicitly says that the concatenation of classical antiquity and feudalism was necessary to produce the passage to capitalism in Europe, but also that it was necessary to produce that passage in its uniqueness.⁷ The question is, of course, what can the idea of necessity mean -- particularly if it is applied to make sense of an experience deemed to be unique or singular -- once one gets rid in one stroke of mechanistic and organicist models, of "all historicist assumptions" and "linear" notions, as well as of "all structuralist assumptions": would anything really be left?

My answer to this question is decidedly in the negative. Of course, it is clearly possible to construe all of the above terms (mechanicism, organicism, historicism, "linearism", structuralism) in a polemic way so as to equate them with distortions or excesses of specific approaches or "schools" in the social sciences and thus to make of them obvious targets for criticism. But being capable analytically to structure our object of study inevitably requires resorting to analytic models which will have something to do with at least some of those terms -- or perhaps, if our task is properly understood, to some extent with all of them. And the sheer rejection of all of them seems to me to be a manifestation of methodological fuzziness rather than of a commendable flexibility.

A little logical exercise with regard to Anderson's conclusions may be helpful in bringing my point home. Very clearly, certain "mental experiments" have to be made by Anderson in order for him to establish his thesis of the concatenation of

classical antiquity and feudalism as a necessary condition for the emergence of capitalism in Europe. Thus, he considers the case of the occurrence of feudalism without the classical universe, which is explicitly dealt with especially by reference to Japanese feudalism -- which does not, by itself, produce capitalism. He would also have to consider, of course, the possibility of the occurrence of the classical universe without feudalism. This is not done in any clear way at all, so that it is not also clear why capitalism could not have come about in some way directly from classical antiquity. What Anderson's analysis actually permits one to say on this point is: (1) First, there are, to be sure, forceful suggestions on the way in which feudalism itself was "instrumental" in producing capitalism such as the one concerning the peculiarly dynamic opposition between town and country to be found in feudalism as a mode of production⁸ -- but this, by itself, is of course different from the argument (possible at least "counter-factually") that would be needed for Anderson to sustain that the emergence of capitalism would have been impossible if feudalism had not existed, in accordance with his proposition on the necessity of the concatenation. (2) Second, there is the above mentioned assertion according to which the classical universe was "doomed" to a catastrophic regression to feudalism -- but this, in turn, besides being, for Anderson, a different way of stating his views on the very question on which evidence is being demanded in this particular point, actually begs the whole general problem. For it makes the concatenation itself

of classical antiquity and feudalism something that will necessarily take place: once you have classical antiquity, you are "doomed" to have feudalism -- in that order. The only problem becomes, then, whether the memory of classical antiquity will be lost during feudalism or kept alive to be retrieved in a crucial Renaissance moment. I cannot think of any reason why this question should be seen as a subject better suited to counterfactual arguments than the one concerning the possibility of capitalism being produced by the classical universe in the absence of feudalism.

If we think along these lines, it seems to me that it soon becomes clear that an argument like Anderson's cannot possibly be consistently held. For what he is after has unequivocally to do precisely with grasping the internal determinations of a long run process, those determinations through which we can see its "end result" as not being merely fortuitous. In other words, the problem for the analyst is the problem of reconstructing the "logic" of the process, which can be translated in terms of recovering such a "linearity" as the process did show. After all, despite the emphasis given to the idea of "concatenation" of antiquity and feudalism, as well as the attention to the aspect of their "synchronic" articulation during the Renaissance, Anderson does not consider the possibility that this concatenation might be produced by a sequence in which feudalism preceded the classical universe and engendered it. And even if we take his assertion that "time was as if at certain levels inverted", we can see, first, that it can be

read as nothing else than a metaphoric allusion to the Renaissance and its retrieval of the classical heritage; second, that even this assertion implies the idea that time does have a direction, or that there is a "vection" in the long-run process. In this light, the question of whether the internal determinations through which we can grasp this "vection" or logic would be aptly described by means of such terms as "mechanic" or "organic" becomes secondary. For, even if we admit that there are aspects of human actions and of human history that are not "naturally" grasped by these or similar terms (such as the subjective or "intentional" dimension of human behavior), certainly it is not the mere fact that feudalism is either "cut off" from classical antiquity or seen as articulating itself with the latter in the production of European capitalism that will make the explanation either more or less "organic" -- or more or less "automatic". Of course, both organisms and mechanisms can be, for instance, either large or small -- or more or less complex, which is more to the point.

Clearly, the crux of the matter in connection with historical explanation (or the explanation of historical events) lies in disentangling the necessary and the contingent or "peculiar" ("unique" etc.).⁹ It might perhaps be said that this is the problem of scientific explanation in general, involving Hume's problems of causation and induction such as recently discussed, for instance, in Karl Popper's Objective Knowledge: what is it that allows someone to treat a relationship between events as a necessary connection between them? Two elements seem to be

present here, both of them considered by Popper: (a) the idea of some sort of "necessary" link ("mechanic", "organic" or whatever) between the events, which would have to do with the problem of causation proper; and (b) a nomological element, that is, the idea that the events are regularly associated or that their association corresponds to a regularity. The latter element would have to do with the problem of induction, which involves the idea that if the observed regularity expresses a necessity, then it will have to occur among non-observed instances as well as among the observed ones.

It is certainly superfluous to point out how complicated a problem of philosophy of science we have here. When we turn to the realm of social and historic phenomena, this problem becomes, if anything, more complicated. I don't mean to refer necessarily or exclusively to such problems as the relationship between explanation and Verstehen, although that is, to be sure, one of the relevant dimensions of the general problem. What I have in mind at this point is rather something that shows up very clearly in the text by Anderson that we have been considering. To wit, the specialist who tries to explain historical events very often faces a situation in which the nomological element or "side" of the problem of scientific explanation is quite defective, for frequently there is no possibility of confronting a more or less numerous series of instances or cases and thus at least conjecturally inferring the existence of a regularity. Indeed, in many cases the

problem is precisely one of establishing, as we saw with Anderson, the explanation of an event conceived of as singular or unique. Our specialist is thus forced to resort to comparing just a few different cases (Japanese and European feudalism), or sometimes even to artificially producing, through counterfactual arguments, contrasting cases which actually do not (did not) exist to be observed. Given that situation, my chief points can be stated in a few items: (1) This state of affairs involves, for the historian -- or, in general, for the social scientist faced with this paradigmatic situation --, the need to have recourse to the other element or "side" of the idea of scientific explanation, that is, the notion of some sort of "internal" link that "ties" together the events. (2) The fashionable tendency to question the validity of such things as a "linear" notion of historical time, seen as involving "organic" or similar determinisms, besides being inconsistent, amounts to barring -- if rigorously understood -- the possibility of such a recourse. (3) Finally, the third point looks at the relationship between the two elements or "sides" of scientific explanation in a problematic light: Is it actually adequate to oppose those two elements to each other? Is it possible to solve the problem of establishing the occurrence of necessary "links" without resorting to the model of nomological explanation? Conversely, does the idea of "regularity" as a source of explanation have any meaning if devoid of the idea of a "link"? Looking at such questions from the point of view of social and political science, the resources presently available

to the latter seem to me to support two propositions: (a) that the proper search for internal "links" not only is not incompatible with the nomological structure of empirico-analytic science, but is rather akin to it; (b) that it may become possible, in that search, to build a nomological and empirico-analytic structure for the social sciences in such a way as to take proper account of the intentional dimension of social and political action that is favored by many who currently oppose the Verstehen approach, on the one hand, to the empirico-analytic model of science, on the other.

II

Some prominent contemporary scholars have addressed, from different points of view, the epistemological problems posed by the historical dimension of social and political life or by the question of change in the social sciences. A brief review of points suggested by the work of three of them on this question will prove useful here, particularly since they turn out to be of great relevance to strictly theoretical (as opposed to methodological) problems of contemporary political science.

The first name I intent to mention is Jean Piaget. In general, I think Piaget's work is probably the case of greatest discrepancy between the substantive methodological and theoretical relevance to problems of the social sciences, on the one hand, and the acknowledgement actually obtained from social scientists, on the other -- despite the great resonance of his work among psychologists and specialists in education. From

the point of view of the specific problem of history and the problematic relationships between necessity, causality and contingency, the application made by Piaget of Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between the "diachronic" and the "synchronic" to the field of sociological explanation (taking "sociological" in the broadest possible sense) directly concerns the basic issues.¹¹ The diachronic dimension has to do with problems of genesis and causality (the Humean problem of causation), whereas the synchronic dimension has to do with a-temporal and necessary relations of logical implication (which can clearly be put in correspondence to the nomological problem that Popper calls the Humean problem of induction). Piaget sees the reasons for the special relevance of this dualism in the case of sociological thought both in the content of this thought and in its formal structure. As to the former, it refers to the nature of social reality itself, which is seen to include both aspects having to do with effective actions and aspects having to do with rules, values and signs. As to the formal structure of sociological thought, "whereas the explanation of the genesis is more causal insofar as it refers to the effective actions where social facts come from, the relationships between history and Implicative equilibrium suppose a different analysis of rules, values and signs, which pertain to the field of implications; a finished equilibrium would even bring about their unification under the form of subordination of the whole set of signs and values to

normative necessity, which would thus lead to an essentially implicative explanation of that equilibrium."¹²

Two points deserve to be noted with regard to Piaget's propositions on the general problem. The first one is that, despite the apparent opposition between a genetic or causal "realm" or "sphere" of effective actions and an implicative one of rules, values and signs, Piaget does not fail to stress that the latter, of course, proceed from "action itself, carried out in common and directed toward nature", even though they go beyond the level of causality and constitute relations of implication.¹³ In effect, this is the only position that would be consistent with Piaget's general epistemological orientation and with the conclusions of his life-long research in the fields of the psychology of intelligence and of genetic epistemology, which sustain the "operational" character of knowledge in general -- that is, that even (and perhaps especially) such prototypical forms of relations of implication as we have in logic and mathematics are nothing but the transposition, into a virtual or symbolic level, of operations that are initially concrete operations, or real actions. In connection specifically with sociological explanation, Piaget associates with the acknowledgement of the operational substratum of rules, values and signs the proposition that sociological explanation "oscillates" between causality and implication (and he suggests that those three kinds of phenomena -- rules, values and signs --, though they all pertain, in a sense,

to the realm of implication, also differ with respect to the way in which we have in each of them a greater or lesser convergence or disjunction of diachronic and synchronic factors).¹⁴ But one is led to ask -- since all knowledge, even logic and mathematics, is operational in the sense indicated above -- whether we do have here something peculiar to sociological explanation, and if so precisely in what sense. For would it not seem adequate to say, in light of Piaget's assumptions and findings themselves, that the challenge or goal for any sort of explanation or of knowledge is precisely the "passage from the causal to the implicative" that he explicitly links to the "difficulties inherent in sociological explanations"?¹⁵

This leads straight into the second point I want to note. In the same text, Piaget also explicitly links in a suggestive way problems of genetic development or of history, on the one hand, and questions of "fortuitousness" versus logical implication, on the other. He writes: "If the social totality were a system wholly integrated through logical composition of the interactions at play, without interference of fortuitous association or of disorder, it is obvious that its historical development would explain all its present connections, that is, the diachronic relations would determine all the synchronic relations among its elements".¹⁶ Piaget goes on to assert that, on the contrary, there actually is the interference of fortuitous or "statistical" associations in the interactions of any social

whole, so that it becomes extremely problematic to try and deduce in any detail a particular state of a social whole from its previous states: "... the fortuitous excludes the univocal transition from the diachronic to the synchronic...".¹⁷

This, I propose, leads us into a seeming paradox with regard to the relationships between the historical and the implicative or formal -- but a paradox that contains also the indication of the way along which the solution for the general problem should be sought. One way to state the paradox would be to note that, instead of history providing a privileged form of explanation -- as frequently argued by certain scholars who claim to be Marxist and think that such a position brings about the need to condemn "formalist" approaches --, the recourse to history is needed, so to speak, precisely for what history has of "non-explanatory" -- that is to say, for allowing us to make room for the fortuitous and disorderly. Put differently, history would only be fully explanatory precisely if social reality were a-historical, expressing a rigorous logic. The privilege usually granted to historical explanation (in Piaget's terms, to the genetic and diachronic dimension) undertakes, often without the specialists realizing the problems involved therein, the fusion of those two aspects, transposing logic (the synchronic dimension) into the diachronic level. This is not only legitimate; it is necessary and inevitable. But it is certainly incompatible with a posture that, claiming a significant epistemological status for history, simultaneously opposed structuralist assumptions -- not to speak

of the case in which such an opposition were extended to nearly all conceivable organizing analytic principles.¹⁸

This prescription of somehow "formalizing" history itself is, no doubt, vague and elusive enough. The possible meanings to be attributed to it might be said to range, for instance, from the mere exhortation that the work of the historically sensitive social scientist should not result in resorting to some sort of histoire événementielle as the last explanatory instance to recommending the search for "historical" laws in the sense of several "philosophies of history". The mere mention of the latter approach in the present context brings immediately to mind the war against "historicism", in that sense, waged by Karl Popper in several of his works, and a quick evaluation of Popper's position will, I think, produce some interesting results.¹⁹

As is well known, Popper explicitly rejects the possibility of historical laws in the above sense, since laws are an exclusive prerogative of nomological or generalizing sciences, as opposed to "historical sciences", which are interested in explaining specific or singular events.²⁰ This is linked to his position concerning the problem of the meaning or purport of history, which, of course, is central to any philosophy of history. Popper's answer to the question "Is there a meaning in history?" is straightforward and emphatic: "History has no meaning".²¹

However, two intriguing observations can be made when

one reads The Open Society and its Enemies -- the very same book that has just been cited in connection with such positions. To begin with, from a normative or prescriptive point of view, there is absolutely no room for doubt as to Popper's preferences regarding certain basic alternative forms of socio-political organization, or, in other words, the goal toward which any particular society, or the political organization of mankind in general, should be directed: his preferences go to the "open society" alluded to in the title of the book and the meaning of which as a political "demand" or "proposal" is made explicit in terms of what he calls "protectionism" (in short, protection, on the part of the state, of the freedom of all against aggression), seen as an adequate definition of the legitimate objective of state activity.²² One of the important motivations of Popper's war against historicism concerns the fact that the latter is seen as linked, in general, to a different and contrasting ideal, to wit, the ideal of the "organic society" first formulated by Plato.

Of course, one may sustain that this preference or prescription has nothing to do with Popper's methodological position on the possibility of historical laws or on the question of the meaning of history, for that position supposedly has only an analytic or "descriptive" import. But then there is the second observation mentioned above, namely, that The Open Society and its Enemies is also clearly

loaded with descriptive statements which are visibly akin to the idea of a meaning or purport of history. From the point of view of socio-political relations themselves, the coming of the open society is associated by Popper with the transition, started in Athens with the "Great Generation" (the generation of the Peloponesian war and a little earlier), from tribalism to individualism and to the expansion of what he calls "abstract social relations".²³ But it is clearly not just a question of an event which took place at a certain point in history and which Popper, acting as historian, can describe. Rather, what we have is the vision of a millennial process which is far from reaching its end and whose direction Popper feels authorized to point out. Thus, as he says in the closing words of the first section of Chapter 10 of The Open Society, "when we say that our Western civilization derives from the Greeks, we ought to realize what it means. It means that the Greeks started for us that great revolution which, it seems, is still in its beginning -- the transition from the closed to the open society".²⁴ At the level of the history of ideas, Popper provides quite clear indications of the way threaded by this process of transition up to our days: the Great Generation in Athens (with Socrates as the dominating figure), early Christianity, Kant, the modern scientific spirit at its best, certainly including Popperian critical rationalism itself -- these are some of the salient

landmarks of the process.²⁵

To be sure, there is more to Popper's discussion of the methodological problems of history as a discipline (or of the "historical sciences"), including the (qualified) acknowledgement of the merits of at least some "historical theories" or "interpretations" (as opposed to scientific theories proper), as well as of the existence and legitimacy, of course, of sociological laws that can be applied to historical interpretation.²⁶ However, when confronted with his categoric assertions concerning the impossibility of historical laws and the meaninglessness of history, the above described views on the millennial process of transition from the closed to the open society cannot but produce a feeling of intellectual discomfort. Moreover, if the affinity between his normative preference for the open society and the direction he attributes to that transition process in his descriptive statements is intriguing in itself, it becomes all the more interesting when we realize that Popper's acknowledgement of the role and import of historical interpretation is predominantly of a practical rather than scientific character, despite the fact that such an interpretation is explicitly seen as involving a problem of knowledge: "To sum up, there can be no history of 'the past as it actually did happen'; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own. But not

only has it a right to frame its own interpretations, it also has a kind of obligation to do so; for there is indeed a pressing need to be answered. We want to know how our troubles are related to the past, and we want to see the line along which we may progress towards the solution of what we feel, and what we choose, to be our main tasks".²⁷

Let us remark in passing how the emphasized passage of this quotation inescapably brings into play again the issue of the meaning of history. And let us further note an interesting point. A few paragraphs above we have seen the limitations of history as a scientific discipline pointed out by Piaget in connection with the interference of the fortuitous in the realm of human relations and with the corresponding restrictions as to the possibility of obtaining a complete logical structuring or integration of the social totality. Now we see Popper, in turn, link his own scientifically qualified and restrictive appreciation of the role of historical interpretation (whatever the seeming difficulties of some ramifications of his position) to the practical interest of the latter. The obvious questions are: what does Piaget's "fortuitous" have to do with the practical import attributed by Popper to history and historical interpretation? how does the point of contact probably to be found between them affect the general problem at issue here?

This brings us to the third name I want to consider:

that of Jürgen Habermas. The reasons are perhaps quite obvious for those who have any acquaintance with his work. Habermas is a representative of a current of thought that has been battling against much of what might be seen as characteristic of such positions as those of Piaget and especially Popper -- and an exponential representative at that, whose work turn out to be a sort of climax of the "Frankfurt school", critically incorporating the work of his predecessors in an effort that is both firmly rooted in the Great German and Western philosophical tradition and singularly open to the achievements and concerns of the contemporary social sciences in different fields. Moreover, some of the central points of Habermas's effort have to do precisely with the questions we have been dealing with above.

In effect, Habermas, who belongs in and claims a "critical" tradition in the social sciences capable of dealing in an adequate way with the problem of history and change, has as a crucial reference point in his work the Aristotelian distinction between "technical" and "practical", which is elaborated upon in a detailed way by Hannah Arendt particularly in The Human Condition.²⁸ Such a distinction is parallel to Habermas's own distinction between the contexts of "work", or "purposive-rational action" (that is, "either instrumental action or rational choice or their conjunction"), and "interaction", or communicative action (symbolic interaction).²⁹ From the epistemological point of view, the separation of these two contexts intends to

provide the grounds for opposing a technical type or kind of rationality to a practical one, which, in turn, are made to correspond to different types of science or knowledge, or different approaches to the problem of scientific knowledge, seen as guided by different types of interest. Thus, technical rationality and technical interest would correspond to the "empirico-analytic sciences", which have in logic their tool and criterion par excellence. Two other types of science, "historico-hermeneutic sciences" (in short, history) and "critical sciences" (Marxism, as critique of ideology, and psychoanalysis, as a sort of "critique of neurosis", are the examples of the latter), would correspond largely to the sphere of practical knowledge and of the practical interest, where we are no longer in the realm of instrumentality and efficacy, but rather in the realm of symbols, consensual norms, communication and "the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding".³⁰ There is, however, an important proviso. Putting aside some problems of interpretation that cannot be dealt with here, whereas the historico-hermeneutic sciences are "turned toward the possibility of a consensus between subjects who act within the framework of a self-conception that is brought to them by tradition",³¹ in the case of the critical sciences the practical interest becomes an "emancipatory" interest, that is to say, an interest devoted to eliminating the restrictions and distortions that are imposed upon the process of communication by the factors of domination,

ideology and neurosis, which, in turn, crystallize, so to speak, in tradition itself. Critical science, therefore, on the model of the psychoanalytic dialogue, is by definition oriented toward a future condition or "anticipated state" (in terms of psychoanalysis, the cure), abstractly described in terms of a "situation of pure communication" or "ideal speech-situation" in which those involved (particularly the "patient", or, at the properly sociological level, those collective subjects hitherto submitted to power relations and ideological manipulation) can autonomously recognize the validity of statements regarding themselves -- a recognition to which are pertinent not only criteria of truth, but also, given the links of the emancipatory interest to autonomy and identity, of authenticity. Besides, such a condition of pure communication is not only conceived of as a sort of end result of the successful interchange between analyst and patient (or what might be taken as their sociological counterparts from the point of view of the critique of ideology), but also as a methodological prescription which resorts to what Habermas calls "reflexive theories" -- that is, theories devoted to emancipation, such as Marxism and psychoanalytic theory (provided they are both divested of the "positivist" or "scientist" ingredients that both Marx and Freud are accused of having brought to their work). In other words, the anticipated state of transparent communication (explicitly described, in its extreme form, as a counterfactual

assumption, though a necessary one) can only be approached through a process which, even as a process, strives for "competent" communication, itself free of power, ideology and "rationalizations" in the psychoanalytic sense.³²

Such a compact presentation of Habermas's ideas cannot, perhaps, do them full justice. But it is enough to allow me to point out a number of greatly relevant observations on the relationship of Habermas's ideas to Piaget's and Popper's. To begin with, Habermas's "anticipated state" can clearly be seen, from a certain point of view, to be akin to the philosophy-of-history sense that was given above to Piaget's at least implicit prescription to "formalize" history -- that is, to grasp its logic, however frustrating this objective may turn out to be due to the interference of the "fortuitous". In other words, it is akin to the question of the meaning or purport of history which emerges emphatically in Popper's work and to which Popper gives an ambiguous solution, even if we stick to the descriptive or analytic level. Put in such a crude way, that seems definitely not to be what Habermas is trying to do. He would probably himself look at that proposition as involving a "positivist" reading of his work, or as containing the same objectivist ingredient that he tries to point out in the thought of Marx himself. And I think it would be easy to show that the aspect treated by Piaget in terms of the interference of the fortuitous in history corresponds to the central position attributed to the subjective (and intersubjective) aspect of human

conduct in Habermas's "practical" conception of history or of the "historico-hermeneutic sciences" — (that is to say, those aspects in which Habermas would claim to have the distinctiveness of his approach seem to be the ones due to which Piaget's formalization or "structuring" of history is not fully possible.)

Nonetheless, this is unquestionably a very problematic point in Habermas's thought. Since it would be impossible here to go into a detailed discussion of it, suffice it to recall the intellectual contortionism found in a passage of the introduction to the German edition of 1971 of Theory and Practice. In this passage, devoted to the problem of the relevance and applicability of a "reflexive theory" under conditions of political struggle, Habermas starts by admitting the need for an "objectifying application" (une application objectivante, in the French version) of the theory, so as to allow someone to be able to resort to the tools provided by instrumental rationality that are required by the demands of efficacy proper to the strategic interaction or fight. Would not such an admission, however, amount to exposing the reflexive theory to a contamination by "scientism" or "positivism", or to depriving it of something essential to the Habermasian conception of the critical sciences characterized by the "reflexive" dialogue? No doubt -- and Habermas steps back, transforming (only three sentences ahead) the admission of the need for an objectifying application of the reflexive theory into a renunciation to

any claim to relevance of the reflexive theory under conditions in which strategic action is involved. But is that not to lead the reflexive theory into the plan of a wholly futile utopia, does not emancipation itself depend crucially on strategy, is it not clear that the price of that renunciation is too high? Of course -- and there we have Habermas, just a few lines below, stating again that "the objectifying use of a reflexive theory is not illegitimate in all cases"... only to warn immediately that "such objectifying interpretations cannot claim, by themselves, a justifying function", and that "the strategic action of those who have made the decision to fight... cannot be... satisfactorily justified by means of a reflexive theory".³³ At any rate, insofar as the central point is concerned, the acknowledgement -- which is explicit, after all -- of some form of relevance of the reflexive theory to strategic action is made by reference to "a pursued goal: that of a state of universal emancipation... /The/ interpretations /of the several aspects of the struggle that takes place presently/ are retrospective from the point of view of that anticipated state. They therefore open up a perspective for strategic action and for the maxims according to which the decisions are justified in the discussions preceding action itself".³⁴

The consequences of some aspects of this position from a broader point of view will be dealt with below. Let me

make, at this point, two remarks. First, in spite of the different epistemological status claimed for history on the part of two supposedly antagonistic thinkers such as Habermas and Popper, they present surprising convergences as to solutions and difficulties. Habermas, engaged in a lasting war against "positivism" and expressly hostile to reducing the hermeneutic character of the historiographic work to a nomological structure of thought,³⁵ somehow solves the problem of the meaning of history by posing an "anticipated" and counterfactual state of pure communication and universal emancipation which is at once an expression of the "practical" view of historical knowledge and the source of epistemological difficulties. And Popper, emphatically in favor of an empirico-nomological conception of science from which stems a suspicious position regarding history as a scientific discipline, also exhibits an at once normative and "descriptive" view of history as a movement toward the "open society" -- a view that is also linked to practical concerns and which, whatever Popper's explicit efforts on the distinction between scientific theories and "historical interpretations", does not fit well, to put it mildly, his epistemological position. Second, both Habermas's and Popper's conceptions on this point, despite dealing with "practical" and normative, hermeneutic or interpretative, subjective and relativist concerns, do involve an answer to Piaget's question on the

relationship between the presence of the fortuitous and the goal of logically "formalizing" or "structuring" history -- in other words, they do involve the transposition of logic into the diachronic level. Is there any meaning to be extracted from this?

III

The points raised in the discussion of the previous section, through the very muddiness of some of the solutions attempted by prominent thinkers, seem to me to articulate with important insights at the epistemological level, which are of immediate consequences for the theory of politics and lead to probably more adequate approaches to the problem of history and change. Unfortunately, I will have to be rather telegraphic at certain points in order to be able at least to touch several relevant aspects of the matter.

We may start from what seems to me to be the unquestionable failure of Habermas in his central epistemological efforts, that is, his attempt to distinguish neatly between the contexts of work and interaction and thus to establish the grounds for the distinction between different types of rationality and knowledge. This failure can be shown by resorting to two related lines of argument.

The first one concerns the decades-long researches of Piaget and his associates in the field of the socio-psychology of intelligence and their consequences for Habermas's theses. For they show as one of their crucial

conclusions the twofold character of logic -- the instrument and criterion par excellence, in Habermas, of the technical rationality and interest and of the empirico-analytic sciences. Thus, logic is, on the one hand, as we have previously seen in passing, the transposition into a virtual or symbolic level of operations which are originally concrete operations, and it therefore necessarily preserves its operational and instrumental characteristic. On the other hand, however, it is intrinsically constituted and even defined by elements of a social and communicative nature which would belong in the intersubjective context of interaction -- to put it shortly, the equality, reciprocity, and equilibrium of intellectual interchange. Such elements -- while permitting one to look at logic as the "morals of thought", in Piaget's not at all metaphoric expression -- correspond in a very strict way to the model of "competent communication" which Habermas links to the emancipatory interest and which he visualizes in the "ideal speech-situation", distinguished by being free of distortions arising from domination, ideology and neurosis.

To provide just a brief indication of the way in which this correspondence affirms itself, let us recall Piaget's findings with regard to the "vection" that leads from heteronomy to autonomy and from egocentrism to reciprocity and solidarity in the psychogenetic development of intellectual and moral norms. According to Piaget, this development

starts from initial stages in which the child is "centered" upon itself even while capable of engaging in interindividual exchanges, a condition called "egocentrism" by Piaget and briefly defined at one point as "a relative indifferention between one's own point of view and those of other people".³⁶ There is an intimate relationship between the egocentric character of the interindividual exchanges of such early phases, on the one hand, and the figurative and intuitive --hence, pre-operational-- character of the forms of thought that are proper to them, particularly to the period stretching from the appearance of language to 7-8 years of age. Moreover, these egocentric forms of thought are complementary with regard to heteronomy and to the imitation of adults. Not only does the child oscillate between egocentrism and imitation, but also both egocentrism and imitation result from the indifferention between self and others.³⁷ By contrast, the development of operational thought and of logic, with its characteristics of being free of contradiction and reversible and of leading to the conservation of sets, takes place in close relationship with advances in the process of socialization and with the individual's growing ability to cooperate with others, to understand relationships of reciprocity, and to coordinate -- actually or virtually -- a plurality of points of view. In this process, the acquisition of the sense of self and the achievement of the conditions needed

for autonomy on one's part are just one face of the coin, the other face being the increasing capacity to recognize the autonomy of others.³⁸

The second of the two lines of argument mentioned above has to do with the extremely ambiguous position occupied, in Habermas's thought, by the category of strategic action, which, in its relationships with both the contexts of work and interaction, has implications which are far from being adequately dealt with by Habermas. Strategic action clearly plays an intermediate role between work and interaction, for, being instrumental and "purposive-rational" action (work), it is also unequivocally interaction and communication. Indeed, the very idea of strategic action stresses the fact that it is that form of instrumental action (oriented toward criteria of efficacy, of means-ends relationships) which takes place in a social context. Habermas's difficulties on this point (to which the above mentioned contortions on the relevance of "reflexive theories" to the political struggle are obviously related) show up very clearly in the oscillations and even contradictions to be found in different passages of several of his works. Thus, in "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", we see strategic action assimilated to instrumental action or "work"; in Theory and Practice, in turn, there is the acknowledgement of the presence of communicative elements in it, but that acknowledgement is

made within a framework of denunciation of the recourse to the idea of strategy as corresponding to a design of technical rationalization and ultimately of cybernetic control of society; finally, in Logic of the Social Sciences we can find the emphatic affirmation, against "positivism", of the communicational character displayed even by strategic action.³⁹

The conclusion to be extracted from the parallel reading of Habermas and Piaget seems to me simple and straightforward: we have but one concept of rationality, which ultimately always has to do with relationships between ends and means. In other words, the notion of rationality inescapably has an operational character, always involving the idea of an action guided by considerations of efficacy, that is to say, the idea of a subject who sets up goals for his own behavior and seeks to realize them by means of the "manipulation" of the conditions of his environment. And this applies just as well to the "practical" field of "interaction" as to the "technical" field of "work". Not only is interaction -- as shown by Piaget's findings -- the ultimate and inevitable context of rational behavior, even when the latter exerts itself over "nature", but also there is no reason not to see communication itself as a goal-oriented action, concerning which, therefore, there is equally a problem of efficacy. This problem (the one of ensuring effective and unembarrassed, pure or competent communication, as the very suggestive phrase of Habermas's

himself has it) is precisely the one to be solved in the "ideal speech situation" freed of all the barriers originating from power relations under different forms.

IV

These propositions, putting together an unequivocal conception of rationality in terms of ends-means relationships in the behavior of an acting subject, the at-once instrumental and intersubjective or normative nature of logic itself, and the intermediate position of strategic action between instrumental action ("work") and communicative action ("interaction"), lead, I submit, to a conception of politics which has proficuous consequences. Habermas's distinction between work and interaction has as one of its important grounds the idea that work or instrumental action concerns the relations of men (the acting subjects) with nature (the objects, in a strict sense), whereas interaction concerns the relations between subjects as such. Yet, the above propositions allow us to see that the decisive question for socio-political analysis lies in the fact that men themselves appear as objects or "nature" to other men from the point of view of at least some of their goals or purposes in any particular moment -- and the notion of strategic action or interaction involves precisely the idea that one of the conditions for achieving efficacy (for strategic action is instrumental action) is that each participant be able to put himself on the other's shoes and

to recognize the other as an autonomous subject, as well as to look at himself as a possible object of manipulation on the part of the other. Put differently, if we lay aside material objects proper, the basic question hinges upon the fact that that which is end or means, or which is to be taken as object or subject, or partly as object and subject, is not socially defined but as a provisional result of a concrete and complex process of interaction -- which, at any given moment, involves both live and reified work, tradition, fight and strategy, and also "critical" and emancipatory action and communication in the strict sense of Habermas's.

Some of the consequences of this can be itemized as follows:

1. The possibility of giving an adequate treatment to the question of change in terms of "rationalization". Of course, both Popper's problem of the meaning of history and Habermas's idea of an anticipated state are amenable to this question -- and Habermas actually uses the term rationalization in this connection, opposing the idea of "technical rationalization" (growth of productive forces) to the idea of "rationalization" in the field of symbolic interaction (emancipation, "individuation", extension of communication free of domination).⁴⁰ Given the importance of this point for our general discussion, it seems appropriate to look at it a little closer.

To begin with, there is the obvious observation that there exists the possibility of talking of chains of ends and means. However obvious it may be, this observation is relevant insofar as it allows us to stress that the adherence to an instrumental or operational concept of rationality, instead of representing an obstacle to looking at social change in terms of rationalization (as suggested by some texts devoted by Habermas to the problem of technocracy),⁴¹ actually turns out to be a requisite for properly considering the corresponding problems. Thus, even if we take rationalization to mean (marching toward) the inauguration of a process of communication free of domination (in which it may become possible, to recover some Habermasian themes, the authentic expression of individual identities by means of a lucid and free assumption of its no longer alienating articulation with a collective identity in its historical deepness), it still inevitably supposes, besides the socio-psychological conditions that permit this ideal to arise as an actual aspiration of certain collective subjects, also those strategic conditions capable of ensuring viability to the corresponding interests in their confrontation with vested domination interests, not to speak of the material conditions which serve as a substratum for both the former sets of conditions. Thus, there naturally are strategic problems and instrumental problems in a strict sense involved in the actualization of any concrete process that may have

as an objective the establishment of a state of affairs approaching a condition of unembarrassed communication. Moreover, describing in terms of "rationalization" a process of such a nature supposes also, in turn, the possibility of establishing an "instrumental" connection between the state of unembarrassed communication sought and "higher" objectives (say, those which express themselves in Habermas's idea of "individuation", or of full individual realization) which are supposedly served by that state. For it is clearly possible to conceive of different objectives for the process of socio-political development (for instance, the objective of a fully solidary and "organic" society in which we would have the mere "administration of things", or the "tribal" or Platonic ideal of the "closed" society which Popper fights) which would not fit a state of free communication built so as to guarantee the radical autonomy of every member, and the establishment of such a state could not be described as "rationalization" in terms of these objectives. Looking at the problem from a somewhat different point of view, from the above we can see very clearly that the mere fact of being operative an ideal of rationality in terms of ends and means is not sufficient ground for the denunciation of a society as being a "technocratic" one, for that ideal does not preclude by itself or in principle the discussion of the ends to be sought through the organization of instrumental activity.

This is not incompatible, of course, with acknowledging the empirical possibility of a syndrom in which a "technocratic" mentality may concur to compose a kind of ideology that is "functional" to certain forms of domination.

2. The possibility of adequately dealing with the crucial problem of the collective subject and of the intentionality or purposefulness of action as collective action. This derives directly from the intermediate and decisive role of strategic interaction, and can be stated by saying that the problem of the constitution of collective subjects hinges upon, first, the operation of general sociological conditions which somehow determine (or make more or less probable) with whom a certain individual subject is going to identify or "communicate" and toward whom will he act "instrumentally" (not without acknowledging, of course, that variations take place here according to several circumstances or aspects of the goals or intentions of the subject); and second, the interference of deliberate and strategic action with the operation of such general sociological conditions. A further point that may deserve stressing is that, insofar as the question of a conscious participation in the socio-political process on the part of any individual or collective subject is posed, the problem to which this subject will be faced as such is a problem liable to being quite properly described as a problem of strategic decision: it would translate itself

in terms of how (given certain biographical and historical conditions that were largely imposed upon him and which concur to define his identity and a corresponding ideal of autonomy) to establish goals for his own actions in the situation in which he is bound to live, a decision that includes as a relevant aspect the one of defining both his partners or friends and his opponents or enemies -- that is to say, those together with whom he will seek to exert power (act effectively) over the environment, including nature, and those over whom he will seek to exert power, somehow assimilating them to "nature".

3. The possibility of superseding or synthesizing two apparently antagonistic forms of approaching the subject-matter of political science, both of which seem equally plausible and important, suffice it to recall, on this point, the contrast between, on the one hand, an Aristotelian view of politics such as elaborated upon by Hannah Arendt, with its communicative, libertarian and equalitarian components which are recaptured and depurated in Habermas's conception of a state of pure communication or of the ideal speech situation; and, on the other hand, the supposedly "realistic" perspective to be found either in current handbooks on political science, in which that conception is replaced by an emphasis on the role played by relations of power or domination in the very definition of politics, or in such "classics" as Carl Schmitt, to whom "the specifically political distinction,

to which it is possible to refer political actions and motives, is the distinction between friend and foe", in the concept of foe entering "the eventuality of an actual fight".⁴² Instead of the sterile confrontation between these seemingly antagonistic conceptions, the emphasis on the complex interrelationships between the elements pertaining to "work" and "interaction", or to "instrumentality" and "communication", and particularly on the singularly important place of the elements pertaining to "strategy", permits us to try and eventually reconcile the "noble" and Greek view of politics as an arena of communication among equals with the acknowledgement of the importance of power in political relations -- an importance that reveals itself not only in the vision of power as a problem insofar as its distribution among acting subjects is concerned, but also with regard to power conceived of as an instrument for the joint realization of shared goals resulting from the very process of communication. Clearly, we have here also the chance of eventually achieving a reconciliation between practical-normative concerns, on the one hand, and analytic "realism" and rigor, on the other -- and not the least reason for the corresponding hope is that the two sides of instrumentality and communication, as we saw with Piaget, are inscribed and coexist dialectically within the essential (operational) nature of mature intellectual activity itself.

The conception of politics briefly characterized above cannot but bring to mind the theoretical efforts presently being made by the current that came to be known as the "rational choice" theory or perspective (or the "new political economy", as a couple of authoers have proposed to call it).⁴³ This current, which seeks to apply the analytic instruments traditionally associated with economics to the field of political analysis (partaking in a broader tendency which occurs also among sociologists and other specialists not particularly concerned with politics), exhibits two related traits which are of great interest from the point of view of the present discussion. In the first place, it starts from a conception of rationality which is unequivocally a "technical" or "instrumental" (operational) one, having to do with means-ends relationships and with problems of efficacy. In the second place, the category of strategic action or interaction is built into the very core of the conceptual and analytic structure with which this current is at work. Accordingly, it seems to me that this line of work deserves the closest attention, representing, as I think it does, perhaps the most promising trend in contemporary political science -- provided we are able to incorporate its analytic strength without incurring into certain excesses that the critical study of its current results can show.

Let me start this very brief comment on some aspects of the promises and problems of the rational choice theory by a couple of observations that seem crucial from the point of view of the articulation between the epistemological and theoretical problems. The first one deals with Habermas's concerns (and the same would apply to Verstehen-oriented authors in general) that the subject not be diluted as such in an objectivist or behaviorist perspective, in which human action were reduced to stimulated behavior. This can be translated into the assertion that the intentionality of action has to be recaptured or retained, or that the goals or purposes of the acting subject as such have to be taken into account. The point to be stressed in this regard is that to speak of intentionality, or of the agent or actor as subject, implies, by itself, to speak of rationality. For to suppose that we may have the search for goals or purposes without rationality, that is to say, without the autonomous evaluation of the connections prevailing between the goals sought and the means which exist in the environment or situation, would clearly amount to reducing action to the conditions proper to stimulated or conditioned behavior, in which disappears precisely the subject as such. The assumption of rationality in the exact terms of the rational choice approach, therefore, not only is not incompatible with some of the basic requirements of the Verstehen approach,

but is rather a condition for a consequent adherence to the latter -- despite the fact that there remains the problem of how to find out which are the goals or purposes in any specific situation, which will be addressed in passing below.

The second observation complements the firstone in a revealing way. Note that the problem of the previous paragraph has to do with the subjective aspect of human actions and interactions, which clearly relates to practical, normative and relativistic considerations -- and its point is that the assumption of instrumental rationality is itself necessary to deal adequately with just that aspect. Now, the assumption of instrumental rationality is also the basic tool that permits the rational choice approach to resort to logical constructivism and to operate in a deductive way, from which derive certain important methodological consequences: (a) the possibility of undertaking an effort at theory construction that may be at once empirically controllable, for being assertive and propositional and not merely definitional (as has traditionally been the case with the numerous "conceptual frameworks" or "taxonomies"), as well as logically integrated and in principle cumulative, instead of the dispersion characteristic of the so-called "middle-range theories"; (b) hence, the possibility of eventually posing in better terms the vexing and ever-lasting problem of the

relationships between theory and research. At any rate, from the broader perspective described above in terms of the articulation between the epistemological and theoretical problems, the point to be stressed is that the contrast between the point of view of "logical structuring" and the point of view prone to recovering the dimension of the practical, subjective, interpretative or even "fortuitous" -- which has of course to do above all with the autonomous decisions of acting subjects -- seems to lose much of its sharpness. And I would suggest that the promising convergence thus apparently obtained seems to be also a convergence between the "nomological" and the "causal" (as far as the latter refers to the idea of some sort of actual "link" between events): for the "logical structuring" made possible by the assumption of rationality in the field of socio-political science is clearly itself based on the "links" between more or less complex chains of purposes and means supposedly to be found in the effective actions of acting subjects -- and in the complex interrelationships of such actions themselves with one another.⁴⁴

That is far from meaning, of course, that all problems are automatically solved. To begin with, the recourse to the instrumental notion of rationality in the works of the rational choice perspective has been frequently associated with a certain way of understanding it in which its applications to political matters results in the sheer disappearance of society as such. This is certainly due to the role

played by professional economists in developing the approach, or to an at least implicit and perhaps in some cases inadvertent reference to a conventional way of conceiving of economics and its task, despite the conscious attempt to equate "economic" behavior with "rational" behavior tout court, whatever the sphere in which it takes place. At any rate, the works of the rational choice approach have been characterized by a "methodological individualism" marked by an extreme "anti-sociological" attitude: their paradigm typically involves a view of society that dissolves the latter into a sort of "state of nature" in which there are no institutions, there is no history, there are no inter-generational links, there is no loyalty or solidarity, but only individuals capable of calculating in function of individual interests that interfere with one another -- in short, the realm of pure strategy. That view, I submit, does not inhere in resorting to the notion of instrumental rationality in political affairs, where the challenge and the promise consist precisely -- as indicated in passing with regard to the problem of collective subjects and of the intentionality of action seen as collective action -- in grasping the way in which conscious decision-making and strategy articulate themselves with sociological and institutional conditions which are, of course, always present. Furthermore, the effort in this direction is the only way of avoiding a threefold error of timeless roots in methodological debates in the social sciences: (a) the postulate of

the isolated individual of the contractualist fiction; (b) the utilitarian postulate of the whole society as the collective unit or subject, which ends up in the "organic" or "cybernetic" models which worry both Popper and Habermas; (c) finally, the postulate of the automatic and unproblematic constitution of collective subjects of a "partial" nature, such as social classes, a postulate that is often resorted to precisely in the work of many who question its adoption for the case of society as a whole. This concatenation of the strategic and the sociological is also the site where we have to look for the answer to the above mentioned question of which are the goals at play in any particular situation -- a question whose answer supposes that we are in a position to say which actually are the relevant subjects, individual and collective, in that situation.

Another problem that is of crucial importance concerns the distinction between, on the one hand, strategic interaction in a more strict sense -- a sense in which it corresponds more closely to the model of a fight or of certain simple games of strategy typically considered by the theory of games -- and, on the other hand, the aggregate and often unintended consequences of the actions of numerous actors, each seeking to realize his own goals or purposes. Actually, the number of actors in presence is not an essential element in defining the logic of the situation, as shown by the well-known game of "the prisoner's dilemma". However, the case of large numbers represents the typical case in

which that logic produces its effects. Be that as it may, the problem of aggregate or "perverse" effects has most recently been dealt with in a careful way by Raymond Boudon in Effets pervers et ordre social, although it has a rather long history in the literature: as shown by Boudon himself, antecedents can be found in the work of such authors as Rousseau, Mandeville, Adam Smith and Marx, whereas in our days it has been pioneeringly discussed by Merton and considered in a quite explicit and elaborate way by Popper himself.⁴⁵ In our context, one of the chief reasons for stressing the problem of aggregate effects is precisely the fact that they provide the realm par excellence of "sociological laws" which are seen by Popper as being applicable to historical interpretations and to recovering the "logic of the situation".⁴⁶ In fact, Popper goes as far as to sustain that "the chief task of the theoretical social sciences" is precisely "to determine the unintended social consequences of intentional human actions".⁴⁷

Without getting into an argument concerning what should actually be seen as properly the chief task, let us just note that the case of situations in which we have "perverse" effects, resulting from the aggregation of the actions of numerous individual or collective actors, can be treated as a particular case of "externalities" accruing to some from the behavior of others; that such externalities would also include the case of situations in which the unintended consequences take place in the interaction among less

numerous groups of agents or even between two agents, and in which the reciprocal interference of objectives with one another is brought about, in a more or less "casual" way, by the mere "co-presence" of the several agents or groups; and that both the above cases can be put together with those special cases in which, regardless of the number of participants, the positive or negative results that accrue to some from the actions of others are not the inadvertent or casual consequences of an "aggregation effect" or of the mere co-presence, but are rather effects deliberately sought in those actions. What matters, then, is that we are dealing with situations: (1) which have as a salient trait the consequences that stem for each participant, and for the interests or objectives he seeks, from the fact that there are other participants who act in order to realize their own interests or objectives; (2) in which the actions in question are guided by considerations of efficacy, that is to say, they are liable to being treated in terms of rationality. As the growing body of literature of the rational choice and related approaches shows, there is no reason to pretend that a proficuous theoretical effort cannot be undertaken so as to apply to all the cases covered by such assumptions. Quite the contrary is clearly the case.

A few concluding remarks. Popper himself, in the passage in which he seeks to describe his cherished model of the open society, by contrast to the model of the

organic or closed society, refers to the former also (in its extreme form, so to speak) as "abstract society". He then observes parenthetically that it is precisely the analysis of the "abstract relations" typical of this kind of society (toward which tend "our modern open societies") "with which modern social theory, such as economic theory, is mainly concerned". And he adds: "This point has not been understood by many sociologists, such as Durkheim, who never gave up the dogmatic belief that society must be analysed in terms of concrete social groups".⁴⁸ If we keep in mind that the chief characteristic of such approaches as the rational choice is precisely the attempt to extend to other fields the analytic tools of economic theory (taken abstractly to refer to rational behavior in general), then this observation by Popper offers, to begin with, an interesting counterpoint to the above mention of sociological laws, which one might be tempted to interpret in a sense less in accordance to the abstract approach of the rational choice. Clearly, therefore, the substantive Popperian political preference or prescription previously pointed out can be shown to be akin to an explicit methodological prescription which is very close to the one favored here.

But there is more to this. If we pay attention to the characteristics ascribed by Popper to his model of the open and "abstract" society, we can see that they refer to such things as free personal relations, no longer determined by the accidents of birth -- that is to say, by what modern sociologists are used to call the factors of "ascription";

to a consequently new form of individualism; to the predominance of spiritual bonds over those of a different nature; to interchange and cooperation. It is hard to see how such a model might actually be distinguished from Habermas's view of an emancipated state of "individuation" and of communication free of domination -- just as it is easy to see how they can both be approximated to Piaget's conception of the social (and actually moral) requisites of mature forms of intellectual interchange. I suggest that such convergences not only are far from being casual, but also involve the possibility of reaching an admittedly normative model of politics which, nonetheless, be analytically and compellingly derivable from the very definition of politics conceived of as that human activity in which necessarily coexist partial interests to be realized by means of instrumental activity (which implies an ideal of autonomy) and the inescapable interaction and communication determined by the fact that such interests correspond to a plurality of subjects (which implies the ideal of solidarity and cohesion and of enlightened acquiescence, if we are not to let down the ideal of autonomy). That, of course, can be associated with the question of change as rationalization -- and perhaps make less meaningless the question of the meaning of history than Popper pretends to pretend.

NOTES

1. Norberto Bobbio, "Existe uma Doutrina Marxista do Estado?" and "Quais as Alternativas para a Democracia Representativa?", both in N. Bobbio et al., O Marxismo e o Estado (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1979, Portuguese translation by Frederica L. Boccardo and René Levie).
2. Perry Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State (London: Verso Editions, 1979; first published by NLB, 1974).
3. Ibid., p. 422.
4. Ibid., pp. 420-22; italics added.
5. Ibid., pp. 420-22; all italics added.
6. Ibid., p. 420; italics added.
7. Ibid.; see especially p. 420.
8. "Feudalism as a mode of production... was the first in history to render possible a dynamic opposition between town and country; the parcellization of sovereignty inherent in its structure permitted autonomous urban enclaves to grow as centres of production within an overwhelmingly rural economy, rather than as privileged or parasitic centres of consumption or administration -- the pattern Marx believed to be typically Asiatic. The feudal order thus promoted a type of urban vitality unlike that of any other civilization, whose common products can be seen in both Japan and Europe." Lineages, op. cit., p. 422; Anderson's italics.
9. Let me note that Anderson himself, at a certain point, states the general problem in very similar terms. See Lineages, op. cit., p. 8.
10. See Karl R. Popper, Objective Knowledge (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 85 ff.
11. See especially Jean Piaget, "La pensée sociologique", in J. Piaget, Introduction à l'épistémologie génétique (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, volume III).
12. Jean Piaget, "A Explicação em Sociologia", in J. Piaget, Estudos Sociológicos (Rio de Janeiro: Forense, 1973, translated by Reginaldo di Piero), pp. 49-50.
13. Ibid., p. 51.
14. Ibid., pp. 51-2.
15. Ibid., p. 50.

16. Ibid., p. 50.
17. Ibid., p. 50.
18. It is probably unnecessary to add that it is also incompatible with the above mentioned opposition to "formal" approaches that is quite common among Marxist scholars in certain academic milieux, according to which "formal" becomes equivalent to some sort of stupid empiricism and "historical" to sound dialectics. For an example of this mystified conception of the relationship between "formal" and "historical", see Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "Classes Sociais e História: Considerações Metodológicas", in F. H. Cardoso, Autoritarismo e Democratização (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1975).
19. I shall be referring chiefly to The Open Society and its Enemies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, third edition, two volumes, 1957). Also relevant, of course, is The Poverty of Historicism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).
20. See Popper, The Open Society, op. cit., volume II, p. 264.
21. Ibid., volume II, p. 269.
22. Ibid., volume I, pp. 109-13; see also pp. 173 ff.
23. Ibid., volume I, pp. 173 ff., 185 ff.
24. Ibid., volume I, p. 175.
25. See *ibid.*, Chapter 10, especially section IV, and Chapter 24.
26. Ibid., volume II, pp. 264-65.
27. Ibid., volume II, p. 268; italics added.
28. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958). Habermas acknowledges explicitly his debt to Arendt in Jürgen Habermas, Théorie et pratique (Paris: Payot, 1975, translated by G. Raulet), volume I, p. 105, note 5.
29. See Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", in J. Habermas, Toward a Rational Society (London: Heinemann, 1971, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro), especially pp. 91-92.
30. Ibid., p. 92.
31. Jürgen Habermas, La technique et la science comme 'idéologie' (Paris: Gallimard, 1973-75); quoted by Jean-René Ladmiral, "Le programme épistémologique de Jürgen Habermas",

Introduction to J. Habermas, Connaissance et Interêt (Paris: Gallimard, 1976, translated by G. Cléménçon).

32. Besides the works cited above, see also Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975, translated and with an introduction by Thomas McCarthy); and Jürgen Habermas, Logica delle Scienze Sociali (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1970, translated by A. Santucci).
33. Habermas, Théorie et pratique, op. cit., pp. 64-67; Habermas's italics.
34. Ibid., p. 66.
35. See especially Habermas, Logica delle Scienze Sociali, op. cit.
36. Jean Piaget, "As Operações Lógicas e a Vida Social", in J. Piaget, Estudos Sociológicos, op. cit., p. 179.
37. Ibid., p. 188.
38. Ibid., especially p. 181, for the intellectual aspects of the problem. For the moral aspects, see "As Relações entre a Moral e o Direito", in Piaget, Estudos Sociológicos, op. cit., especially pp. 227-28.
39. See Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", op. cit., pp. 91-92; Théorie et pratique, op. cit., volume II, p. 104; Logica delle Scienze Sociali, pp. 85-86. With regard to the latter work (Logik der Sozialwissenschaften, which originally appeared in 1967), Gabriel Cohn has called my attention to the fact that it is presently repudiated by Habermas, and I think a couple of comments should be made on this. The first one is that such a repudiation seems to me, from a certain point of view, largely irrelevant. Any of the great thinkers of the past, if given the chance to reevaluate his own work nowadays, would probably repudiate more or less important parts of it; that, however, does not keep us from taking those thinkers for what they wrote and from discussing them -- just as we do not abstain from critically examining even the texts that a certain author may have deliberately avoided to publish, provided we can get access to them. The second comment is that, in any case, that repudiation turns out to be nothing but a strong corroboration of the proposition concerning Habermas' vacillations on important points.

As should be clear, the present article was written before I had the opportunity to read Habermas' new book, On the Theory of Communicative Action. It should be of interest, of course, to check the extent to which the criticisms made here stand or fall when confronted with this new step of Habermas' efforts.

40. Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'" op. cit., p. 93.
41. For instance, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", op. cit.
42. Carl Schmitt, Le Categorie del "Politico" (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972), pp. 108 and 115.
43. The term "new political economy" was used in James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, The Calculus of Consent (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962). It is certainly unnecessary to provide extensive references on the rational choice approach. Let me just mention Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); Mancur Olson, Jr., The Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1965); and Brian Barry and Russel Hardin (eds.), Rational Man and Irrational Society? An Introduction and Source Book (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), which is a very useful collection of articles and parts of books.
44. An interesting indication of the confusions prevailing on the general methodological problem dealt with here is provided in a recent work by J. Donald Moon. I refer to "The Logic of Political Inquiry: A Synthesis of Opposed Perspectives", included in volume I (Political Science: Scope and Theory) of Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), Handbook of Political Science (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975). Moon puts together the "contingent", the "causal" and the "nomological", which are all contrasted with the "logical", which, in turn, is made to correspond to the "practical", seen as having to do precisely with action, intentionality and goal-oriented behavior.
45. See Raymond Boudon, Effets pervers et ordre social (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977); Robert K. Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action", American Sociological Review, 1936, I, 894-904; as to Popper, see both The Open Society, op. cit. (for instance, volume II, pp. 93-94), and Conjectures and Refutations (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), Chapter 4, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition".
46. See, for instance, The Open Society, op. cit., volume II, Chapter 14, especially p. 97.
47. Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, such as quoted in Boudon, Effets pervers et ordre social, op. cit., p. 5; see also Conjectures and Refutations, op. cit., p. 124.
48. Popper, The Open Society, op. cit., volume I, p. 175; the traits of the "abstract society" cited below in the text are found on the same page.