

SOCIAL THEORY: DEBUNKING ASSUMPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Present paper is a perspective paper which is the outcome of the discomfort of over using scientific methods to understand and explore phenomenon in social sciences. Paper argues how logicity, cause-effect relationship and scientific approach have created a kind of impasse among nature of social science, problems of social science and methods and tools adopted to deal with these problems. This impasse seems to be un-resolvable because innovation taking place in social sciences are still hegemonized by science, where subjectivity, sentiments, emotions are rejected. These left outs of science are 'residues' and are the basis of understanding the nature of social science and its problems. Socio-biological and Radical perspective have been used to elaborate upon the raised quarries. Largely the idea of this article is to debunk the assumptions which are generated by science for social sciences and social theories.

Keywords: Prevailed Assumptions, Methods and Debates

Introduction

Social theorists have made use of assumptions about human nature to substantiate and elaborate upon theories they have given. Almost every theorist accepts understanding human nature with regard to a theory is essentially required. But the fact is that social theorists could not manage to relate the human nature with theory they perpetuated. The mismatch between human nature and given theory is very common in social theory discourse. We will discuss about such issues later in details but an example here will provide clarity about the centrality of the argument. Conservative oriented theorists justify and rationalize various human inequalities based on human's biological innate nature. The mismatch in biological nature and its forced relation with social issues has created problems. It results in building more complexities to resolve the issues, because the assumptions, method and context do not share common epistemological stance. For this point of view (rationalizing social concerns through biological stance) E. O. Wilson has faced criticism by the radical perspective for maintaining such characterizing feature of human behavior inclusive of territoriality, tribalism, the family, sport and warfare were 'phylogenetically adaptive.'

The main problem in this regard is that issues of human nature and compatibility with theory has not reviewed critically the extent to which social theorists have empirically verified the various assumptions about human innate nature which they have incorporated in their theories. The argument of Eunuuchs about their equality issues is based on the critic of socio-biological theorists. The discrimination is based on biological basis that take it to the social sphere and make the discrimination permanent because biological basis are also seen as binary (male or female), which hardly provide space to any other diversity as long as gender is concern.

The above discussion and analysis leads us to ask a fundamental question, is it important and unavoidable to use of assumptions about human nature in a social theory. And if the answer is yes, another important question emerged whether it is possible and even necessary for social theorists to base their

assumptions about human on some kind of empirical data about human nature which is not governed by biological or scientific stance only. This will help to explain the actual role of social theory, which is not merely a mean to objectify particular social ideologies or establishing science base of society without acknowledging the human nature beyond and other than biological base.

In brief, there are various theories which discuss about human nature. One of the theories which have scientific underpinnings is socio-biological theory. It includes logicity and rationality. As per this perspective, biological perspective determines the idea of equality in society, which has been critiqued by various other theorists. The problem of inequality is rooted in society but has always been treated with it biological bases. There is a need to understand that human beings are not static entities, therefore, human nature is also dynamic and so scientific method will not be able to answer many questions related to social sciences.

Taking this argument ahead, it is important to understand that all social theories assume something about human nature. Understanding these assumptions is crucial in understanding the dynamics of theory construction. Further, we established that differences in these assumptions would lead to differences in the nature of theory and if social theories are tried to be explained by science, then there will be chaos, because the nature of problem and nature of method will not be matching and issues will keep persisting.

Here, it is also important to understand and critically analyzed that over domination of science to explain social phenomenon has created un-resolvable situation in social sciences. Wherever science managed to explain the ideas in social life has been celebrated by science but where it fails to explain it argues and starts establishing that 'nature of social science is very complex' and left the crucial issues unaddressed. This again happened because of inability of science to explain, social science. Social science, which by this time has been so depended on scientific method to explain social sphere, accepted this claim of science about social science and continued to reproduce the basic dependency of social science over science and hence un-resolvable issues.

This critical analysis shows that to make social science and social theories more relevant to its own nature, it is required that it does not force social science to be same as science and provide space to work on emotionality, subjectivity, interest and sentiments instead of objectivity, logicity and cause-effect relationship. These left out which has never been accepted by science as a way or tool to study because of their subjectivity and less cause- effect relationship are 'residues.' Therefore, to using these residues will help to establish a relationship among social science, social theory and their nature.

Residues are our non-logical behaviors, needs, motivations, emotions and sentiments. Our residues of innate drives and instincts govern these behaviors. These residues become basis for subjective elements as theories are to be logical and rational. This general idea about theory construction was challenged by Pareto in his book (1916) 'Mind and Society- A Treatise on General Science' where he in attempt to define subject matter of sociology, argued that social theories should consider human sentiments because human experience exists at subjective level.

Here theories of Elites formulated by Pareto, Mosca and Michels in the references of the socio-biological basis of Elitism. In Pareto's view human experience is a matter of subjective level so sentiments are among the most important elements with which sociology is called upon to deal. Residues, appetites

and interests are the main factors to determine the social equilibrium. Pareto's theory of Elites added that the residues are not evenly distributed among the various strata of society. He argued that social change and the circulation of Elites occurs when the higher stratum or aristocracy decline in proportions of the residues which enable them to win their power and hold it. The residues of sociality and individualism are unequally allocated. In reaction of the ideals of reason and the natural laws of social development, Mosca (1923) argued that social phenomena and human behavior must be analyzed in a subjective context. He asserts that a social phenomenon is the product of the context and psychological tendencies of human nature. According to him the most important factor of human behavior is the basic psychological law of the struggle of men for preeminence that always resulted in the victory of the organized majority over unorganized majority. Therefore, the entire debate goes round and round about the context, approach and method with regard to their subjectivity and objectivity. The ideas and assumptions which required debunking are related to the human nature, pedagogic processes, correlation between the epistemological basis of problem, methods decided to solve it and solution etc.

Further it is interesting to know how perspective other than socio-biological has seen assumptions mentioned above. By the end of 1960s theorists from across the world has started questioning and critiquing the various organizations and institutions such as political, economic etc related to western society. The developmental illusion created by liberalism was getting dis-illuminated. Theorists in social world become relatively more aware about the issues of inequalities, competition, and commodity fetishism and started questioning the existing governance system. Liberal idea of freedom was also challenged, because of mechanical engagement of people in production and forced choice without considering the needs and requirements. These theorists had become critical about west societies and contributed to in development of theories which question the political commitments of western world. For example, David Horowitz has said that it is easy " *to see that such a perspective is 'radical' in the usual sense in that it leads directly to the question of how its members and institutions may be adjusted and accommodated to the need to maintain social stability and order*" (Horowitz, 1971:7).

Norman Birnbaum is one of the leading radical theorists. He showed his trust in Marxism to critique the post industrial society. He argued that there are certain pre-requisites or conditions to attain and celebrate the state of freedom, such as " *men cannot repossess their world until they recognize in it, their own labour. Before this can occur, certain historical conditions have to be met. A specific human group and a social class must so develop that the conditions of its liberation from ideology are identical with the conditions of human liberation generally*" (Birnbaum, 1971:7). Here the condition of human liberation is associated with the human nature, which is not bound to political boundaries. This idea explains that man is an active entity, who need right praxis to develop himself at fullest, because this praxis will provide space, opportunities and context to reconstruct and reconstitute one's self and that is how a person will be acknowledged with regard to his 'real nature', which is not governed by capitalism and which is free from the restrictions of capitalism. Capitalist societies claim to be working for individual freedom but actually capitalist societies contribute in suppressing of individual freedom.

Similarly to question the existing social order Baran said " *powerless to justify an irrational and inhuman social order and unable to answer the increasingly urgent questions which is poses, bourgeois ideology clings to concepts that are anachronistic..... Its bankruptcy manifests....in the stubborn upholding of old fetishes and half truths which now turn into blatant lies*" (Baran and Sweezy, 1966:338).

Despite all the efforts made by various theorists “ *the question nevertheless remains whether social theorists today have the responsibility of basing their assumptions about human nature on anything else other than the convenience of these assumptions in supporting their own world view and their specific beliefs about the nature of human society and behavior*” (Nicholas G,L Petryszak, 1980).

The entire discussion explains the necessity of human nature to develop any social theory. Both conservative and radical sociologist has given value to biological nature of human being to argue their theoretical underpinnings and ideological view point. But, it also does not mean that conservative and radical sociologist view points and ideological stances are same. They are fundamentally different from each other. Another important aspect which required attention is that the use of certain process repetitively establishes their strong existence. Kumar (2017) argues that the over use of existing theoretical framework enultrate one’s thinking process in a specific direction which hinder the process of generating innovative ideas. Therefore, theoretical framework is a fear for authentic researches.

Abridgment in Context

In constructing and justifying social theories, the biological stances have been quite common among theorists to rationalize certain social, political and economic structure. These assumptions based on biological differences and innate human nature have often been used as basis to rationalize inequalities grounded in class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on. One might agree that the origin of these assumptions can be traced back to experiences or even common observations of the theorists utilizing these assumptions in their theories, there can be several counter arguments to these. *First*, both experiences and observations can be subjective in nature conditioned if we consider whose experiences and observations are being taken into consideration, and the pre-conceived notions, the socio- economic conditions and prior experiences that shaped the ideological stance of the person. *Second*, where is the data coming from, does it cover sufficient portion of the population or if the data is even reliable. Yet, however, the biological differences can make an argument seem logical and difficult to counter. But since such arguments conveniently disregard human emotions and sentiments, there can always be a counter argument, which, if not completely uprooting biological differences as an argument for inequality, at least shakes the foundation and make it difficult to sustain socio-biological theories. Moreover, since emotions and sentiments are generally in reaction to an action, one can argue for its logical nature and hence, despite its subjective nature, question its absence from construction of social theories.

Radical social theorists claim that a spirit of collectivism cannot prevail in a capitalist society. Capitalism promotes an individualistic approach wherein material benefit and profit to the self become more important, and true welfare of the society and social contribution take a back seat. Hence, it limits opportunities for individual members of the society to realize their full potential, thus restricting individual freedom. Also, Norman Birnbaum (1971) argues that the practice of praxis is restricted in a capitalist society and unless people develop the practice of reflection they cannot be truly liberated, concluding that capitalism restricts individual freedom.

If we look at the education system from the above lens, it provides some interesting thoughts to ponder over. If the above holds true universally then for profit school will fail at providing an education that will help students grow as active and reflective member of the society. It won’t be able to provide a

democratic education, and be unable to provide equal access and equal opportunities of growth to all. Therefore, to ensure that everybody receives education that provides them equal opportunity for growth and to realize their potential, then an education system which does not work on profit making will need to be followed. In other words, commercialization of education will fail in the aim to prepare self aware and socially aware members of the society.

Similarly, at the higher education level, only those with the requisite resources will be able to attain access to and successfully complete higher education. Thus, capitalism will limit the opportunity for advanced studies and further realization of potential through higher education by not creating opportunities for more at an economic and social disadvantage.

At the policy level too, we require a platform where all stakeholders can together debates about a policy decision and arrive at solution to the problems indentified. Now this requires:

- A reflective approach where we think beyond the problems to arrive at the solution and at the same time be able to give critical thought to the proposed ideas.
- A collective effort and commitment to the society which requires efforts beyond individual profits. In this endeavor it will be necessary for the individual's dependence and want for material benefits and comfort to take a back step in favor of the right praxis and a collective approach to develop policies as solution to the challenges within education.

New Beginning

The need is to understand and necessitate the revisiting of prevailed nature of social science which is largely decided and governed by sciences and its method. Social theorists have to work towards establishing the utility and necessity of subjectivity, emotions, sentiments etc to explore about the social issues and phenomenon, which will develop and explain actual nature of social science which is beyond simple cause- effect relationship. The argument that subjectivity will not be able to provide good tools to deal with issues is a myth, because we have not explored subjectivity sufficiently in itself. Our idea of subjectivity is also governed by the way science perceived it. Therefore, social theorists have to work to draw a parallel line instead of critiquing science only. Not only this, field based contextual theorization is required in the field of social theory for which researches without existing theoretical framework have to be conceptualized. Ethnographies can work effectively to establish the actual nature of social science. Researches to develop new research methods and tools for social science are also required, which cannot be postponed any further.

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