

## Relational Sociology, Pragmatics, Interactions, and Social Areas

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### Abstract

I contend that the field of relational sociology faces the potential loss of its underlying purpose if it fails to adequately address two essential ontological and practical concerns. These difficulties arise from the concept that relational sociology is grounded in several social ontologies that are incompatible with one other. (2) The subject of inquiry in relational sociology pertains to the aspects that are examined and analysed within this field of study. In this context, I propose a thorough analysis of sociology that distinguishes relational sociology from social determinism and co-determinism. The work has a discernible influence from the writings of J. Dewey, but in a somewhat liberal manner.

KEYWORDS: determinism, co-determinism, pragmatism, social theory, social fields, and transactions.

### INTRODUCTION

The following statement perhaps marks the inception of a social manifesto: The historical development of classical sociology was characterised by the ongoing conflicts and competitions among different perspectives. Marxism, functionalism, feminism, Weberian theory, system theory, rational choice theory, and symbolic interactionism represent a range of sociological theories and approaches. These theories have engaged in an ongoing, often concealed, and sometimes openly competitive relationship. This rivalry has been driven by divergent or even contradictory viewpoints on essential matters, including the objectives of sociology, the characteristics of the social sciences, and the criteria for evaluating the quality of a theory.

One of the primary inquiries pertained to the correlation between society and people, or the interplay between social structures and agency. One particular branch of sociology espoused the concept of social determinism, while another branch contested the notion that an individual's identity is influenced by social institutions or society at large.

A considerable number of sociologists underwent changes in their professional positions during the course of their careers, and in some instances, even within the same body of work. The subsequent sociological manifesto might perhaps draw its major source of inspiration from Elias' *The Civilization Process*, as opposed to Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*.

Contemporary sociology, stemming from its classical predecessor, has not eradicated the proliferation of theories. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has given rise to a novel form of societal advancement that lacks an accompanying theoretical hegemony, instead relying on a serene intellectual habitus. Many sociologists have adopted a strategy of mitigating disagreements in academic settings such as conferences, journals, and classrooms by making concessions that are often weak or complex in relation to core concerns. Regarding the correlation between agency and social structures, a consensus among sociologists exists, suggesting that social phenomena are comprised of both A and B, rather than being limited to either A or B.

This succinct and witty introduction establishes a connection between classical and modern sociology. It is imperative to provide a complete citation for Martin's work as he articulates my intended message with precision. Upon examining the situation of Western sociology at the onset of the new century, it becomes apparent that the most notable observation is the lack of a theoretical crisis, which may potentially raise concerns. Even the most sceptical analysts are unable to detect any indications of a significant theoretical breakdown or ambiguity within the field of academic sociology in its present state. Furthermore, there is no basis to expect a crisis in the foreseeable future. The resolution of core issues in social analysis remains elusive due to several factors. Firstly, there is a lack of consensus regarding the criteria for evaluating the quality of theories. Various standards, such as the ability to explain variation, parsimony, prediction of future states, reproducible intervention, intuitive accessibility, and support for generative research, are frequently cited but often contradictory. Secondly, there exists ambiguity surrounding the ontological status of cr Nevertheless, the theoretical aspect remains devoid of any discourse or activity.

I argue that the prevailing quiet can be attributed to two allegedly beneficial yet highly detrimental phenomena: (1) a pervasive agreement to equally accommodate both valid and invalid dichotomies, and (2) the escalation of theoretical exaggeration. In contemporary discourse, it has been a prevailing practise to frequently terminate debates involving various conventional dichotomies by asserting the coexistence of both sides. These oppositions include macro/micro, social/individual, nature/nurture, static/dynamic, structure/agency, and quantitative/qualitative. Both individual and cultural influences have a crucial role in influencing X, Y, and Z. The remedies mentioned by Goldstone (1991, p. 49) are

characterised as "wishy-washy" and seem to expedite the prompt resolution of long-standing paradoxes, without compromising the legitimacy of these claims (Martin, 2003, pp. 2-3).

There exist compelling justifications for refraining from engaging in intellectual arenas where aspiring "paradigms" compete for supremacy in speech. In my perspective, it is reasonable to express criticism towards oversimplified or too complex compromises that arise from the concept of co-determinism (Dépelteau, 2008). This is particularly relevant considering the emergence of the "relational turn," which presents an alternative approach. Emirbayer's current work serves as a reminder that relational sociology (RS) emerged as a critical response to established sociological theories, conceptions, and practises.

Upon my initial introduction with the concept of "relational thinking" during the early 1990s, its terminology appeared reminiscent of military vernacular. Prominent social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Harrison White, and Charles Tilly, with emerging researchers like Margaret Somers and Peter Bearman, were actively questioning several established and prevailing methodologies within the field of sociological research. The opponents encompassed various methodologies, including statistical regression-based approaches commonly used in status attainment research, rational choice theory and other economic perspectives, categorical approaches that prioritised shared attributes rather than relational settings or configurations, monological accounts (referred to as the "village monograph" by Bourdieu) that lacked a dialogical or field-theoretic framework, and several other conventional and dominant approaches with The individuals who advocated for a realignment of sociology with a focus on relationships expressed their viewpoints through the medium of critical critiques. The individuals in question were under the impression that they were actively participating in a cognitive contest. The individuals had apprehension over their ability to compete with those of high intellectual capacity. According to the source cited on page 209 in the year 2013, Emirbayer is a prominent sociologist known for his contributions to the field of social

Emirbayer (1997) posits in his seminal work on relational theory that the social realm is primarily shaped by dynamic processes rather than by fixed social structures. To support this claim, he draws upon the ideas of prominent processual philosophers such as Dewey, Cassirer, and Elias. In reality, RS was not only a performance carried out by one individual. In the early 1990s, Bourdieu began to exhibit a shift towards this trajectory. Scholars such as White, specialising in network analysis, have devised relational frameworks and methodologies to

investigate the interconnections among "nodes." Latour has posited that sociologists can fulfil their professional duties by scrutinising the associations between human and non-human "actants." Furthermore, critical realists such as Archer and Elder-Vass have also established links between their theoretic In his work titled "What Is Sociology," Elias had previously released a book that explores relational aspects without explicitly employing this specific label. While it is possible to offer other illustrations, the main emphasis is on the many manifestations of RS as indicated by Dépelteau (2013).

Despite the association of RS with provocative language, its emergence might be attributed to a period in which sociologists were actively searching for resolutions rather than the "profound antinomies" highlighted by Martin. Potentially, the proliferation of generalisations such as "everything is relational," "relationships hold significance," and "society (or a social structure) is composed of connections" has resulted in a reduction of the inherent novelty within the field of relational science. The prevailing consensus among individuals, regardless of their theoretical inclinations towards Marx, Parsons, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Elias, Luhmann, Bourdieu, structuralism, critical realism, or other influential sociological perspectives, is that these generalisations hold true for the majority of individuals. In recent decades, RS has become closely linked with many social theories and concepts, despite the fact that their arguments may be rooted in conflicting opinions or principles. In summary, a layer of imprecise and conceptual statements has obfuscated underlying matters. Moreover, the intricate compromises in RS are a product of meticulousness, unquestionable intellect, and a profound comprehension of social theory and the social realm. The following list is not meant to be comprehensive, but it includes notable recent publications by Donat (2011), Crossley (2011), Elder-Vass (2010), Piironen (2014), as well as works by Archer and Bourdieu, which are considered outstanding exemplars. Sophisticated and complicated compromises often give rise to various issues due to the dualistic nature they maintain (King, 2004). The aforementioned statement holds true for the many forms of co-determinism as mentioned by Dépelteau in his works from 2008 and 2013.

The primary contention posited is that, in contrast to prior suppositions, the significance of the advancement of RS lies solely in its capacity to provide an innovative methodology towards a select number of foundational issues. As individuals who are both social and introspective in nature, it is imperative that it aids us in effectively addressing societal issues. In this context,

sociology, as an academic discipline, need a framework (Latour, 2004), akin to other scientific fields, but also benefiting from a substantial degree of dissent. It is not possible to be more "civilised." If RS fails to initiate this form of productive discourse, if it evades rather than tackles core issues, or if it is only a rehash of existing ideas, it may be considered superfluous noise (Dépelteau, 2013). The potential obsolescence of RS arises from the lack of a comprehensive explanation of its distinctiveness and its potential to aid those outside the field of sociology in addressing their social issues. I thus present a pragmatic recommendation for a research study that draws inspiration from the Dewe acceptance framework. The potential of this research study to produce unique and enhanced solutions to two interconnected categories of questions is a key factor in determining its relevance, whether in its entirety or in part.

#### **What's the point of RS?**

The current phenomena that is being referred to as the "relational turn" is intricately interwoven with academic arguments that are focussed on dualism. In particular, the conceptual barrier that exists between agency and social systems is being discussed. According to Dépelteau (2013), the predominance of co-determinism is unquestionably one of the most important topics of discussion in modern scientific dialogues. In a nutshell, those who subscribe to the theory of codeterminism investigate the dynamic relationship that exists between social structures and individual agency, regardless of whether or not they are aware of their activities. According to what Martin has stated in the past, codeterminist theories come into play when both the individual and the society elements are deemed to be key determinants of X, Y, and Z. Some people quickly embrace the idea of co-determinism because they recognise the relevance of its role in preventing an overwhelming tendency towards voluntarism/subjectivism or determinism/objectivism. On the other hand, there are many who recognise the intricacy of the problem and devote whole works of literature to elucidating the theoretical relationship that exists between social institutions and individual agency. Academics that specialise in the third category of relational sociology have been actively seeking an alternate point of view. Hermeneutic sociology was pioneered by King (2004), and it is characterised by the understanding of social interactions from the perspective of the persons participating in such interactions (p. 171).

A pragmatic assessment of critical realism and the dualistic character it holds may be found in the works of Kivinen and Piironen (2004, 2006) as well as Piironen (2014, 2016). The

authors argue that although it is necessary to differentiate between social structures and agency in an analytical sense, it is not necessary nor desirable to construct a clear-cut or ambiguous ontological division between the two. Instead, they say, it is preferable to avoid making such a distinction wherever possible. Despite the fact that I could have a different point of view on some of the concepts that sociologists have put up, I continue to have an optimistic outlook on the possibility that sociology will go through a logical metamorphosis in its approach to relationships. When seen via an ontological or analytical lens, one of the most significant advantages of this technique is that it is able to question the notion that the social sphere exists independently of individuals. This is accomplished without the need for a change towards subjectivism or individual methodological methods.

The purpose is to completely overcome the duality that exists between subjective experience and objective reality.

When the writings of Dewey, Latour, and a number of other academics are taken into consideration, it is clear that the existence of reality is properly acknowledged. In addition, it is an emotion that is held by a large number of different people. At the moment, I consider myself to be a pragmatist. This refers to the philosophical position that holds that it is impossible to arrive at absolute truths in any area of research. As a result, one of the most surprising effects of RS would be for people to give up their search for absolute facts altogether. The identification of the underlying processes or infrastructures that regulate suppositional occurrences, the unveiling of social laws, or the revelation of the pure forms of the social are all things that are not only impossible but also inappropriate. The extraordinary complexity of social processes and the inherent limitations of human intellect are two considerations that might be used to support an argument that there is a need for something that goes beyond the idea of truth. Since our awareness of the entire is restricted, we must rely on educated guesswork to determine the nature of the whole. In addition to this, social phenomena are seen to be in a constant state of change. Their environment makes it very clear that there are no long-lasting institutions, legal structures, conventions, or processes.

It would appear that Plato's assertion about the fundamental limitations of human vision, according to which people are only capable of perceiving mere shadows of actual events, is correct to some extent. This is because the statement describes how people are restricted to perceiving just shadows of actual happenings. Relational sociologists are able to differentiate

themselves from the high ideals of Plato's philosophers because of their dedication to a separate pragmatic and transactional epistemology. One more time, it is essential to emphasise the significance of the fact that there is no pristine condition that can be viewed and revealed. In the following discussion, an explanation will be given about the inclusion of relational sociology within this logical framework, as well as an investigation into the possible benefits that may be received from this disciplinary discipline. Both of these topics will be discussed in conjunction with one another.

### CONCLUSSION

In recent years, there has been a discernible rise in the number of fervent responses that may be attributed to the ideas that are presented in this academic work. It is clear to me, based on my substantial experience working in the field of social sciences, that a considerable number of my professional contemporaries place a high value on the ideas of causation within social systems and the pursuit of the truth. A warning comment was made in the past by one of my other colleagues, indicating that the discipline of sociology may be doomed to oblivion if we stopped the habit of attributing identical behaviours to the operation of social structures.

In addition to worries over the possible extinction of sociology in its present iteration, there is a desire among myself and others to challenge the underlying assumptions that underpin this phenomena, which is feeding the response that was just indicated. This phenomenon is being driven by the aforementioned response. There may be instances of agency that are intermittently intermingled with recurrent and comparable behaviours and interactions, but these do not serve as the essential underpinnings of our society's structure. These occurrences of agency are possible. In addition, it is important to note that a different strategy for comprehending the aforementioned parallels could involve investigating the interactions that take place within the various social sectors, as opposed to relying on the idea of "social things" (*International Review of Sociology—Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 61). The ability to acquire a thorough understanding of sociology has the potential to make harmonic cohabitation more achievable by preventing the imposition of a universal "conditions of order." It is conceivable that social structures might not serve as the essential basis for social organisations, which may demonstrate traits of fragility and transience in their operations. I will not stop bringing up these fundamental issues because I want to see transactional sociology become a more established topic. Other sociologists have, in the past, put up comparable

concepts, which have frequently been subjected to criticism and been dubbed as anti-sociological viewpoints, such as "methodological individualism." Latour was met with prompt, vehement, and negative responses to her remark that advocated giving up the search for the Truth and relying on "hard" facts instead. In a nutshell, the author contends that if one pays close attention to the phenomena known as "science-in-action," one may recognise the formation of links among "actants" through the utilisation of tubes and machines, academic papers, citations, and other research methods. This can be accomplished by attentively studying the phenomenon. The method of data collecting that scientists use is neither the same as Plato's philosophical ideas or a practical comprehension of the cosmos. Both of these are separate from the scientific method.

Because of his empirical analysis of science-in-action, which has generated issues about the validity of scientific knowledge, numerous sociologists and epistemologists have regarded Latour as a radical relativist or constructivist, which is contrary to the prevalent conventional wisdom. This is largely owing to his examination of science-in-action, which has produced these doubts. In point of fact, Latour's support for realism in dialogues concerning scientific undertakings constitutes a threat to the authority that science enjoys as a human endeavour.

It would appear that the adverse responses may be ascribed more to the social habitus than they could be to the radicalism or freshness of the themes and theories that I offer and embrace. This is a possibility. Many sociologists are skilled at employing empirical evidence to claim that they possess the ability to perceive forces or happenings that are not easily obvious to others. This is one of the primary ways in which sociologists differentiate themselves from other researchers. The individuals are under the impression that the acknowledgment they receive from other people is directly proportional to their level of efficacy in playing the part of one of Plato's philosophers, who are endowed with the ability to explain abstract ideas and societal structures.

Having said that, it is important to highlight the fact that my experience has shown me that only a small percentage of sociologists genuinely believe that they are able to meet the demands of this role. The overwhelming majority of people have a stronger tendency towards pragmatism and humility than any other personality trait. I have spent a significant amount of time reading and listening to spoken and written discourse on the topics of society, social systems, and social structures. It has been seen that a growing number of sociologists are



participating in empirical research relating to certain social domains, but they are not making use of the language that was indicated earlier in this sentence. In addition, it is quite unusual to come across sociologists who are not under the impression that their field of study has the ability to contribute to the solution of a variety of issues that plague society. In spite of the fact that these ideas could be subjected to some criticism in the future, several sociologists make use of scientific methods that are, to some degree, comparable to one another. This is the thesis that I am aiming to communicate. When seen from this angle, it is clear that a sizeable percentage of people have the propensity to reevaluate their cognitive habits, which can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The improvements that took place in the latter half of the 1980s are perhaps the most important reason that can be credited with contributing to the rising prominence of the RS designation. According to Emirbayer (2013), it is essential to recognise that the aforementioned terminology have the potential to be categorised as "fighting words."

The incorporation of sociological research with applicable societal difficulties that are confronted in individuals' day-to-day lives is the method via which this study proposes the beginning of a "deep" transformation in interpersonal relationships, which will be difficult to accomplish but extremely necessary. This shows that it is essential to acknowledge that social spheres do not come equipped with an innate framework that can be applied everywhere, and it is needed to do so. Instead, it is vital to connect with individuals within the varied and distinct social settings they inhabit. Additionally, it is imperative to actively seek to help others in navigating their social issues by developing practical sociological knowledge. The individuals, in line with their various roles and tasks, actively contribute to the formation of these ephemeral and extremely dynamic spaces as participants. Sociologists should place a higher priority on observing, characterising, comparing, and investigating the various and multidimensional nature of these domains rather than trying to establish a general description for them.

People who are not necessarily sociologists are the ones who are responsible for shaping the world in all of its complicated glory. Sociologists, on the other hand, have the potential to make a significant contribution to this continuous process by developing social intelligence through a sequence of around 62 social encounters, as guided by F. Dépelteau. Again, the

incorporation of sociological knowledge has the ability to raise our level of social intelligence and make it easier for us to navigate the intricacies that are inherent in our social environment. It is worthwhile to consider the possibility of using this strategy in modern society in light of the current condition, which is characterised by many crises. In addition to this, it is of the utmost importance to determine whether or not the discipline of sociology is adequately prepared to manage the transition away from the eras of social determinism and co-determinism.

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