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Scholar Entangled: The Unattainable Detachment in Social Inquiry

Įsipainiojęs mokslininkas: objektyvumo problema
socialiniuose tyrimuose

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Abstract: The practice of social studies continues to be a complicated scientific endeavor. From an epistemological point of view, the social sciences, unlike the natural sciences, do not conform to the predominant definition of science. The existing differences among expositions of “science,” “inquiry,” and “studies” lie with the contested role of the intellectual who is embarked on understanding the social realm. The “maturity” of the social sciences is usually discussed in the context of objectivity and rationality. But continuing epistemological debates would be insufficient without reference to the scholar as a human studying humans. The philosophy of science has focused mainly on the procedures of knowledge accumulation, neglecting social context and its implications for inquiry. To address this neglect, this essay sets out first to retrace doubts about the role of the scholar that emerged with the institutionalization of the social sciences at the outset of the twentieth century and then to rethink these issues in terms of recent scientific developments. What surfaces is a new, participatory role for scholars that demands responsible contextualization and a broader conception of causal stories.

Keywords: rationality, social inquiry, philosophy of science, entanglement.

Summary: Socialinės studijos išlieka prieštaringa mokslinė sritis. Skirtingai nuo gamtos mokslų, socialiniams mokslams yra sunkiau pritaikyti vyraujančius mokslinius kriterijus. Apibrėžimų ir interpretacijų skirtumai „mokslų“, „tyrimų“ ir „studijų“ atvejais yra tiesiogiai susiję su nevienareikšmiu mokslinio tyrėjo vaidmeniu, ypač siekiant suprasti socialinę tikrovę. Socialinių mokslų branda paprastai vertinama objektyvumo ir racionalumo kontekste. Tačiau nesibaigiantys epistemologiniai debatai gali prarasti savo vertę, jei nebus atsižvelgta į mokslininką kaip į žmogų, tiriantį kitus žmones. Mokslų filosofija daugiausia koncentruojasi į žinojimo augimą, ignoruodama socialinį kontekstą ir jo įtaką tyrimams. Straipsnyje aptariamas socialinio mokslininko darbo problemiškas, išlikęs nuo socialinių mokslų institucionalizacijos pradžios XX a. pirmojoje pusėje. Taip pat kritikuojamas besąlygiškas objektyvumo (nešališkumo) principų taikymas socialinėms studijoms, įžvelgiant pavojų epistemologinei pozicijai tapti socialiniu požiūriu.

Keywords: racionalumas, racionalumas, socialinis tyrimas, mokslo filosofija, įtraukimas.

Introduction

The words “scholar” and “social inquiry” have been deliberately chosen for the title of this paper. Their modern counterparts, “scientist” and “social science,” may seem more prominent in academic terms but are nonetheless controversial. A certain trend has come to the fore regarding the usage of these words that by and large connote the natural sciences collectively as an exemplary model of scientific endeavor, a model that is the focus of this paper. The impressive success of Newtonian physics

has set long-term scientific standards that include impersonal knowledge, “value-free” objectivity, and the articulation of regular patterns. A pivotal principle of these standards has been the detachment of scientists as observers and researchers. The detachment was supposed to guarantee an impartial objectivity thus indicating the right way ‘to do science’. It has constituted a methodological framework used in social science since its institutionalization in universities at the end of the nineteenth century. Though, as the century that followed has not marked a final elaboration of social science, the application of scientific method in terms of attained detachment remains questionable in the social realm.

Social science as such has become associated with industrialization from the nineteenth century, but it has never achieved the same success as natural science, “though many have tried.” As a result, social science has continued to drift between philosophy and the humanities on the one hand and natural science on the other. However, a mechanistic approach, with relevant cause-effect relations, has still been extensively applied in social studies that do not qualify for the comprehensive exploitation of available options. Meanwhile, many interesting developments have taken place in the natural sciences as well, e.g., in physics, with the result that Newtonian physics is no longer the only exemplary mode of scientific inquiry. This paper discusses a complete unattainability of detachment in social inquiry, hereby positioning a scholar in non-isolated (entangled) setting. It is not possible to cover the majority of social disciplines within the scope of this paper, so it has referred mainly to economics due to its representational status (as ‘queen of social sciences’). Economics, as one of the oldest ‘established’ social disciplines, enables to reconsider epistemological problems both in historical and social context. Therefore, it can provide with some relevant insights for the broader discussion in regard to the problem of detachment.

Certainly, scholars had been always ‘entangled’ before the term ‘entanglement’ entered quantum physics. The major problem with studying the social realm is defined by the sheer impossibility of impartial knowledge. In other words, positivism applies only to a limited degree to social reality, even if its mode of “slicing” the object of study to retrieve quantitative data is claimed to be comprehensive. The detachment of scientists is an idealized notion that in many cases is not even completely adhered to in the natural sciences. For example, sometimes taking a measurement literally requires the intervention of the observer, as in quantum and particle physics. Since the definition of observation is not fixed, the notion of objectivity itself is rather inconsistent. The upshot is that scholars are more than just scientists—they are intellectuals, who are not controlled by the technical functions and standard procedures imposed by the scientific framework. To begin with, they must be sensitive to ethical issues and societal needs, which is not as superficial a declaration as it may seem.

On the Verge of troubled times

The statement by Rorty (2016: 24) that “there was no intellectual struggle comparable in scale to the warfare between science and theology” between 1600 and 1900 stimulates some troubling thoughts concerning the twentieth century and beyond. Its material and technological achievements have been strongly associated with the scientific method and rationality. On the one hand, the quest for a universal framework was a basic precondition of the scientific project (Wallerstein 1996: 3) with an ambitious promise to extract some rationality from the so-called *non-scientific cluster of values*. However, a clash of ideologies has displaced the warfare between science and religion, leaving the issue of rationality no less complicated. The autonomy of science has continued to be defined in relative terms, especially in the case of the social sciences. This is a hallmark of the twentieth century—politics pervading science and vice versa. The relation between these two has become a special kind of entanglement indicative, both implicitly and explicitly, of a new pattern of research within the social realm.

Following the first industrial revolution, a scientific capacity to predict and control processes has been placed in the service of engineering power. The need for newly emerged nation-states to consolidate and manage social transformations has invoked a technical and deterministic approach within the social sciences. This marks a certain point of divergence between scientific and intellectual outlooks, which is no less significant than the preceding split between philosophy and the sciences. The present suggestion is that scholars should aspire to re-evaluate the restrictions imposed by methods, thereby moving toward resuming social inquiry in a broader context than the notion of “discipline” allows. Despite the ubiquitous nature of impressive developments, the sense of *stasis* is still prevalent in the ivory tower of social knowledge. This is certainly not a winning stance.

In some sense, science can be nominated as the successor to the theological tradition since it claims a monopoly on knowledge of Being. On the other hand, theology readily assumes the scientific foundations of religion, thus preserving the status of a faculty discipline in some Western universities (which philosophy, by default, cannot frequently afford). From a historical perspective, a “purification” mechanism by means of the scientific method has not, at least in the social field, proven to be reliable by sustaining a framework of rational values of its own throughout the twentieth century. It is rewarding to compare certain intellectual fluctuations in the context of this dispute. Dewey (1929), while dismissing traditional metaphysics, put his faith in the industrial economy and experimental scientific method; Dyson (2006), at the end of the twentieth century, admitted the relevance of religious values to the growth of scientific knowledge. However, first and foremost, these authors shared a common sentiment regarding the role of science and scientists in terms of society and social responsibility. Dewey and Dyson rejected a grand universal framework based on privileged access to “pure”

rationality cleansed of social and moral values. Equally, they dismissed the perspective of an idealized outside spectator (be it God or a “detached” observer) and the unique authority of science in the search for new knowledge.

Even though the demand for adequate policy advice is growing, the social sciences possess a limited set of research tools that mainly rely on modeling and statistical databases. This means that social knowledge has necessarily been accumulated from experience as well, including dead ends and mistakes, though not everyone is willing to take advantage of these. For example, the mentality of “let bygones be bygones” is still evident in the economic mental outlook for ideological and methodological reasons (Stiglitz 2010). The ideal of detachment has been disconnected from social reality, much as a religious sentiment might be. If social inquiry is to be newly approached, social interests and ethical considerations must become an inseparable part of a research program (or paradigm) that is liberated from misleading and reductionist “rational agents.”

For the benefit of the service

Shortly after the social sciences were established in universities at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries (Wagner 2001), it became obvious that social complexity could not be surrendered to the engineering ambitions of the industrialization epoch. The newly emerged nation-states needed a sophisticated tool for administrative statecraft, something that had been realized since long before nineteenth-century industrialization. At that time, a basic principle of experimental science propounded by Bacon delivered a new promise “to tame a Nature.” The much-appreciated success of the predictive capacity of the physical sciences had stimulated the governing elites to believe that they could ‘tame’ a social and political order. That shift in thinking had been premised on the expected transposition of lawlike regularities from the physical to the social realm by assuming certain similarities between the two, an assumption that paved the way for the social sciences.

Not surprisingly, the first theoreticians and practitioners of social sciences also occupied administrative positions (Hirschman 1997, Wallerstein 1996). This became quite an influential trend, sometimes referred to as “mandarinization,” which survived into the era of imperial Germany. Although the compresence of scholars and administrators in one person can be traced back to Ancient China, it is unnecessary to go back so far to find examples. The obligation to supply “policy advice” has led to a peculiar list of requirements for scholars—who are forced, sometimes unaware, to make conflicting methodological, professional, and moral choices during their inquiries. These contradictions are usually resolved by “rationalizing” hidden bias within a formal framework (Myrdal 1944). A “disinterested social science,” according to Myrdal, “never existed, and it never will exist” (1944: 1064).

Meantime, the philosophy of science has always struggled with the so-called immaturity of the social sciences (Kuhn 1996 [1962], Lakatos 1999 [1976], Popper 2008 [1963]). The introduction into economics, the “queen” of the social sciences, of mathematical models with linear equations did not complete its maturation. Once the professionalization of the sciences has gained momentum, there has always remained an open question regarding the application of the results of scientific research in terms of the common good. Natural scientists can perform as many experiments as necessary, but social theorists do not have this privilege. Social complexity obliges scholars to be as empathetic and sensitive as possible in making socially responsible methodological choices. Although they are not building a new weapon of mass destruction, the consequences of an ill-advised choice can be just as devastating.

Modelling (molding?) the social

The 2008–2009 financial market collapse revealed how much damage could be done by delusional misunderstanding and misappropriation of rational-agent–based modeling. Models may be useful for studying and understanding social reality, but they cannot replace reality itself. Even today, the arrogant behavior of many financial institutions, such as banks, is beyond rational limits. Allegedly, economic processes are modeled in terms of objective and accurate analyses, but banks are understandably dissatisfied with the tools available. They aspire to tame uncertainty by shaping public opinion, and not only through financial education programs. A significant amount of effort is made to influence the behavior of consumers by designing schemes. Furthermore, instead of sharing expert knowledge, bank economists frequently function as public-relations specialists by publicly propagating certain attitudes. Without interference from external regulatory institutions such activities result in “closed-loop” thinking and acting. In this case, the model is not intended to correspond to reality; instead, the reality is coerced into complying with the model.

Ironically, economists are famous for trying to personify “rational agents” (Stiglitz 2010: 249), not to mention for their regular efforts to convert others. This behavior is reminiscent of the practices of a religious community. As Redman (1993: 176) observed, “it has been forgotten that economics in both England and the United States grew out of religion.” This refers to historical findings that many early economists were clergymen (in the UK) and former or practicing ministers (in the USA). Later, the authority to preach and to rationalize social order became entrenched in the political realm as well. The redemption and the amelioration of the human condition are two sides of the same coin—the postponed (or lost) ideal of final achievement yet to be actualized. However, this approach can introduce transgression of a set of values, especially via the ideological dimension, which is oriented towards the subordination of reality to the worldview aspired to.

Social reality is both an indispensable object and conditional context of research, what delivers the interesting results of intersecting scientific, political, and social dimensions. However, scientific and political mentalities have in common the deficiency of egocentricity, be it methodological or political. Although such a focused approach is, of course, an effective way to foster the professional career of a scientist or politician, it is valid mainly within an institutional framework or, as Bourdieu (2004) put it, a “scientific field of forces.” Mathematical models were supposed to safeguard the autonomy of scientific endeavor because they were expected to provide the necessary isolation from incompetent political influence (Redman 1993: 156) or excessive entry fees for amateurs seeking access to the “scientific field” (Bourdieu 2004: 48). Mathematics appears to have been overestimated as a guarantor of scientific clarity and certainty in the social sciences. This is because, firstly, numbers lend themselves well to expressing political opinions, as does every other rhetorical device sooner or later. Secondly, the “gatekeeper” has become more of a problem than a solution by encouraging the entrance of many scientists from applied mathematics into the social sciences, as in the case of economics (Leontief 1982). It echoes the observation of Bourdieu (2004: 115) that “social science will never come to the end of the efforts to impose itself as a science.”

The current challenges (of both social and natural origins) do not conform to “business as usual” and require a new way of thinking, a new kind of mentality that can be better represented than by the figure of a typical scientist. This is a common finding for learned and educated people—the conventional scientific attitude has become excessively immersed in specialization. Humanity is subjected to the pressures of complex, overlapping issues, such as pandemics, liberal democracy under attack, insufficient global governance, climate change, and economic crises. This extensive interconnectedness renders abstract modeling and the idea of detachment insufficient to ground comprehensive social studies or adequate policy advice. A concise intellectual itinerary that includes critical self-reflection and public commitment should enable a scholar to become a full-fledged agent of social reforms. This would result in abandonment of the position *artificially created for detached observation*, which is implicitly subordinated to a network of complicated political relations.

The insufficiency of detachment

A perennial discussion about the “maturity” and “immaturity” of the social sciences turns out to be unproductive. “The very distinction implies that the social sciences can develop exactly as the natural” (Redman 1993: 174). The same author has emphasized that not even Popper goes as far as that, despite his inconsistencies and reservations. Social inquiry can be improved by following an alternative path without loss of high-quality scholarship. The aim of this approach is not to place the scholar between opposing perspectives and reject possible standards of inquiry

but rather to induce the scholar to face the problem of distortions in social inquiry. The best way to handle bias is to declare it transparently and expose it to criticism. Redman, in the same manner, insists that objectivity does not presume being “cleansed of all predilections,” “rather, objectivity comes about by exposing our theories, ideas, and beliefs so that they may be criticized, corrected, and bettered” (1993: 133). The unattainability of complete objectivity is redeemed by two major implications for social inquiry: 1) the whole scientific endeavor can be understood as a “systematic inquiry” without any methodological exceptions (Backhouse 1998: 123), and 2) the relevance of interpretation can be acknowledged because “all sciences, including the natural ones, are interpretive” (Addleson 1995: 16).

The projection of the social sciences had implied the control and prediction of social changes. A social dimension of knowledge (Hoover 2003: 244) has been intertwined with a political one, since social processes can be directed (managed, manipulated, etc.). Despite the widespread belief that science, operating as it does on solid ontological premises, ensures continuity and certainty in the context of contingencies, moments of unpredictable bifurcation occur. A certain demarcation line may be aspired to delineate the scholar in the context of the society and inquiry itself. Abstraction is the most common way to dissociate the object of inquiry from intermittent distortions. However, when human beings are involved, these appearances may be misleading.

Even though statistical data and calculations are supposed to provide decision makers with a coherent and concise picture of reality, the accumulation of collected data may lead to such aggregated fictional entities as the averages. The averages then become established ‘political and social facts’ studied by the ‘political and social sciences.’ It is a cult of fact that makes political passions take on a special form of “divinized realism” (Benda 2009 [1928]: 36). Benda was concerned less about “the treason of intellectuals” than about the assimilation of intellectual reasoning into a so-called practical experience that seeks to apply knowledge. The problem is that social studies cannot be as exact as the natural sciences. For example, Hausman has tried “to save” economics by admitting its inexactness, affirming that “it is only supposed to be complete at a high level of abstraction or approximation” (1992: 93) and that “economics resembles individual theories such as Newtonian dynamics or Mendelian population genetics more closely than it resembles disciplines such as physics or biology” (1992: 95). Economics is supposed to be an exemplary social science that employs the scientific method, but its initial premises are irrelevant to actual economic and political issues (Holland 2015). Its dependence on rationality and methodological individualism just strengthens criticisms of human beings as rational agents possessing perfect information (Stiglitz 2010).

The “divinized realism” promotes a fatalistic and deterministic worldview wherein human beings are subjected to the unilateral influence of alleged “social laws or other unavoidable regularities.” The yearning of Benda for the noble status of intellectuals may be disregarded, but the rise

of the new “aristocracy,” i.e., the experts, should not be neglected. Not only do they tend to hold a monopoly on expertise in technical (practical) matters, but their rise has also introduced the idea that the “production of knowledge” needs to be “managed properly.” Russell (1956), one of the greatest protagonists of science, warned of the threat to intellectual freedom. “Thus, the practical experts who employ scientific technique, and still more the governments and large firms which employ the practical experts, acquire a quite different temper from that of the men of science, i.e., a temper full of a sense of limitless power, of arrogant certainty, and of pleasure in manipulation even of human material” (Russell 1956: 245). Russell distinguished scientists from experts and admitted that the latter are more likely to flourish as a result of scientific reasoning.

Nowadays, groups of scientists and experts are so similar in profession and affiliation that it is often practically impossible to distinguish between them. Accordingly, Russell’s notion of scientific temper remains an unfulfilled aspiration, an ideal to seek after or a formal standard to strive for. Knowledge about the social realm has been compartmentalized into incommensurable fields that are more easily dominated by a monopoly of expertise or by certain interest groups. Thus, social scientists have become more vulnerable to alienating themselves from the notion of scientific temper and society in general than ever. A truly scientific method cannot exclusively sustain the criteria of universality and objectivity in social research. The reduction of normativity to a finite set of initial premises is counterproductive in the attempt to understand social complexity.

The modern preoccupation with linearity

It is important to reassess the ideas of evolution, progress, and development, which are frequently key concepts in describing and explaining social transitions over time. “The idea of progress is of modern rather than ancient date” (Hertzler 1965 [1922]: 101). Only since the second half of the nineteenth century has the idea of progress become “a general article of faith” (Bury 1920). Industrial development in the nineteenth century induced extreme societal changes that had to be addressed out of the necessity to preserve a political order. The success of the physical sciences in “taming a Nature” had extended the scope of the scientific method. “Social science is a concept that was invented quite recently, only in the 19th century” (Wallerstein 2000: 161). Mechanistic reasoning relies mainly on a linear perception of reality—a transition from one stage to another in a controlled and predictable fashion based on premises specified in advance. The combination of cause-effect reasoning and the urgent necessity to establish safeguards against social tensions has produced modern forms of social engineering which have had tremendous implications during the twentieth century.

While Benda denounced political ideologies as “divinized realisms” and preferred metaphysical permanence beyond a succession of “historical” states, Wolfe insisted on looking “nowhere else than to science to dispel the mystical, metaphysical, nationalistic, class, and

narrow-egotistical illusions that still stand in the way of our sensing a rational direction in which collectively to guide human evolution” (1923: 306). Wolfe had expected that the applicability of the scientific method in the social realm would amplify the scientific attitude into a “generalized behavior-pattern.” According to him, the scientific method is the best possible way to rationalize conflicts between political interests. “The scientific attitude rests upon one, and only one, fundamental article of faith—faith in the universality of cause and effect” (Wolfe 1923: 215-216). It comes as no surprise that the scientific attitude in this sense enters into close association with liberalism since both are positioned between reactionism (as longing for the past state of society which is non-existent *already*) and radicalism (as seeking the possible state of society which is *not yet* achievable). This comparison may appear (and probably is) simplistic because our times demand more sophisticated typologies. However, it is hard not to wonder whether both, science and liberal democracy, have entered (or perhaps never left) a mode of crisis because the scientific method applied between *already* and *not yet* does not necessarily yield reliable results concerning social complexity.

Wolfe was not so naïve as to rely entirely on deterministic science and mechanistic psychology. What makes his approach still relevant for today’s discussion is the notion of sympathy as “an indispensable aid to scientific observation, where human beings and their motives are involved” (Wolfe 1923: 312). “Sympathetic insight” and the ethical dimension have still not been accommodated properly within the scientific framework. Wolfe’s imagined society of rational agents could be a universal template for introducing social well-being and predictability—a perfect match of social reality and scientific modeling. However, critical thinking and the sciences have a complicated relationship, which may be identical to the problematic relationship between education and indoctrination.

Ortega y Gasset (1950 [1930]) warned that the increased specialization characteristic of modern science allowed the “average man” to enter this field with success. As he implied, the same mechanization as seen in industrialization divided scientific activity into separate technical functions, which could be performed with “commonplace” intellectual merits. In this sense, specialization reproduces a self-satisfied mentality within certain limitations that cannot support further progress. “The specialist ‘knows’ very well his own, tiny corner of the universe; he is radically ignorant of all the rest” (Ortega y Gasset 1950 [1930]: 81). Benda, Wolfe, and Ortega y Gasset express a shared concern but distinct suggestions for intellectuals encountering “layman passions,” “popular mind,” or the “average man.” In general, their critical sensitivity remains valid today despite an obvious inclination to elitist detachment in hopes of securing a safe harbor for “higher” values. The alternative would be to reconsider a participatory social inquiry, thus revisiting the latest developments in natural sciences.

Non-reducible intermezzo

A once popular guide for “young academic politicians” (Cornford 1908) supplied satirical career advice for prospective fellows. As they say, advice under academic auspices is never in short supply. Besides recommending the reputation-building method of “sit tight and drink port wine,” this guide introduced (among several others) the “Principle of Unripe Time,” the rule of inaction always denouncing the idea that the present might be the right moment to act. Every “decent” academic fellow must adhere to certain rules of inactivity and keep obstructing alternative proposals. In this context, Cornford (1908) inserted the sardonically revealing remark that “time...has a trick of going rotten before it is ripe.” This thought may have some bearing on the issue of the application of the scientific method within the social realm.

Barrow (2007: 15) has pointed out that it was the Judeo-Christian perspective that induced the now dominant way of cutting reality into pieces and studying the wholeness through its constituent parts. That perspective makes possible a linear approach focused on transitional processes from one state to another and involving predictive and manipulative powers. This is not to imply that modern science and Christianity were directly interrelated, though many prominent precursors of modern science, like Boyle, Newton, and Maxwell, were deeply religious. According to Barrow (2007), other religious sentiments have also participated in building a scientific framework, although not on an equal basis. The Eastern holistic perspective and its contribution to the understanding of non-linear processes has been appreciated only recently and thanks to improved computational capacities. Barrow (2007) attempted to balance Western and Eastern “approaches” by making the studies of linear and non-linear processes complementary, reliant on each other’s achievements.

Reduction as a scientific procedure has been used to construct a unified Theory of Everything by reducing physics to a basic set of constants, in parallel to Russell’s method of reducing mathematics to basic logical propositions (Barrow 2007: 115). The promise of a Theory of Everything had included the refinement and simplification of existing knowledge. But the symmetry of physical laws and the beauty of mathematical equations do not fit a complex reality that is simply “messy,” though they are at the heart of efforts to reconcile that knowledge. As indicated by Barrow (2007: 138), we do not observe laws of Nature directly—we just observe their outcomes. Likewise, we do not observe mathematical equations as representations of Nature and its laws—we merely have the use of their solutions. This implies that laws and mathematical solutions do not necessarily manifest symmetry, e. g., in quantum mechanics: “outcomes are much more complicated than laws; solutions much more subtle than equations” (Barrow 2007: 138). It is no coincidence that reduction has been a key procedure in two extreme poles of the scientific inquiry: astronomy and the physics of elementary particles. These disciplines have still been trying to preserve the status of “fundamental”

ones, clinging to the promise of a “unified theory.” But there exists an intermezzo (or meso) world of complexity occupied by “messy” human beings—a case full of symmetry-breaking. Social complexity cannot be reduced to definite parts and viewed simply as their sum while searching for ultimate explanations at the lower level. Non-reducible social systems with emergent properties have induced new perspectives in terms of causality and determinism (Byrne 1998, Ormerod 2009).

Cluster causality

Quantum mechanics has revolutionized physics since the beginning of the twentieth century. Contrary to popular beliefs, it did not completely abolish the Newtonian framework nor finally settle the issue of indeterminacy. Quantum systems evolve according to the deterministic Schrödinger equation if no interference via measurements is attempted. The interference of measurement has remodeled the scientifically “fixated” position of a detached observer in favor of a participatory model. The possible implications for social sciences have been addressed since the emergence of quantum mechanics as a scientific discipline (Dewey 1929). The non-locality of quantum systems has redefined causality relations through the notion of entanglement. As emphasized by Weinert (2005: 258), causation has become “a cluster concept: if at least a majority of its features are satisfied, then we are entitled to speak of a causal situation.”

Philosophical reflection on the developments of quantum mechanics has introduced a new concept of causation without classical determination, which is relevant for social inquiry as well. Social scientists have always been accustomed to working with sets of most likely factors as the causes of events (Weinert 2005: 249). Every kind of inquiry explores regularities, dependencies, and patterns; this is a common way to understand physical and social realities. And for this purpose, a certain model of causation has always been in demand. The overwhelming mathematization of the sciences “strongly encouraged the identification of the notion of causation with that of predictive determinism” (Weinert 2005: 259). The positivist ideal of value-free science did not manage to tame bias; interests could be safely harbored in the language of mathematics. However, participatory inquiry has reintroduced human agency into the process of research otherwise restrained by hyper-rationality. The proposal to redefine scholarship and social inquiry is not motivated by “anti-scientific” sentiment. Causation made compatible with chance delivers the conditional model of causation as a plausible alternative to classic mechanics. This model implies that some causal conditions may be necessary/dependent and others sufficient/independent. In other words, Weinert (2005), following quantum mechanics, has philosophically reinterpreted the conditional view of causation as incomplete but with the advantage of adaptability. Now it is up to entangled scholars, having assumed the role of the

responsible intellectual, to introduce duly contextualized and viable causal stories.

Conclusion

The scientific detachment is completely unattainable notion in social inquiry. The social studies have been reciprocally entangled within social realm: a) detachment does not automatically imply freedom and objectivity of research; b) social inquiry is not distanced from the potential involvement with the object of study. The paper was not intended to stigmatize bias nor to search for new ways to avoid distorted results of social inquiry. It is rather an invitation to rethink how firmly scholars are entangled in the social context. The main problem with scientific detachment is its capacity to shift from epistemological stance to social attitude.

The human ambition to identify itself with detached omniscience may be detected in anticipated forms of societal “perfections” at the “end of history.” Directional and progressive development is supposed to ameliorate the human condition according to entrenched idealizations projected into the future. The existing hyper-rational idealized models are aimed at sustaining the notion of general agreement on the level of metaphysical certainty, as logical forms and mathematical equations do. These intellectual devices allegedly help distinguish the imperfections of reality and provide possible solutions. But austere scientific mentalities are prone to constructing automated chains out of initial premises and syllogisms, leaving human agency aside.

There is a dangerous and still widespread misconception that liberal democracy is something given which evolves in automated fashion. It needs to be addressed otherwise why the phantom of the 1930s keeps us haunting? Social complexity has to be approached in attentive and responsible way. This path should be pursued by scholars who fully recognize the subtlety of entanglement with the social processes under study as both a challenge and an opportunity in leaving behind the observational position of omniscient spectators.

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