

TOWARD A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF SOCIAL INTERACTION AS RELATED TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY

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I. ABSTRACT

One of the themes in the study of social theory, throughout its history, has been the examination of the social forces of agency and structure. This has been true both of the micro and macro levels of social interaction and has also been discussed in a number of differing applications to social problems in local, national and international contexts. Although the classical social theorists offered varying emphasis at both ends of the spectrum, they also seemed clearly

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concerned with understanding the linkages that connected them together. More recently, some theorists have focused more upon the extreme positions of opposing paradigms in an apparent pursuit of theoretical purity. However, there now appears to be a renewed interest in integrating and synthesizing social theories toward a more holistic and balanced paradigm. This article will briefly review some of these considerations and attempt to encourage further investigation and development of adequate social theory models, especially as they relate to conflict and to its resolution in local, national, and international applications. Specifically, three concepts will be proposed as progressive steps toward this goal. The first step relates to a theoretical broadening of perspective in light of C. Wright Mills's concept of Sociological Imagination.¹ The second recommended step is inspired by George Ritzer's interest in meta-theories and examines the integration of ideas from his Major Levels of Social Analysis model.² The final suggestion concerns the exploration of new dimensions and considers the dynamics of the Social Cubism model by Seán Byrne and Neal Carter.³

II. INTRODUCTION

One of the rarest of all commodities in this life seems to be that of finding adequate *balance*. Aristotle sought to find a happy median in the *Golden Mean*.⁴ Philosophers have long been debating whether each individual person is a free agent or whether each one is totally and helplessly locked into an endless chain of deterministic causes and effects. Varying philosophical speculations place the answers to these questions at both extremes and at several places in between.⁵ Biologists design experiments to try and ascertain whether nature or nurture wields the strongest influences in guiding human behavior and both possibilities find their ardent supporters.⁶ Theologians have argued for centuries about whether the human destiny of every person is divinely and absolutely fixed prior to one's birth or whether the choices that we exercise in this life represent genuine acts of freedom. Likewise, whole religious denominations

1. See CHARLES LEMERT, *SOCIAL THEORY: THE MULTICULTURAL AND CLASSIC READINGS*, 348 (2000).

2. See GEORGE RITZER, *SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY* (4th ed., 1996).

3. See SEÁN BYRNE & NEAL CARTER, *Social Cubism: Six Social Forces Of Ethnoterritorial Politics In Northern Ireland And Quebec*, 3(2) *PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES*, at 52-71 (1996).

4. See O. JOHNSON, *ETHICS: SELECTIONS FROM CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY WRITERS*, 67-77(1989).

5. See R. SOLOMON, *INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY: A TEXT WITH INTEGRATED READINGS* 495-537 (4th ed. 1989).

6. See JOHN J. MACONIS, *SOCIETY: THE BASICS* 124-125 (4th ed. 1997).

have grown up around exactly how one might think that this question should be answered.⁷ It seems that incomplete or partial knowledge can easily lead one toward the acceptance of an extreme position in any number of areas. For example, embracing one end or the other of opposite extremes on any continuum often seems to represent an imbalance in rationale that ultimately leads to isolation and disunity. Yet, the choice to accept such a position seems common in almost every discipline. So, in trying to answer the questions of structure and agency in social theory, whether at the local, national, or international level, social theorists are following a long line of similar inquiry in many other disciplines. Social scientists also, as they study the structures and institutions of any given society, and the individual's actions within them, are engaged in a very real quest to understand where agency factors leave off and where structural ones begin.⁸ Often, those of us theorizing about these issues initially only find partial answers to our questions. Therefore, in general, any one theory often can only provide a very small part of the explanation to these rather large and complex questions. The search for balance can usually be satisfied only through the comparing, contrasting and synthesizing of ideas and concepts while seeking a well-rounded and integrated whole.⁹ Nowhere is this more evident than in the analysis of social conflict and in the search for its resolution at all levels and across all cultures.¹⁰

Although the study of conflict, and conflict resolution theory, is of necessity multidisciplinary in scope¹¹, it is also clearly grounded in the social sciences.¹² Because of this, and because of the complexity of the subject matter itself, the connection between social theory and the need for simple and practical models becomes obvious.¹³ Conflict seems to be as complicated as it is prevalent.¹⁴ The sources of conflict sometimes seem almost infinite and the consequences, when they are not adequately managed or resolved, can be horrific.¹⁵ Examples such as the genocide practiced in Bosnia and Rwanda

7. See SPERRY LEWIS CHAFER, *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY* 183-198 (1974).

8. Cf. RITZER, *supra* note 2, at 531.

9. *Id.* at 633.

10. Cf. Byrne & Carter, *supra* note 3.

11. See J. NOLAN-HALEY, *ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN A NUTSHELL*, 5-6 (1992).

12. See L. COSER, *THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT*, 5 (1956).

13. See C. COSTANTINO & C. MERCHANT, *DESIGNING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: A GUIDE TO CREATING PRODUCTIVE AND HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS* xiii (1996).

14. See D. WEEKS, *THE EIGHT ESSENTIAL STEPS TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION: PRESERVING RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK, AT HOME, AND IN THE COMMUNITY* ix (1994).

15. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 148.

illustrate just how deep-seated these sources of conflict can be when experienced in protracted situations in local, national, and international contexts. Conflict occurs at all levels of social interaction, from the largest of society's structures to the smallest of human groups.¹⁶ With these things in mind, a better understanding of micro and macro sociological theory, along with deeper insights into agency and structure relationships, can offer much toward an integrative understanding of conflict and toward the development of more holistic models for finding resolution.¹⁷

As in the case of micro- and macro-sociological theory, questions of structure and agency are sometimes viewed as polar opposites, and may even be seen as mutually exclusive concepts.¹⁸ Although there are certain valid distinctions, that sometimes need to be made, to differentiate macro issues from structural ones, and micro issues from those of agency¹⁹, their general similarities are sometimes offered together here for purposes of simplification. It is my contention that a balanced and holistic theoretical approach requires an integrated sociological worldview. This perspective needs to be one in which structure, agency, micro and macro sociological issues can all be considered as interrelated concepts held together by a natural tension that could best be conceptualized as an integrated multi-dimensional design. In other words, for there to be a comprehensive understanding of such events as the recent protests at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings, the tensions between structure and agency must be taken into account. This becomes especially evident considering the starkly contrasting opinions that exist as to how one nation's economic policies can empower or disempower individuals and nations around the world.

Much as Ritzer's diagram of social analysis (see figure 1 below) of the micro/macro-level issues includes both vertical and horizontal axes, with multi-directional and multi-level interplay between objective/subjective and micro/macro continuums, so also structure and agency issues require similar frameworks for a comprehensive evaluation.²⁰ And, just as Byrne and Carter's social cube model demonstrates the importance of viewing the interconnections, relationships and the interaction between many social variables (see figure 2 below)²¹, so, also, this article will illustrate the complexity, emphasize the

16. See W. WILMOT & J. HOCKER, INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT, 33 (1998).

17. Cf. COSTANTINO & MERCHANT, *supra* note 13, at 22.

18. See G. MARSHALL, THE CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SOCIOLOGY, 10-11 (1994).

19. Cf. RITZER, *supra* note 2, at 522.

20. *Id.*

21. Cf. Byrne & Carter, *supra* note 3.

necessity and encourage the development of better, more comprehensive conflict analysis and resolution models. Truly helpful conflict intervention systems designs require the capacity both to analyze complex social interactions and to offer clarification to both structural/agency and micro/macro-sociological influences in social theory (and in conflict resolution theory). But they also need to provide the simplicity with which to offer real help to the conflict resolution practitioners who will be seeking to apply them to ordinary cases in the international, as well as to local and to national settings.

III. BROADENING PERSPECTIVES

Because of the limitations inherent in a person having only incomplete information and perspective, the hope for progress toward more integrative designs challenges us to widen our fields of view. The interface between agency, structure, micro and macro factors in the determination of ultimate causes of conflict is complicated in part due to the invisible nature of macro-structural level influences upon individuals and upon groups. For example, the universal international law principle of human rights is not perceived culturally in the same light in China as in the democracies of the West. This divergence of cultural values contributes to conflict escalation between countries at the international level. In addition, there is further complexity added because of the multidimensional considerations of each.

For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated, in both his writings and in his life, the society-changing potential of non-violent resistance.²² But how could one best analyze and explain just how such individual and corporate actions positively impact a society? On the one hand, each individual act of resistance could be considered agency at its most basic level. Dr. King illustrates this beautifully when he quotes Henry David Thoreau on the slavery issue, "aye, if one honest man, in the state of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from the copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America."²³ Indeed, history provides us with a plethora of examples in which the actions of single individuals have had profound social import. But then, in contrast, Dr. King also acknowledges the necessity of a larger agency when he states that the success of nonviolent protest depends upon a "mass movement" to accomplish its goals.²⁴ He further magnifies the importance of linkage between the two

22. See J. FAHEY & R. ARMSTRONG, A PEACE READER: ESSENTIAL READINGS ON WAR, JUSTICE, NON-VIOLENCE AND WORLD ORDER, 113-128 (1992).

23. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 347.

24. *Id.* at 345.

when he writes that it is “not a struggle between people at all, but a tension between justice and injustice.”²⁵

Although individual agents take part (and are vital to this movement) a complete understanding of what is really at work extends to the larger framework of analyzing structures and value systems of the society as a whole. Dr. King’s philosophy clearly integrates the involvement of individuals with groups to move the conscience of the larger society and even of the world. Although it is possible to isolate and to compartmentalize his individual statements and concepts in ways in which they might be categorized as either micro or macro in nature, the overview leaves one with a sense of the need to see the whole as an interconnected range of ideas on a continuum between the two.

Similarly, the questions of structure and agency are likewise difficult to separate.²⁶ At what juncture does the agency of the individual end and the influence of the group become primary? A model with the capacity to graphically illustrate and bring meaning to these relationships could be most helpful for building new holistic and balanced perspectives. A relatively recent example of the interface between agency and structure issues, resulting in positive conflict management and resolution, is found in the multilevel impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s (TRC) efforts between 1994-1996 to heal the inter-group conflict between Blacks and Whites in South Africa. This effort represents a structural intervention within a society with a goal of transforming relationships between ethnic groups down to the micro level of individual interaction and cooperation.

There is no doubt that the dynamics of nonviolent actions taken by many people during the civil rights movement in this country impacted America at every level. Individuals and families were changed forever.²⁷ So were whole cities and eventually our entire nation and the world.²⁸ The changes were imperfect and incomplete. The new conflicts have replaced the old. And the new questions raised, and not yet answered, remain for further study and analysis. What really caused the conflicts in the first place? Are the answers to be found in our history? In our religion? Are they causes that originated in individuals or in groups? What social structures contributed to and facilitated these problems? What cultural and psychological factors accelerated the acts of violence and what factors contributed to inhibiting them? Why did similar

25. *Id.*

26. *Cf.* RITZER, *super* note 2, at 521.

27. *See* M. EDELMAN, *LATERNS: A MEMOIR OF MENTORS* (1999).

28. *See e.g.* JESSICA SENEHI, *VIOLENCE PREVENTION* (2000) available at <http://webct.nova.edu/adrd6170senehi/syllabus.htm>.

actions not have the same effect in other settings? Why do differing strategies seem to work more effectively in one culture than in another?

IV. AVOIDING EXTREMES

Avoiding the extremism caused by focusing only upon a narrow field of partial information is not always a simple matter. In trying to negotiate paradoxical forces in social relationships, some have tended toward theoretical polarization through retreating to one end of the continuum or the other. One clear example can be found in the work of David Riesman as he attempts to explain why individuals act in society in specific ways. He quotes from Erich Fromm regarding the connections between social structures and the development of individual human character. He concludes that the very desires and motivations of individuals seem to be wholly and absolutely determined at the macro-structural level by society's indoctrination implemented through the socialization process. He goes so far as to extend this idea, of social influence over individuals, to include all "mode[s] of conformity—even be it one of rebellion."²⁹

If applied uniformly and universally, his inferences would seem to extend in concept even to the nonviolent resistance movements of leaders like Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela, Corazon Aquino, Shimon Peres, Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. If one accepts this premise, one would seem to be forced to conclude that even as individuals might choose to rebel, in one form or another from the dominant culture, the character-shaping influences of that culture are causing the individual actors to "want" to rebel. All individual human agency seems to have been thereby denied and each individual consequently reduced to a mere passive receptacle of the larger structural forces.

How is this actually accomplished according to Riesman? His theory seems to imply an ability of a given society to pre-determine what is necessary for its own best interests and to bring about the desired results.³⁰ This is accomplished through the shaping of the character of individuals within it through the social institutions of family, schools, and government. The individual person therefore seems passive. He or she seems to merely be a conduit of these forces and then ultimately to become a vehicle to support and reproduce them. Other social theorists seem to draw similar conclusions, accepting macro-sociological determinism, in even more concise terms. Bruce Mayhew, for example, states, "In structural sociology, the unit of analysis is always the social network, *never the individual*."³¹ The nature of the apartheid

29. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 322.

30. *Id.* at 321.

31. Cf. RITZER, *supra* note 2, at 494.

system in South Africa illustrates how the structural violence of the state toward Blacks, Asians, Coloreds and Whites can be institutionalized within a society and internalized within individuals. But once again, the question remains, where does the responsibility for this evil reside? Can it be wholly the result of structural forces alone...or do individuals share in the blame? Mayhew, and others like him, would seem to conclude ultimately that an individual's choice cannot be separated from the macro-forces of the society to which one belongs.

On the other side of this issue lies another theoretical pole. Some neo-Marxian theorists clearly rejected the parallel concept of "mechanical determinism" which seemed to be implied by writers like Engels in speaking of "the inevitable decline of capitalism."³² Rather than considering structural influences as some kind of irresistible force in history, theorists like Georg Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci proposed "a subjective orientation" to offset "the early Marxist at the objective, material level."³³ The *Critical Theory* School, as a whole, further criticized the positivism of sociology for allowing the scientific method to legitimize the status quo.³⁴ If one rejects these principles thoroughly enough, there can be no chain of cause and effect and thereby no possible deterministic structural forces, only *subjective* ones.

Why such extremism? Lewis argues that the resistance to a more integrated paradigm is not so much theoretical as political because opposition to existing theory is often the inspiration that many theoretical approaches draw from. In other words, an integrated theoretical framework threatens their more independent and extreme approaches.³⁵ Perhaps this is indeed correct in some cases. But another possible, more fundamental, flaw in rationale could come from the tendency in all of us to want to achieve total comprehension of any subject matter under consideration. It arises from the basic reductionistic tendencies that accompany our human condition out of this desire to understand and explain reality in an absolute fashion in spite of our own limited experience, knowledge, and perspective. For example, seeking to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in isolation is an exercise in futility. One needs to consider the wider regional context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Similarly, a study of the multifaceted cold war politics of the United States-Russia rivalries certainly serves to illustrate the necessity of understanding and unraveling the complex and interrelated layers of local, regional and international conflict contexts. Oversimplification, at best, only postpones the real work of analysis and achievement of mutual understanding.

32. *Id.* at 272.

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.* at 277.

35. *Id.* at 228-229.

With the limitations of our own individual abilities and experiences, we can suffer from intellectual tendencies toward narrowing the field to a manageable range, especially in regard to paradoxical problems. Interestingly enough, ancient wisdom literature addresses these very concerns with amazing insight. In philosophy, the definition of paradox carries the idea of implicit contradiction.³⁶ But in Judeo-Christian theology, a paradox is defined as a condition in which there is only an *apparent* contradiction.³⁷ In other words, just because one cannot fully comprehend the breadth, height or depth of an issue, this does not necessarily require that it is in itself contradictory. Further, the commendation of one old Hebrew proverb encourages rather that a person attempt to accept both sides of the paradox even without a total comprehension of the issue. Specifically in this context, addressing some of the perplexing questions related to the existence of good and evil, it states: "It is good that you grasp one thing, and also not let go of the other"³⁸ To paraphrase, it is acceptable in the quest for greater understanding for a person to allow an apparent contradiction to stand while one continues to pursue the wisdom and knowledge necessary to grasp them both at the same time. So, to apply these insights to social theory, perhaps we should be more willing, than we often are, to tolerate some cognitive dissonance long enough to continue the search for balance and completion rather than succumb to the temptation to settle for one extreme or the other. Opportunities to exercise this kind of open mindedness toward diverse viewpoints are plentiful in such events as the religious wars of our own day. Islamic Fundamentalist and Israeli Zionists interests often seem to be mutually exclusive. The polemical positions that have frequently been presented to justify ethnic cleansing in such places as the Balkans and Rwanda illustrate the need for new paradigms of analysis and for a stretching of perspectives to comprehend rationales. Certainly this is not intended to suggest that wholesale accommodation of such rationales would necessarily be appropriate but rather that a movement toward the creation of better frameworks in which we can analyze, comprehend and adequately address such conflicts would be more constructive and encourage more collaborative solutions.

V. HARMONIZING CONCEPTS

Writers like C. Wright Mills also seem to offer concepts that could potentially help bridge the chasm between extremes positions or concepts. His idea of "sociological imagination" provides a theoretical description of how a person might perhaps extricate him/herself from the structural stream long

36. Cf. SOLOMAN, *supra* note 5, at 40.

37. See W. ELWELL, *EVANGELICAL DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY*, 826 (1984).

38. See *ECCLESIASTES* 7:18.

enough to gain some objectivity and to rise above the invisible forces of cultural indoctrination and paradox. "It enables him [the possessor] to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions"³⁹ thereby clarifying ones vision and allowing that person to gain a new outlook unobscured by cultural myopia. Mills suggested that those that have been successful at doing this have done so through asking several key and searching questions. His material is quoted here at length because of its direct importance regarding the need for a complex model for analyzing conflict and because it will be used later in this article to illustrate the significant value that Byrne and Carter's model provide to this discussion.⁴⁰

First, what is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?

Second, where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period---what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history making?

Third, what varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of human nature are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?⁴¹

Notice the way in which Mill's questions lead an observer to analyze different levels of social interaction and the reciprocal nature of how they interrelate. Notice also the contextualization of placing the inquiry into its unique historical and cultural setting and the reflexive and reflective requirements of providing complete responses. Assuming that we can be successful enough in doing this to begin the analysis of agency/structure and micro/macro integration and linkage issues, what types of models permit a multi-dimensional, multi-layered and multi-faceted approach that would be comprehensive enough to deal with all of these questions and yet simple enough to offer practical assistance to conflict interveners? Perhaps a brief consideration

39. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 348.

40. Cf. Byrnes & Carter, *supra* note 3.

41. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 349.

of some ideas from the past can help in illustrating what capacities these new models might require.

VI. LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Looking back to the classical social theories of the past can potentially be of help to us in at least two regards. First, we can more clearly recognize the helpful insights gained by these social theorists toward a better understanding of the linkage between micro/macro and structural/ agency concerns. Secondly, we can also potentially discover those factors that have already been seriously considered in social theory analysis and, by omission, those that clearly have not. Although some sociologists and conflict theorist have tended to characterize the classical social theorists as primarily residing on one side or the other in this debate, George Ritzer notes that they generally demonstrated a concern for gaining a better understanding of micro-macro linkages.⁴² The following sections will attempt to summarize representative portions of some of their writings to help illustrate this point. In doing so, we can learn how these social thinkers contributed to the integration of these concepts, on the one hand, and yet failed to think comprehensively enough on the other. Perhaps by recognizing some of the shortcomings of their own attempts to account for all of the relevant social factors, we can avoid making similar mistakes ourselves and thereby add new perspectives to these past contributions.

A. *Karl Marx*

We begin with Karl Marx precisely because of the macro-sociological and conflict emphasis he seemed to place upon a relatively narrow field of causal factors, specifically economics. His dialectical approach was in many respects revolutionary in its potential for overcoming some of the barriers and linear thinking of other theorists. He demonstrated an integration of historical and subjective factors in his writings that were exceptional. However, in his divisions of the social classes and in his analysis of social conflict, he seemed to consider economic factors as almost singularly responsible for all of society's ills as well as potentially the best arena in which to find solutions. So, in spite of the opportunities presented by this dialectical approach, Marx nevertheless seemed to accord to economic factors the lion's share of value as compared to all other social considerations and categories. Secondly, he seemed to discount the importance of certain other social forces, for example, religious factors in escalating conflict. He acknowledged the reality of religious influences in

42. Cf. RITZER, *supra* note 2, at 494.

society but seemed to minimize their significance especially toward finding positive solutions.

Because of these dynamics, Marx has often been interpreted as an extreme structuralist.⁴³ These realities illustrate further the need for models that can offer dialectical and multidimensional theoretical approaches. Although Marx's argument about class conflict does indicate the importance of economic issues in escalating international conflicts, there remains a need to allow for a more balanced value to be assigned to a variety of relevant social factors, and to the interplay that they have at the multiple levels of society. A modern example of this complexity can be seen in the critical conflicts between the G-7 Nations and the group of seventy-seven. Certainly economics is central to the many tensions existing between the wealthiest of developed and the poorest of developing nations. But at the same time, complexities of greatly divergent value systems further compound and complicate finding parity and justice in a way that can be understood as equally satisfactory to all. Economic considerations are clearly key to the conflicts but not easily interpreted in the vacuum of mono-culturalism. Rather, much can be learned through looking at cultural perspectives through a number of lenses before drawing final assessments.

B. Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim clearly concerned himself with macro-sociological and structural issues and with the effects that these social forces exerted upon the individuals in a society. In fact, his criticisms of the sociology of his own day related to its failure, at several levels, to significantly differentiate itself from other academic disciplines, especially psychology. This further revealed his interest in the macro/structural realm and in the keeping of society together through cultural and legal norms. One of his primary points related to sociology's apparent inability to identify a domain that it could call its own. In *Sociology and Social Facts* he writes, "Sociological method as we practice it rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual . . . there can be no sociology unless societies exist, and . . . societies cannot exist if there are only individuals."⁴⁴

In comparing sociology with psychology in this context, he was clearly demarcating the subject matter of the former as it specifically related to objects wholly separate in existence from mere individuals in society and indicating that psychology should be the social science discipline that claims the individual, in like manner, as its own. He therefore, in one sense, places sociology squarely

43. *Id.* at 271.

44. *Cf.* LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 73.

in the domain of macro/structural theory. Even while doing so, Durkheim is not theoretically and categorically divorcing micro and macro, structural and agency concerns from one another. Instead, he goes on to offer significant ideas related to their linkage. This is demonstrated in his works on anomie and suicide. For example, in his *Anomie and the Modern Division of Labor*, he expresses concern at the macro-level about a diminishing influence of moral restraint and guidance in modern society. He is dealing with the subjective macro-social and structural forces in the ongoing development of norms and values in modern society. And yet, in the very same context, he connects this particular social phenomenon—the collective conscience—to the agency of the individual person as having a real effect upon society.⁴⁵

In spite of the macro realities of both objective and subjective social structures, at the micro level, individual liberty, evidently according to Durkheim, wields very real consequences in its linkage to the greater structural problems of a society. Moreover, Durkheim's functionalist model later became the philosophical framework for the 1948 development of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). This movement, by pooling the coal and steel industries of Germany and France, proved successful in preventing them from going to war with one another. Scientific and economic cooperation created norms of interdependence that have spilled over into the political realm through the expanded membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). This integration of forces, at both the macro and micro levels, brought about a working relationship and peace system that has also resulted in a political and economic regional superpower, the European Union (EU).

What are the linkages between these varying levels? In *Suicide and Modernity*, the very core of Durkheim's thesis relates to identifying the social factors, beyond the individual, that influence people in society to take their own lives. In this connection, the correlation of suicide rates to external social factors necessitates the consideration of macro-structural dynamics in relationship to this issue. Durkheim does this in part by correlating the various suicide rates of different nations by occupational categories.⁴⁶ He does it in principle by connecting determining factors to some force exterior to the individual.⁴⁷ Ultimately, the agency for suicide is eminently recognized at the micro-level of individual choice and behavior as social norms break down and anomie results in the increase of suicide. Durkheim certainly seems to acknowledge this when he speaks of man's "free combinations of the will."⁴⁸

45. *Id.* at 70.

46. *Id.* at 81.

47. *Id.* at 75.

48. *Id.* at 74.

Therefore again, both macro/structural and micro/agency forces exist. How exactly do they interrelate? Durkheim causes us to ask the right questions, but fails to integrate them in such a way as to help us understand linkages. More complex models, with the capacity to help establish these relationships are needed for further clarification of all of the variables in society and how they interact with one another at different levels.

C. Max Weber

Max Weber is also known primarily for his grand narratives regarding the ever-growing bureaucracies of the modern age.⁴⁹ The very nature of the subject itself has an intrinsic, collective component that depends upon masses of individuals for its very existence and function. "Bureaucracy is *the* means of carrying 'community action' over into rationally ordered 'societal action'" and the individual bureaucrat "is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism."⁵⁰ Yet, Weber is also apparently keenly aware of the significance of individual agency, even in the largest bureaucracy. As he discusses leadership and authority, he addresses both macro-structural and micro-agency types of legitimate authority in society. The *Rational* and *Traditional* forms of leadership find their power in the structural institutions of rational-legal authority and sacred societal traditions. However, when he comes to his last type, *Charismatic Authority*, he states that its basis resides upon "devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person . . ."⁵¹ Thus, his theories reveal a belief that the largest imaginable bureaucracy can still be affected by the agency of one person but also that the individual lives in an "iron cage". However, conflicts between bureaucracies and individuals seem to clearly trouble Weber.⁵² Other factors must be involved. But what are they and how are they interrelated? Weber's theories seem inadequate to answer many of these questions but, at the same time, serve to illustrate the lack of critical thinking in our world.

Today, similar tensions would seem to exist with such developments as the explosion of the Internet and e-commerce. Global communications have been speeded up, thereby dissolving geographical boundaries into a global village of sorts. However, rational technology seems to have not only provided undeniable benefits to humankind but also to have brought about an eradicating of differences of culture, an inhibiting of critical thinking and an effecting what

49. *Id.* at 199-124.

50. *Id.* at 109.

51. *Id.* at 115.

52. *Id.* at 100-104.

has been called the “the McDonaldization of society”⁵³ . . . or, to borrow from Weber’s terminology, the creation of a global “iron cage.”

VII. SYNTHESIZING IDEAS

The reality of this complex interaction of individuals and groups has inspired efforts to develop social interaction models that could perhaps shed new light on just how these differing elements interrelate. What appears to be lacking, however, are conflict analysis models that provide adequate frameworks capable of demonstrating holistic and balanced paradigms of social interaction, especially as related to the complexities of social conflict between individuals and groups, nationally and in the global arena. One approach has been developed through the practice of comparing social theories among themselves in a new field called meta-theoretical analysis.⁵⁴ This integration of theories has provided social scientists with new frameworks with which to discover and consider relationships previously unexplored.

George Ritzer offers a diagram of *Major Levels of Social Analysis* designed to integrate micro and macro aspects of interaction.⁵⁵ This two-dimensional chart shows two axes, one vertical and the other horizontal. The vertical axis provides a continuum from macroscopic to microscopic. The horizontal axis offers a similar continuum from objective to subjective. This divides the overall graph into four quadrants with the following categories: Macro-objective, macro-subjective, micro-objective and micro-subjective. Arrows pointing both directions connect each of the quadrants to all of the others indicating multidirectional linkage interconnecting every part of the diagram into dialectical relationships. This provides for a range on the horizontal axis “from material phenomena like individual action and bureaucratic structures to nonmaterial phenomena like consciousness and norms and values . . .” and on the vertical axis “from individual thought and action to world-wide systems.”⁵⁶ This model encourages the researcher to consider the larger framework as a whole rather than any single component in isolation. It further graphically places each of the four quadrants in equal relationship and implies equity of significance to each dynamic (see figure 1).

Using Ritzer’s diagram to analyze Mohandas Gandhi’s nonviolent disobedience movement could place, for example, Gandhi’s own personal values of justice and injustice in the micro-subjective category. His actual

53. *Id.*

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.* at 497.

56. *Id.* at 496-499.

personal protest activities could be considered in the micro-objective theoretical quadrant. The larger society's acceptance of some of these values could be considered a part of the macro-subjective phenomena and any actual resulting civil rights legislation that was enacted by the British colonial power, in the macro-objective category. So, in considering individuals and groups, their beliefs and actions, their impact on cultural values and legislative enactment, we can move through all four analytical frameworks while maintaining a continuous and very interconnected theoretical network of interaction. This model provides a great step toward a more holistic perspective capable of drawing upon multiple sociological levels of analysis.

VIII. EXPLORING NEW DIMENSIONS

Another model offering potential for an even more comprehensive analysis is Byrne and Carter's Social Cube,⁵⁷ which has six facets compared to Ritzer's four. It provides potentially more dialectical dynamics while maintaining relative simplicity of design. It is graphically presented as a simple cube with each of its six sides representing different faces or facets of social reality. It includes demographics, religion, history, economic factors, political factors and psycho-cultural factors. Its design is tailored to the consideration of ethno-territorial politics with a stated goal of providing a more complete view of social phenomena. "Only when one considers the interrelations among the faces of the puzzle can one progress toward a more holistic solution."⁵⁸ A further key to its usefulness is found in an emphasis, not on rigid categories, but on inter-relationships. Their focus is intentionally directed away from concentrating upon any single category exclusively, and toward gaining a greater understanding of the interplay existing between them.⁵⁹ The social cube model is applied to both the Northern Ireland and Quebec conflicts illustrating the complex set of relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and Anglophones and Franco-phones in Quebec.

IX. BYRNE AND CARTER'S SOCIAL CUBE

Returning again, for illustration, to the general consideration of Mohandas Gandhi and his involvement in the human rights non-violent protest movement in India, we can compare its characteristics to the criteria of the social cube. The dynamics now offered move from the four categories found in Ritzer's two-dimensional model to the six categories found in Byrne and Carter's three-

57. Cf. Byrne & Carter, *supra* note 3.

58. *Id.* at 1.

59. *Id.* at 2.

dimensional model. But something else also seems to develop. In writing on ethno-territorial conflicts in Northern Ireland and Quebec, Byrne and Carter note the tendency of some to focus upon one category or another rather than considering combinations or even competitions between the various factors. "People concentrating on only one aspect, or side of the puzzle, are unlikely to produce a complete solution or picture of the problem."⁶⁰ In using the three-dimensional model, it becomes much more clear just how dialectical in nature social conflict theory must be in order to adequately analyze the different levels and categories of factors discovered, especially in social conflict. For example, rather than simply attempting to place different levels of social realities in one or another of the four categories of Ritzer's model and then trying to visualize some kind of abstract linkage between them, Byrne and Carter's analysis moves to a more complex examination of the *relationships* between differing aspects of a conflict rather than merely focusing on the position which it holds on the model.

For example, the social cube model could easily encourage one to consider not only, in this case, the subjective, micro-level considerations of the personal beliefs, norms and values of Mohandas Gandhi but also to further analyze them in the framework of the other facets of the cube as applicable. Ritzer acknowledges that his model, in general, provides only a "'snapshot' in time."⁶¹

The three-dimensional social cube seems to do more than that (see Figure 2). While certainly, the model can represent a single moment in time, its very design and purpose is to encourage a more continuous and dynamic analysis of events unfolding while also considering the fluctuations and interplay between those factors. For example, using only three of the six factors (for simplification) in Byrne and Carter's *Social Cubism: Six Social Forces of Ethnoterritorial Politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec* to illustrate the point, a comparative analyses of the historical aspects of both of the conflicts under consideration can also be correlated to the religious aspects of these conflicts and further correlated to psycho-cultural factors. In this example these three factors—history, religion and psycho-cultural considerations—when combined reveal contrasting results in the two cultures due to the differences *created* by their respective combinations (for an extended modification of this model see also Russ-Trent, in this special issue). The following portions of the paper are quoted to simply illustrate how these factors are intertwined and actually fluctuating through time and space to create a dynamic, ongoing, and ever-changing social environment helpful in the study of the conflicts in both Northern Ireland and in Quebec:

60. *Id.* at 1.

61. *Cf.* RITZER, *supra* note 1, at 638.

“History, recounted by those involved in conflicts, sets the context for current ethno-territorial politics.”⁶² “Today, religion has more salience as a social category in Northern Ireland than in Quebec.”⁶³ “Tensions and emotions have often escalated during social change or perceived political crisis between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and between Anglephones and Francophones in Quebec.”⁶⁴

In these sample observations, the importance of historical context, the changes in religious factors and the psychological impacts of social tensions are all noted. The resulting dynamics of the conflicts in these two seemingly similar cultural confrontations take on notably different characteristics because of the differences in history and religion in each culture. And although the third statement seems to indicate that the result of these tensions on psycho-cultural factors are the same, one has only to look at how these tensions manifest themselves differently in each ethnic setting to realize that these considerations are different too. The section on terrorism, under Political Factors, in Byrne and Carter’s article clarifies this point. The differences in the frequency and intensity of terrorist acts of violence found in both Northern Ireland and Quebec, for example, find their origins in the interplay between a number of the factors including differing levels of access to political institutions historically.⁶⁵ (For additional insights into the analysis of similar cultures in order to discover subtle variables that can dramatically alter outcomes, see Jay MacLeod’s *Ain’t No Makin’ It*).⁶⁶

Another impressive aspect of the *Social Cubism* model is found in its potential to achieve what C. Wright Mill’s quotation above stated must happen in order to objectively study one’s own culture through the use of *sociological imagination*.⁶⁷ Notice his emphasis on the study of relationships (see quotation above). In the first question he offered as a necessary ingredient, in order for one to gain insights into the structures of a society, the finding of the “essential components” of those structures and the information required to understand . . . how they are related to one another?”⁶⁸ Second, Mills addresses the question of history and its significance in relationship to both the culture itself and to

62. Cf. Byrne & Carter, *supra* note 3, at 4.

63. *Id.* at 7.

64. *Id.* at 12.

65. *Id.* at 10-11.

66. See J. MACLEOD, *AIN’T NO MAKIN’ IT: ASPIRATIONS AND ATTAINMENT IN A LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD* (1995).

67. Cf. LEMERT, *supra* note 1, at 348-352.

68. *Id.* at 349.

other cultures. Third, Mills includes questions about "human nature" as related to the culture in much the same way as Byrne and Carter address the "psycho-cultural factors" in their Social Cubism model. Finally, he references the word "change" throughout his questions demonstrating the need, in each of the areas of inquiry, to follow the ever-changing dynamics of the flow of social events in cultural study.

Using the Social Cubism model to consider again the nonviolent example of Gandhi would seem to stimulate a whole host of additional questions for analysis, both at the micro and at the macro levels. What was the history of this conflict in India? What is the relationship between this conflict and the history of British colonialism? How does it relate to the histories of other non-violent protest movements? What are the structures surrounding these events? What are the religious factors? What are the political factors? What is the relationship of these factors to the people on the other side of this conflict? What about the personal histories of the individual leaders on both sides of the protest? How have the leaders influenced the other protestors and the society and by what means? How do economic factors relate to the society, the subgroups and the individuals involved? What is changing and what is not? What connects all of these events together and in what social patterns?

X. CONCLUSION

Theoretical models help us to organize information and to better relate concepts and ideas together. Social conflict theories are always finite, and partial in nature, due to the limitations of the theorist's own abilities, experiences and perspectives. Social conflict theory models that inspire integration and synthesis of seemingly opposed viewpoints can trigger insights into the commonalities and compatibilities between them and help social scientists to envision new and better models and theories. The models discussed in this article help us to ask more probing questions into the interrelationships between the social structures around us and the individuals who create and comprise them. Through broadening perspectives, synthesizing ideas and exploring new dimensions, we can build upon the labors of the past and hopefully discover relationships that can potentially reveal more holistic solutions to social problems locally, nationally and globally. Social conflict poses one of the most complex and difficult social problems of all for social theorists to analyze, understand and resolve. Perhaps some of the insights gained through the discussion and utilization of these multidimensional models will result in the development of even more practical tools for the future in the field of social conflict theory and in their application to social conflict and conflict resolution.

XI. APPENDICES

A. Figure 1: Ritzer's Diagram of Social Analysis

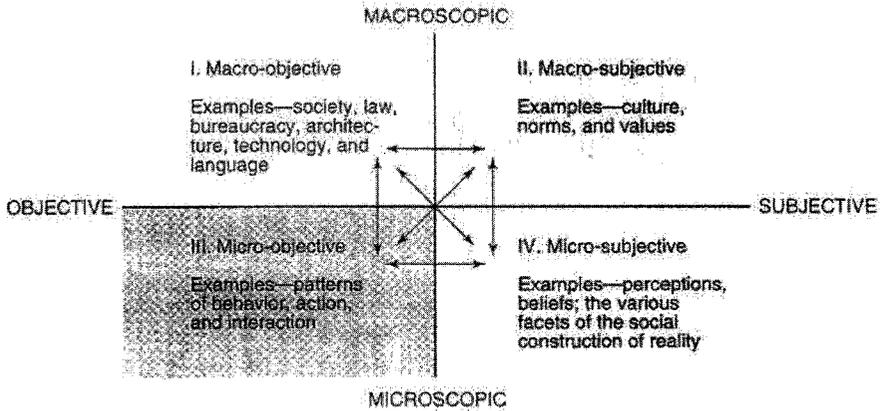


FIGURE 14.1
Ritzer's Major Levels of Social Analysis*

*Note that this is a "snapshot" in time. It is embedded in an ongoing historical process.

B. Figure 2: Early Warning-Contingency “Social Cube” Escalators/De-escalators (Byrne & Carter 1996, Byrne & Keashley 2000)

