TRIUMPH OF COMPATIBILISM OVER STRUCTUALISM AND INTERPRETIVISM

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Ayn Rand makes a poignant observation in her pamphlet "Philosophy: Who Needs It" that everyone has a philosophy, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. She points to the need for everyone to comprehend what philosophy is residing in their brains. For,

"A man who is run by emotions is like a man who is run by a computer whose print-outs he cannot read. He does not know whether its programming is true or false, right or wrong, whether it’s set him to success or destruction, whether it his goals or those of some evil, unknowable power. He is blind on two fronts: blind to the world around him and to his own inner world, unable to grasp reality or his own motives, and he is in chronic terror of both. Emotions are not tools of cognition. The men who are not interested in philosophy need it most urgently: they are most helplessly in its power."

This warning should especially be heeded when one involves oneself in academic pursuits. While the reader of a newspaper may have a difficult time in fitting the day’s events into a meaningful framework without the tool of philosophy, the student involved in academic pursuits has even more of a responsibility to understand not only his/her own philosophy but also the philosophies used by others. Understanding the perspectives of others gives a human being the ability to critique and criticize the work of others because the person can then look under ground to examine what kind of foundation is holding up all the arguments in the thesis.

Therefore, the reader of either Kozol or Bowles & Gintis must have knowledge of what systems are being used in each so that the reader may determine if each has an accurate interpretation of the issues at hand. Each of the authors makes subtle and blatant appeals to the reader’s emotions. If taken at face-value, these emotional arguments could easily sway an unsuspecting reader to immediate action. The discerning reader would understand what basis is used for the arguments and would then reach an educated conclusion. It is, therefore, the scope of this paper to present a behind-the-scenes look at what methods are used by Kozol and Bowles & Gintis. Armed with a skeptical insight into the perspectives of these authors, the reader will be assured that the most careful attention has been made to the opinions of the two books.

The two sociological philosophies to be examined are structuralism and interpretivism. The curious reader might question the fundamental validity of these two models when used to examine educational problems. The sharp reader will ask if these tools are the correct ones for the job. Clearly, a carpenter who brings warped rulers, rusty saws, and bent nails will have difficulty making a high-quality house because s/he is using inadequate tools. Likewise, the tools of Kozol or Bowles & Gintis must be examined to see if they will be valid at for the duties at hand

If structures of any sort exist, they must channel something. Buildings channel people, computers channel electricity. The macro- and micro-level structures described by Kozol and Bowles & Gintis channel one thing: Power. In formalized structures, one can easily see the hierarchy of positions. In utilizing structuralism the conduits of power are laid bare as the author maps out a schematic diagram. That power relations are so clearly seen using the structuralist approach should not be surprising. Structuralism posits that every element in a particular situation has no significance unto itself --- its identity is defined in terms of its relationship to all other elements in the same situation. (Cherryholmes, pp. 16-17) Structuration is defined by Giddens in Cherryholmes’s book:

Structuration is the dual process by which individuals create social processes and institutions through their choices and actions, and the latter both constrain and provide opportunities for the former. (p. 8)

Structuralism may be seen as focusing on the systems of relations among the parts in a whole. It does not emphasize the uniqueness of each of the parts, but rather sees how some common aspects of the parts relate those parts to the larger whole. Meaning is reserved for the structures linking individuals together, not the individuals themselves. Structures also have the characteristic of dealing with transformations. As the structure can only sustain itself by perpetuating a continuous likeness of its parts, that is what it strives to do.

Examining the flow of power according to interpretivist tradition requires a different stance. Cherryholmes, in Power and Criticism, uses Michel Foucault’s ideas extensively to explain interpretivism. Foucault employs the concept of a discursive practice, defined as

"a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function."(New York, 1988, pp. 34)

As the rules of discourse in everyday life govern what people say and don’t say to each other, their universal pervasiveness creates some unsettling, often unrecognized, changes in our society. Educators are no longer defined primarily as people who educate, but rather as people who act like educators. Since no one is able to alter the rules of discourse, they are the rules which no one escape from. Society demands that only educators can determine what educators look like, and so anyone wishing to become an educator must look like one to educators. If one doesn’t make statements that sound like an educator’s statements, then one will not be considered for the position of educator. (Cherryholmes, pp. 33-36)

Interpretivism, then, points to the employment of restrictions by one’s immediate social contacts. Operating on a micro level, interpretivism shows power as travelling horizontally, the results and dynamics of the past washing over and coloring the population of the present. The channels of power weave their path both visibly and invisibly. When announcements advise of certain criteria to be satisfied, the power is operating visibly. When the power encroaches invisibly it takes the form of subtler social controls.

Extending the example of how educators are influenced by the rules of discourse a "walk-through" can be fashioned to put the model in motion: How people act as educators becomes more telling in whether or not they will be educators than how qualified they are to be educators. This is so because as people wish to identify themselves as educators, they strive to attain some degree of educatorness, which they see embodied in current educators. As everyone wishing to become an educator has to look to this same model , adherence to conventions is created within those who strive hardest to become educators. Once accepted as educators, the new initiates follow the same rules in their new position in relation to educatordom. Now educators, they will form their community and their identities around what they perceive to be personal qualities of educatorness. These same qualities will be expected in any persons seeking admittance to educatordom, thereby perpetuating the cycle.

With structualism and interpretivism clearly identified, one can return to the works of Kozol and Bowles & Gintis with a new knowledge of how they are identifying and tackling the issue of school reform. The two works each wrestle with the stickiest, yet most fundamental, issues of schooling. While each book is clear about what problems exist, more revealing is the examination of how each does it. Kozol sticks mostly to an interpretivist approach where he looks at the most pressing concerns of the schools' communities. He points out the socio-political problems of communities, schools, and individuals. Throughout his book, he utilizes the approach of proving that "he was there." The bulk of Kozol's work gives the reader a seat on Kozol's tour bus, allowing him/her to take a special itinerary so as to get a closer look at the realities of dilapidated school systems. Once in a while the bus's tour guide will explain how some structures are contributing to what the sightseer (read: reader) is observing out the window, but the shock of touring such decrepit schools is mostly allowed to speak for itself. The effect is that he allows his subjects to tell their own story. One example is when Safir Ahmed, a veteran reporter for the Post-Dispatch, speaks the words about East St. Louis which Kozol won't say himself:

"The lottery advertises most in black publications. So people who have nothing to start with waste their money on a place that seels them dreams. Lottery proceeds in Illinois allegedly go into education; in reality they go into state revenues and they add nothing to the education fund. So it is a total loss. Affluent people do not play the lottery. The state is in the business here of selling hopes to people who have none. The city itself is full of bars and liquor stores and lots of ads for cigarettes that feature pictures of black people. Assemble all the worst things in America --- gambling, liquor, cigarettes and toxic fumes, sewage, waste disposal, prostitution --- put it all together. Then you dump it on black people." (Kozol, pp. 16-17)

By focusing on such immediate problems Kozol achieves two important objectives: he proves through the power of anecdote that nightmarish conditions exist for significant portions of American society. Kozol achieves the other objective by illuminating the ways in which channels of power circumvent the concerns of the most desperate in the educational system.

Kozol makes extensive use of first-person narratives in an interpretivist style. In one instance he elicits a comment from the principal of DuSable High School in Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes projects. Principal Mingo notes how little beauty is in his students' lives. Their neighborhood is so bleak and abandoned of life that the principal keeps several peacocks in the school's courtyard. He simply wishes to give his students some escape from their dreary environment. (p. 71) Kozol also quotes a former editor of the Chicago Tribune who says that an "extraordinary combination of greed, racism, political cowardice and public apathy" contributed to the wretched state of Chicago's public schools. (p. 72) Specific problems are identified in a comment from a first-year English teacher in a Bronx high school :

"I've got five classes --- 42 in each! We have no textbooks yet. I'm using my old textbook from the seventh grade. They're doing construction all around me so the noise is quite amazing. They're actually drilling in the hall outside my room. I have more kids than desks in all five classes." (p. 111)

While he does not dwell on the structuralist factors contributing to the uneven levels of education across the country, Kozol does point out some of the immediate structures which are set up to confound any attempts at levelling education in America. One very important structure, unable to be ignored by anyone proposing a solution of levelling, is the property-tax system of collecting revenue for school districts. Kozol informs the reader that most public schools depend on local property taxes for their primary funding:

"[T]he property tax is the decisive force in shaping inequality. The property tax depends, of course, upon the taxable value of one's home and that of local industries. A typical wealthy suburb in which homes are often worth more than $400,000 draws upon a larger tax base in proportion to its student population than a city occupied by thousands of poor people. Typically, in the United States, very poor communities place high priority on education, and they often tax themselves at higher rates than do the very affluent communities. But, even if they tax themselves at several times the rate of an extremely wealthy district, they are likely to end up with far less money for each child in their schools." (pp. 54-55)

Another example of Kozol's structuralist thought appears when he indicates how government, through formalized and visible laws, condemns children to unequal lives. Since wealthy folk have extra resources , compared to poorer people, in the form of private wealth, they have more choices open to them. Laws dictate that schoolchildren must spend a certain proportion of their lives in school. Public schools are provided to fulfill the government's responsibilities under the law, so that no one needs to pay directly for a private education. However, the wealthy have the option of using the system of private education if it is better than what is being offered for "free." Poorer children must make do with the public school system which may not always provide a good education. As Kozol indicates, this is often the case, thereby effectively jailing schoolchildren in boring and even dangerous schools.

With knowledge comes responsibility. It is one thing to examine how Kozol presents the reality of unequal education to the reader, but quite another to examine what plans of action Kozol might suggest and the perspective used to reach that conclusion. As Kozol uses both interpretivism and structuralism to identify the problems, he now uses them also to suggest a call for reform.

Savage Inequalities presents the solution before the puzzle is seen. Kozol firmly states that for all the attention paid to social problems affecting children, children are almost never invited to discussions involving them as the subject, or consulted for decisions made which affect them.

This seems unfortunate because the children often are more interesting and perceptive than the grown-ups are about the day-to-day realities of life in school. For this reason, I decided, early in my journey, to attempt to listen very carefully to children, and whenever possible, to let their voices and their judgments and their longings find a place within this book --- and maybe, too, within the nation's dialogue about their destinies. I hope that, in this effort, I have done them justice." (pp. 5-6)

Other calls to action are exhibited in the book, but in much subtler ways. Throughout the book Kozol points out the horrible disparities in school-building conditions and school financing. Turning again to the tour-bus analogy, Kozol is the tour guide who has control over what information is given to the sightseers. Being king of the bus, he has "totalitarian" control over where the bus goes and what is told to the sightseers about what they are viewing.

This dictatorial control is wielded masterfully by Kozol. In providing the context for the reader's assumed new experience, he works with a tabula rasa and has the power to make a strong but subtle suggestion for a certain course of action on the reader's part. The suggestions he seems to be making throughout the book are related to the observations he decides to imprint upon the reader's consciousness. By merely bringing to light certain phenomena which he assumes the reader will find appalling he infers that something should be done about this situation. By bothering to even enlighten the reader with this discovery he implies that some action should be taken by the reader. In comparing paradigms controlled for everything but race, or class, he pinpoints the problem and silently appeals for the caring reader to do something with his/her new knowledge of the crisis. One instance can be seen where Kozol silently screams for an end to racism in the educational system and in society:

"[W]hen Asbury Park --- predominantly non-white --- asked to rent facilities in a white district, the white district was willing to take only \324a small number of students’ and insisted that they \324be kept separate.’" (p. 165)

Bowles & Gintis also take upon themselves the task of confronting the problems in the American educational system. However, unlike Kozol, they point to a monolithic stumbling-block to educational progress. The whole capitalist system must be dismantled, they argue, because it is corrupting the educational system to its own ends. Therefore, Bowles & Gintis use a highly structuralist approach to analyzing the problems confronting a fair distribution of educational resources to American schoolchildren.

The argument "guy-wires " used by the authors to hold up their thesis "tent" of capitalist influence are numerous and strong. One of the poles supporting the tent is the argument of how profit obfuscates all other societal concerns. While the wealthy have ownership of some means of mass production, most workers own only their own labor power. As such, their labor power becomes commoditized under capitalism. Like any other commodity, labor becomes subjected to market forces. As the price of labor fluctuates, workers are hired or laid off. The owners, or employers, of labor wish to ensure that they will have a constant flow of labor available to them in the future. Capitalism, then, also promotes a rigid reproduction of labor for the sake of the labor ownership. Like pens coming off a factory conveyor belt, workers must also be as consistent as commodities from one person to the next. Capitalists interested in their company’s bottom line do not see their employees as people, but rather as a homogeneous composite of workers. Just as the owner of a bulldozer must make sure that it is well oiled and fueled so that it produces the work required of it, the owner of a labor force will tend to his/her workers only as much as is needed for the labor to do what is required of it. No mind is paid to the fact that a person cannot be separated from his/her labor. If the worker has personal needs for a good home, clean parks, health care, etc., they are irrelevant to the employer since those items would only cut into the owner’s profit margin without returning any more labor. Moreover, if the ownership and the workers are vying for control of an educational system, the ownership will have more leverage to dictate what goes on in the schools since they have more to invest in the infrastructure.

These structuralist arguments abound in Bowles & Gintis’swork. The book goes on to indicate how the technocratic-meritocratic ideology which is promoted by capitalism has also found its way into the educational system. As capitalism is the only economic system in existence in the United States, it profoundly permeates all sectors of economic and social life. Education, purported to be the one universal social service guaranteed to everyone, finds itself tamperedwith by capitalism. It is the money which dictates what gets looked at and what is paid attention to because money is what pays the bills. The corporation can benefit a nearby neighborhood school by investing in some renovations, new computers, and teacher raises for the school. This money does not enter into the local school without strings attached. The corporation might "request" that the school obligate the investment by allowing some capitalist propaganda into the school currciculum. Perhaps the corporation feels that a certain textbook should be used instead of another. That corporation will have the economic power to pay for the textbook and present it "free of charge" to the school. In this way the school is determining whether or not future generations of workers learn worker history, whether or not they are told about the corporation’s donation to the school, and whether or not they will be trained for a job on the world market or one within the same city.

The same structure is presented throughout Bowles & Gintis, but the structure’s details which branch out are examined more carefully within the book. Noting, then, that corporations can influence the educational system in a variety of ways, it is not difficult to move up the structure and see how schools are really producing a commodity. Schools are molding well-disciplined and behaving workers out of a human form. They are acting like the mass-production cookie-cutter machine. It stamps out little cookies, looking the same and smelling the same and tasting the same. As the cookie-cutter machine is excellent at producing a consistent product in great quantities, so too do public schools stamp out workers for the needs of capitalist ownership. Therefore, says Bowles & Gintis, the overarching structure of capitalism reaches into and taints the structure of education. The call for reform must make capitalism its enemy since it is at the root of the educational problem. The structural solution, then, is to overthrow this system and replace it with a more efficient and humanitarian system --- socialism. Socialism itself is a structure which is explained in detail so that the reader is given an idea of how much education would improve through socialism.

Bowles & Gintis employ the use of a diagram in their book to map out the structures which must be paid attention to when trying to find a relationship between socioeconomic background and income/occupational status. It looks like this (p. 113):

Bowles & Gintis, then, work primarily with structuralism. But do they work with structuralism exclusively? The visible structures in place under capitalism are not sufficient in strength to keep rebellions under control. Counting the armed forces, police, and court systems, there is not enough physical force present to keep the workers from overturning the capitalist structure. What other forces are at work to balance out this obvious disparity of population and political strength? Bowles & Gintis point to the everyday interactions in which we reinforce the dominant social mores in each other. Thought police do not need to be employed if they are already installed into our own minds. In the book it is stated this way:

Thus it is clear that the consciousness of workers --- beliefs, values, self-concepts, types of solidarity and fragmentation, as well as modes of personal behavior and development --- are integral to the perpetutation, validation, and smooth operation of economic institutions. The reproduction of the social relations of production depends on the reproduction of consciousness. (p. 127)

Bowles & Gintis show what conditions are needed for a people to throw off this cloak of inhumanitarian values. In a socialist society people would not be treated with as workers but as people. That is to say that a fundamental change in the economic system will trickle down revolutionary changes in the social order. As has been demonstrated above, the capitalist economy is so directly linked to society that a revolution against the economic order will coincide with a revolution against the social order.

It must be noted, however, that Bowles & Gintis do not advocate creating an economic revolution by starting a social revolution. The authors shake their heads at attempts to change mores --- that is, to alter millions of peoples’ ways of thinking so that changes in the economic system will evolve with new consumer demands. That approach would fall under the rubric of reformism, which never insists on the immediate removal of the capitalist system in order to pre-empt further injustices made by it. Therefore, the authors take the hard-line structuralist viewpoint that only revolution against the capitalist system will create the necessary changes needed in the human condition.

As said at the beginning of this paper, both works investigated here are excellent at making their points about what is wrong with the educational system and how it needs to be changed. Now that the reader is armed with a basic understanding of the techniques used by Kozol and Bowles & Gintis and comprehends the workings of these approaches, s/he may delve into analyzing the techniques. Two weaknesses immediately exposed are as follows: The methodology itself may be fllawed, or its particular application may be misapplied.

Howe, in "Getting Over the Quantitative-Qualitative Debate," turns to Brian Fay to uncover some problems with using interpretivism.

"[Brian Fay] enumerates four shortcomings of what he calls the "interpretive model": its neglect of (1) the external conditions that help give rise to systems of actions, rules, and beliefs; (2) the unintended consequences of actions; (3) the internal contradictions between actions, rules, and meanings; and (4) historical change." (p. 242)

Fay asserts that a social scientist must be able to explain social institutions, but an interpretivist perspective obfuscates recognizing those overarching social institutions which reach into our ground-level relationships. Therefore, the only way an interpretivist can explain these social orders is by borrowing from other, non-interpretive, disciplines. (Howe, pp. 242-243)

Structuralism, too, has its deficiencies. It rests itself on the assumption that it can reside solely in, and be tested solely by, observation. This is the doctrine of "verificationism" --- the foundation on which resides the theory of structuralism. However, it is this demand of verification which is too extreme. Structuralism suffers from starting with the theoretical models devised by the scientist. That is, all scientific theory is "value-laden" and is unpreventably colored by the "conceptual schemes" or "paradigms" which the scientists employ. (Howe, p. 240)

Then the reader of Kozol must be on the alert for weaknesses in his arguments, which are based predominantly on interpretivism. Likewise, as Bowles & Gintis make extensive use of structuralism, their arguments must be scrutinized under the light which reveals flaws in structuralism. Kozol continuously asks the reader to look where he’s pointing so that we see the people he wants us to see. A possibility clearly exists for not seeing the forest for the trees. Kozol does acknowledge some structuralist forces at work, but mainly keeps his attention focused on the surface-level of the problems. He shows a particular context, where the emissions from nearby chemical plants are hazardous to the downwind population of East St. Louis, Ill. In another instance Kozol indicates the problems caused by a particular corporate perspective. In this instance, where Kozol presents the blatant connection between business corporations and education, he seems to be making the same observation as Bowles & Gintis do when they warn of big business’s power. However, Kozol looks to the micro-level of this situation and how a specific group of business-minded authors call for a turn to "realistic goals" for impoverished schools. While he is obviously presenting the argument on behalf of all like-minded people, his analysis is not structuralist because he speaks only of this "isolated incident" and does not attempt to tie in into a bigger picture.

Bowles & Gintis, too, must be analyzed to see what liberties they may have taken with the use of structuralism. Over-dependence on Marxism can create difficulties in the theory’s use. The inherent weakness of structuralism lies in its casual use of functional attribution. This action is used when an identification is made between a particular function and a particular practice or institutional feature. Often distinctions and explanations are confused, giving rise to spurious conclusions. In other words, "the citation of an effect is presented as an explanation." (Liston, p. 328)

So, then, even if it can be proven that a company’s profit- motive causes a decrease in worker benefits, the explanation doesn’t uncover the reason for its existence. That is, the cause for decreased worker benefits has been shown to be the company’s pursuit of profit, but it hasn’t explained anything about what worker benefits are. Linton uses this concern to critique Bowles & Gintis:

They [Bowles & Gintis] note the need to identify mechanisms through which this correspondence is maintained, but one senses that the identification of mechanisms is a foregone conclusion. In Bowles and Gintis’s story, the educational system now appears to be part of the "naturally required" order: it all makes sense. Schools are superstructural institutions in a capitalist formation where the economic base rules. (Liston, pp. 333-334)

If both structuralism and interpretivism contain irregularities, then what perspective is to be used?A new approach would borrows mechanistic explanations from the natural science model and intentional explanations from interpretivism.

Whereas a structuralist has more expertise about structures people live in than the people who live in them, their theories are often too detached from the real lives being lived in those structures. Taken to an extreme, one could say that the structures are eloquently described, but they are misrepresentations. They take a "spectator view" of knowledge in that they encourage viewing humans as passive, affected by exogenous causes. Interpretivism contains the advantage of faithfully reflecting insiders’ perspectives , so it is able to represent the actual social workings quite accurately. It, however, lacks the ability to find institutions in the melee of interactions. It views humans as active and self-creating and as being so totally different from everything else in the natural world that they become inexplicable in these terms.

Now that the imperfections in the systems of interpretivism and structuralism have been uncovered, it is necessary to see if a better perspective can be put forth in their stead. Howe suggests that both structuralism and interpretivism are incomplete and untenable. He posits a new epistemological perspective which takes the best features of each, and combines them into "compatibilism." Howe:

" . . . [R]ealizing an activist conception of human nature requires (1) that humans have the basic capacities (physiological, psychological, etc.) to be active and (2) that conditions exist that foster the development and use of these capacities." (Howe, p. 245)

In applied-theory terms, the simple idea is called critical social research. Social research must be closer to interpretivism and must be grounded in terms of the insider’s perspective. Critical social research allows the researcher to use structural expertise, but Howe suggets that a "citizen interlocutor" be used to inject doses of reality into the researcher’s generalizations. (Howe, pp. 249-250)

The advantage of this synthesis is explained best by the author in the last quotation of my paper:

Value constraints of both kinds set the boundaries for the conduct of educational research at the most general level, and it is within these boundaries that the compatibilist conception of social scientific explanation comes into play. Because the critical social research model eschews the positivist- interpretivist epistemological split in favor of compatibilism, educational research based on this model weds itself to the "logics in use" that have proved themselves successful instead of wedding itself exclusively to either the positivist or interpretivist models of explanation. (Howe, p. 251)