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Sociological Concepts between Construction and Revision

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Abstract

In this paper I shall advance the view that sociological concepts are developed in a constant alternation between construction and revision. I shall substantiate this view by including on the one hand the constructionist thinking of Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieu and on the other hand the realist thinking of Andrew Sayer and Margaret Archer. I utilize the sociological concept of integration as an example of a concept, which has in its development alternated between construction and revision. My conclusion is that construction is resultant from the personal cultivation, the societal concerns and the choice of empirical sources of the researcher, and that the revision of the constructions made take place as a consequence of continuous confrontations and discussions concerning contrasting conceptual constructions.

Introduction

Sociological concepts must alternate between two methodological principles, that of construction and that of revision. On the one hand, sociology must at all times be prepared to create new concepts in order to illuminate still more elements of societal evolution. If we cannot accept the construction of novel concepts, new tendencies as well as phenomena, which have not yet been conceptualized, will pass us by and they will not become part of our sociological theorizing.

On the other hand, these conceptual constructions must be incessantly revised in consideration of their relations to other conceptual constructions and of novel views on

societal phenomena. If sociologists create different concepts of the same phenomena, it becomes necessary with debates and subsequent revisions. And if new concerns come into existence among sociologists, it may also become necessary to carry out revisions. Thus, sociological concepts are formed in a constant alternation between construction and revision.

In sociology we have two schools of thought which can be utilized to explicate respectively the principles of construction and revision. The principle of construction can be elucidated by taking recourse to the thinking of classical sociology about construction, mainly the contributions by Max Weber and Georg Simmel, and by including the thinking of the contemporary sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The principle of revision can be elucidated by taking recourse to realist sociology, mainly the contributions of Andrew Sayer and Margaret Archer.

I shall illustrate the idea of a combination of construction and revision in the formation of concepts in sociology by investigating how the concept of integration has evolved in sociology. The question is whether we can see the evolution of this concept in the light of a combination of a combination of construction and revision and thus in the light of a combination of constructionism and naturalism.

The Construction of Concepts

The principle that the researcher constructs his or her own concepts becomes most evident in classical sociology. It was developed by the classic sociologists in their distancing themselves from the German historical school and its belief in a naturalistic science. Dissatisfaction with the demands of the science of history of description and exact photographic reproduction of empirical reality made the new sociological science stake on the principle of construction.

The strongest proponent for the principle of construction was probably Max Weber. In his methodological articles he repeats time and again the idea that the researcher must construct his concepts or ideal types, as he labels them. His argument for why researchers must carry out these constructions is that sociology preoccupies itself with dynamic, changing phenomena. In the article "'Objectivity' in social science" Weber spells out his principles for the creation of ideal types. Ideal types must be developed in order to understand unique phenomena, and this must be done utilizing constructions. These constructions are carried out through value-based, one-sided accentuation of particular perspectives or points of view with regard to a given phenomenon. Therefore, ideal types, or basic concepts, are mental constructs.

We have purely considered the ideal type essentially - if not exclusively - as a mental construct for the scrutiny and systematic characterization of individual concrete patterns which are significant in their uniqueness, such as Christianity, capitalism, etc. (Weber, 1904-17/1949, pp. 99-100).

In this article, Weber notes that the creation of ideal types can be utilized also for the development of classificatory concepts.

One thing, however, against which Weber warns vehemently concerning constructions, is the identification of these constructions with reality or with the driving forces of reality. ‘... ideal-typical *constructs* and *history* are to be sharply distinguished from each other ...’ (Weber, 1904-17/1949, p.102). The risk is that one confounds theoretical constructions and historical evolution.

Nothing, however, is more dangerous than the *confusion* of theory and history stemming from naturalistic prejudices. This confusion expresses itself firstly in the belief that the ‘true’ content and the essence of historical reality is portrayed in such theoretical constructs or secondly, in the use of these constructs as a procrustean bed into which history is to be forced or thirdly, in the hypostatization of such ‘ideas’ as real ‘forces’ and as a ‘true’ reality which operates behind the passage of events and which works itself out in history. (Weber, 1904-17/1949, p. 94).

Seemingly, Weber is aware of the immense risk of misapprehension and of misuse of the constructions created in sociology.

Precisely this misapprehension has become realized in social constructionist thinking, where constructions are assumed to be tools for the development of the world. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), constructions take place when human beings – in face-to-face relationships as well as in more general types of relationships – use categories in order to understand one another, in order to act vis-à-vis one another and thereby to create social structures. At the same time, these categories are continually negotiable and therefore objects of change. The consequence of this thinking becomes that we through the construction of categories construct the world. The problem of this type of thinking is that it does not entail the possibility that we construct antagonistic categories of the same phenomenon, and thereby may come to see the need to ponder our categories once again and maybe revise them. If we did create the world through the developing of categories, we would be inhabiting different worlds depending on the categories, we had created.

Also Simmel has, in his methodological thinking, utilized the concept of construction. In *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* Simmel emphasizes that through asking questions one undertakes a selection among the empirical data. This means that certain aspects of the facts are thrown into relief, while others are relegated into the background. The result becomes the creation of a construction in relation to empirical reality. 'The facts as objects of knowledge are formed into new constructs that have their own peculiar qualities.' (Simmel, 1905/1977, p. 77). The basis for this construction is the approach or the point of view which the researcher chooses to employ with regard to his or her material.

A science of the total event is ... impossible because it would lack a *point of view or problematic*. Such a problematic is necessary in order to produce a construct that would satisfy our criteria for knowledge... There is no knowledge as such: knowledge is possible only insofar as it is produced and structured by constitutive concepts that are qualitatively determined. Because these concepts are qualitatively determined, they are inevitably partial and biased. (Simmel, 1905/1977, p. 82)

Finally, Durkheim has also argued – despite his very fact- and natural-scientific-ally oriented understanding of methodology – for the principle of construction of classificatory concepts, which may form the point of departure for comparative analyses.

Given the circumstances, we must confine ourselves to a few nations and disregard the rest, all our comparisons, however conscientious they might be, will necessarily fall short of a complete enumeration. The only remedy for this defect is to construct a classification of human societies. If societies were reduced to certain types, it would suffice to examine the phenomenon one wants to study in each type. (Durkheim, 1887/1993, p. 133).

Here, Durkheim employs the concept of construction in connection with typification. Undertaking typifications is a precondition for carrying out comparative investigation. Without constructions, no comparisons.

Therefore, constructionist thinking in classical sociology has been employed in relation to the study of unique phenomena, to the development of classificatory concepts, to typification and to selection of aspects of given historical phenomena. The principle behind these constructions is that the researcher selects information and in this manner creates his or her own concepts. This selection can be governed by the values, the point of view or the approach of the researcher. In any case it is the researcher, who

creates these concepts in order to be able to afterwards utilize them to comprehend empirical phenomena.

In contemporary sociology, constructionist thinking has been continued by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu extends this thinking in an attempt to build a bridge between the purely objectivist and the purely subjectivist thinking.

The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and contrary to intellectual idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions. (Bourdieu, 1980/1995, p. 52).

Bourdieu wants to overcome objectivism by insisting that we create knowledge through constructions and to overcome subjectivism by insisting that these constructs are a product of habitus and constituted in practice.

In *The Weight of the World* Bourdieu substantiates this point of view while at the same time emphasizing that the researcher must know the social logic behind the data upon which the construction is based. The researcher must be familiar with the basic social and institutional structure.

True submission to the data requires an act of construction based on practical mastery of the social logic by which these data are constructed. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 27; cf. also 1999, p. 617-8).

Finally, Bourdieu notes that the established construction is a realist construction: ‘... the only ‘spontaneous’ process is one that is constructed, but it is *a realist construction*.’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 28; cf. also 1999, p. 618). In this connection, the problem is that Bourdieu does not supply us with a closer specification of what we are to understand by a realist construction. Does it imply that the construction is really existing, or does it imply that the construction reflects real phenomena? Presumably it implies that the construction reflects the logic or the material relationships, which lie behind the sources, which the construction is based upon. The problem is that Bourdieu in his sociological thinking also conceives of the material relationships as constructs, e.g. when he discusses the construction of the social space (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; 1994/1998). It may be rather difficult to relate a construction to the social and material relationships, when these relationships are also conceived of by the usage of research constructions. I should probably prefer to say that the act of construction cannot stand alone. It must be suc-

ceeded by a realist-oriented type of thinking. The researcher must take the full responsibility for the construction, but it must be followed by a discussion concerning whether it is in contradiction with other views of the same phenomenon. With the concept of a realist construction Bourdieu seems to hint at a kind of synthesis thinking in the relationship between constructionism and naturalism.

Summing things up so far, we can say that those parts of sociology we have discussed here, are of the view that concepts must be constructed. As the background for this construction, the values, the choice of approach and the habitus of the researcher are mentioned. One can say that Bourdieu has succeeded in overcoming the voluntarism, which one could deduct from Weber's and Simmel's understandings of the process of construction. On the other hand, however, one might also say that this process could become envisaged as something relatively automatic and reproductive, when it takes its point of departure in habitus and therewith in the social background. I would prefer to say that any construction is a cultural product, and that as such it must be resultant from the cultivation of the researcher. Therefore, it is those forms of thinking that the researcher through a long process of cultivation has acquired, which becomes decisive for the choices that the researcher makes as to which social phenomena to conceptualize and in what way these concepts should be constructed. Therefore, construction only seemingly takes place spontaneously. It takes place as a reaction to new phenomena or the discovery of hitherto unseen phenomena, but it is at the same time deeply rooted in cultural tradition. To this tradition belongs the basic ideas of knowledge, the basic ideas of society and the basic ideals of society. The cultural point of departure will therefore be epistemological as well as ontological and ethical.

The Revision of Concepts

The idea that knowledge evolves through the revision of concepts has been developed especially in the naturalist understanding of knowledge. Roy Bhaskar defines naturalism as 'the thesis that there is (or can be) an essential unity of method between the natural and the social sciences' (Bhaskar, 1979, p.2). In this way, Bhaskar's philosophy places itself clearly in the Neo-Kantian tradition of searching for methods and concepts which are so general that they may cover all forms of science. One might also say that there is an element of synthesis in Bhaskar's philosophy. There are, still, significant distinctions to be made between the methods employed in the natural sciences and in the social sciences respectively. These distinctions are based in real differences between the objects of these sciences: '... it is the nature of the object that determines the form of its possible science' (Bhaskar, 1979, p.3). It is a basic point of departure for naturalist thinking that the world consists of mechanisms which are neither artificial constructs nor Platonic forms. These

mechanisms can be experienced and it is the task of science to produce knowledge about them (Bhaskar, 1998, p.35). This production of knowledge is according to Bhaskar a social activity and he basically emphasizes that the evolution of knowledge must take place in the form of change of concepts: ‘...man never creates, but only changes his knowledge’ (Bhaskar, 1998, 52). The task of the researcher is to constantly change the concepts which we have about the basic mechanisms in society.

In sociology there are at least two important trends in the realist tradition, critical realism represented by Andrew Sayer and social realism represented by Margaret Archer. I shall now look at how these two sociologists contribute to a naturalist and thus a realist understanding of the constant changing of the sociological concepts.

In Sayer’s view, the social sciences are only partly naturalist. In his view, the social sciences can only to a certain extent utilize the same methods as the natural sciences, because they must at the same time include the double hermeneutics in their thinking.

This means that critical realism is only partly naturalist, for although social science can use the same methods as natural science regarding causal explanation, it must also diverge from them in using ‘*verstehen*’ or interpretive understanding. (Sayer, 2000, p.17).

Against the background of this partly naturalist approach, Sayer emphasizes that the formation of sociological concepts can only take place through the alteration of existing concepts. ‘New concepts can only be developed from pre-existing ones’ (Sayer, 1984/92, 63). The change of concepts can happen when concepts are utilized in a new situation, whereby its meaning is changed, when a concept does not lead to the expected practical result, when there is an inconsistency in the conceptual system, and finally when scientific knowledge causes changes in its object. Among these reasons for changes in existing concepts, Sayer places most emphasis on the practical results of concepts. In Sayer’s view, concepts are not only meant to say something about the social world, they must also be employable to change it:

... it may be wise to avoid thinking of knowledge as attempting to ‘represent’ or ‘mirror’ the world like a photograph. A better analogy may be that of a map or recipe or instruction manual, which provides means by which we can do things in the world or *cope* with events (Sayer, 1984/92, p. 59).

The relevance of concepts is shown in practice, and if they do not have the intended effects, they must be altered.

In Archer's view, the development of concepts is governed by the ontological point of departure of the researcher. In her thinking, there is a clear connection between ontology, methodology and practical theorizing. She also takes point of departure in the naturalist view that

the nature of what exists cannot be unrelated to how it is studied ... what social reality is deemed to consist of do affect how its explanation is approached. (Archer, 1995, p. 16).

In Archer's view, the ontology, the theory of social realities, works as a regulator of the development of concepts and has an impact upon the process of our descriptions and explanations of social phenomena. On the other hand, the knowledge we obtain about the social world will also influence what we think about it and therewith our ontology. As a consequence of our methodological work we may have to change the ontology.

What we think social reality is cannot be a separate matter from what we find it to be. The reciprocal regulation which I am arguing obtains between ontology and methodology is one which obviously has to work in both directions. (Archer, 1995, p. 23).

The decisive principle for Archer is therefore that ontology and methodology mutually influence each other. One can say that the development of concepts becomes a consequence of a given ontology, but that this development in its practical consequences can also influence ontology. This raises the question of where this process starts and where it ends. Is there a product on the way or is it a constant circular movement between ontology and methodology?

In realist thinking, therefore, development of knowledge takes place primarily as the development of the existing concepts. In Sayer's theory it is primarily the practical relevance of concepts, including their ability to act as mechanisms of change, which determines whether they must be changed. In Archer's theory, the results of the research influences ontology and therewith methodology and the development of concepts.

Those parts of sociology which we have discussed in this section, purport the view that concepts must be constantly revised and that this takes place on the background of our experiences with their ability to change the social world or on the background of the results we obtain in the production of knowledge. The question becomes whether it really is the practical relevance or our scientific production of knowledge, which gives us the opportunity to revise the sociological concepts. In my view, the need

of revision arises because different researchers have different cultural backgrounds. Their cultivation is based on different research traditions. The concepts construed by the researchers will therefore reflect different types of cultivation. In their practical usage the concepts will therefore result in different types of understanding of the same phenomenon. These different types of understanding supply us with the reason to revise our concepts. If the contradictions between the developed understandings are too substantial, there can be a tendency to search for syntheses. The problem is that syntheses may be marred by tensions and thus may create divisions. In this way, the revision of developed concepts will take place as a constant alternation between synthesis and division.

The Concept of Integration as an Example

As an illustration of the view, which I have advanced in this article, I shall include the construction and revision by sociology of the concept of integration. The question is whether we can understand the formation and the evolution of this concept in the light of the sociological thinking about construction and revision of concepts.

The concept of integration was utilized by classical sociology, especially by Durkheim, who was most concerned about societal integration in the advent of modernity (Østerberg, 1988). In Durkheim's view, the individual had to become socialized to become a member of society. The means to safeguard this socialization was education. Through the pedagogical influencing, the individual would learn to enter into social interaction with others, so that society's members could become integrated in its totality. The basis for integration thus becomes, in Durkheim's view, morality which is developed through the socialization of the individual. Furthermore, legislation, enabling society to intervene, when morality is insufficient, partakes in safeguarding socialization.

This thinking by Durkheim about the concept of integration was not based upon any explicit construction of the concept of integration. It was Talcott Parsons, who carried out the genuine construction of integration thinking in sociology. Parsons constructed his concept of integration in relation to systems thinking. His desire to view the system as one which attempts to obtain equilibrium made him concern himself with the processes which facilitate equilibrium, allocation and integration. In this connection, Parsons constructs his definition of integration:

By *integration*, we mean the processes by which relations to the environment are mediated in such a way that the distinctive internal properties and boundaries of the system as an entity are maintained in the face of variability in the external situation. (Parsons & Shils, 1951, p. 108).

Included in the processes that facilitate integration are socialization and social control.

The question is now what it is that has made Parsons construct the concept of integration in this way in relation to his systems thinking. We can only guess, of course. Some researchers have pointed out that Parsons was concerned by the problem of Thomas Hobbes, i.e. the problem of how one in a world of scarce resources can avoid constant conflict and the war of all against all. From this angle one may emphasize that Parsons was concerned by the problem of how to safeguard a social life characterised by mutual advantages and peaceful cooperation instead of mutual animosity and destruction (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; Nygaard Christoffersen, 1998). In this way, the values behind Parsons' construction of the concept of integration become emphasized, but one can also emphasize the affinity with the Durkheimian system oriented and biologically inspired thinking and the focus on socialization and morality as the basis for integration. If so, the construction becomes resultant from the cultivation, which Parsons himself has been subjected to, a training in functionalist thinking. In any case, one must see this construction as a personal construction characterized by personal values and cultivation.

With this construction the concept of integration becomes well established in sociology. Immediately, however, it runs into opposition to proponents of conflict theory, for whom system equilibrium is uninteresting. In conflict theory the most important thing is to illuminate antagonistic relationships in society. In this situation, David Lockwood established a synthesis between these two types of thinking. He did so by creating the relationship between system integration and social integration. Lockwood writes about these two concepts:

Whereas the problem of social integration focuses attention upon the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *actors*, the problem of system integration focuses on the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *parts* of a social system, (Lockwood 1964, p. 245).

Concerning the relationship between these two types of integration, he writes that societal dissolution and disintegrative relationships between parts or subsystems of society are the basis of social conflict or dissolution. Whether change takes place is dependent on whether the persons who have an interest in upholding the institutional order are able to compensate for the problems that have arisen. If they can, change will take place, but the problem is still there. If they cannot compensate for the dysfunctionality, disintegration commences and a change of the institutional order must take place (Lockwood, 1964, p. 252).

With his conceptual construction, Lockwood has been able to build a bridge between two types of thinking in sociology and on the basis hereof create a coherent theory. This synthesis was provoked by the desire to solve a conflictual problem in sociological theory. And why so? It may be difficult to see any particular values or cultural traditions in this type of syntheses. Maybe he follows his own theory and carries out this compensatory exercise to avoid conflict and dissolution in the sociological milieu. Maybe he just saw a theoretical problem and a natural solution to this problem.

This compensatory exercise did however turn out to be a highly viable synthesis. More recent sociological theorists have not been able to write about the concept of integration without relating it to the relationship between social integration and system integration. We find this in the writings of Margaret Archer, Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas.

Archer adopts Lockwood's thinking about social integration and system integration and utilizes it in her understanding of morphogenetic processes in the cultural and the structural domains (Archer, 1988/1996; 1995). In this process she does not redefine Lockwood's concepts. She utilizes Lockwood's theory about the connection between social integration and system integration as the basis for developing a theory of cultural and structural change processes. One can say that Archer adopts Lockwood's naturalist thinking about integration and utilizes it unaltered as an inspirational source for her own development of a theory.

Giddens adopts the distinction between social integration and system integration, but he gives these concepts a novel content. As a point of departure, he defines integration as mutuality in action between actors or collectivities:

‘Integration’ may be understood as involving reciprocity of practices (of autonomy and dependence) between actors or collectivities. Social integration then means systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction. System integration refers to connections with those who are physically absent in time or space. (Giddens, 1984, p.28).

Integration thus refers to the degree of mutual dependence in action or to the systemization which is a part of any type of reproduction of systems. One might say that Giddens here returns to the original Parsonian thinking about integration as a system phenomenon, and that he redefines Lockwood's distinction between social integration and system integration to being a question of a micro and a macro level. His theoretical point is that integration on the face-to-face level is a precondition for integration at the structural level. In this way, conflict thinking has again been driven out of integration thinking. What we are left with is a quite optimistic type of thinking about integration which may develop

from the near relationships to the distant ones. One may say that Giddens' thinking about social integration is based on his training in existentialist and hermeneutic thinking. The result has become a quite optimistic view of integration thinking.

In Habermas' writings social integration is linked to the lifeworld, while system integration is linked to the system. He considers social integration as a reproductive process in relation to society. It takes place through communicative action, i.e. by means of those actions which aim at mutual understanding. The consequence of social integration becomes coordination and solidarity.

The social integration of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the dimension of social space: it takes care of coordinating actions by way of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations and stabilizes the identity of groups to an extent sufficient for everyday practice. The coordination of actions and the stabilization of group identities are measured by the solidarity among members. (Habermas, 1981/1991-92, p.140)

System integration is considered as a media-governed process, in which money and power are decisive for the degree of integration. The problem is, in Habermas' view, that system integration is parasitic upon social integration, while at the same time impeding its possibilities for communication. In this way, Habermas' thinking about social integration upholds Lockwood's distinction between social integration and system integration, but he represents a very pessimistic understanding of the relationship between these two phenomena. Also here, conflict thinking is taken out. On the other hand, phenomenological thinking has been included, but it stands as threatened by the systems theoretical approach. One is tempted to say that also here the original Parsonian concept of integration becomes the decisive one.

To summarize this short sketch of the evolution of the concept of integration in sociology one can say that Parsons first constructed the concept of integration in his systems theoretical thinking. This approach opposed conflict theory in sociology. On this background Lockwood constructed a synthesis coupling together system integration and social integration. This synthesis has proved extremely viable in the further theoretical evolution. One almost cannot speak of integration without carrying out the distinction which Lockwood outlined, but the substance of the two concepts has become changed in the process. The conflict perspective has been pushed into the background, while the system perspective has been enforced. Instead we have with Giddens achieved an existentialist perspective on the influence from micro to macro phenomena, and with Habermas a critical perspective on the influence from system to lifeworld.

What then is the challenge today? The concept of integration has been developed in the system theoretical thinking and it still has an element of adaptation and coercion. It was thought in this way by Durkheim and Parsons and still so by Giddens and Habermas. The point of departure for this view was the concern for the cohesion of society. The question is if we over time have become convinced that society is cohesive and that this may be at the cost of the individual and of the interaction between individuals in society. Is it about time to look more at the individual and relationships between individuals than at all-encompassing system thinking?

Giddens views social integration as mutuality in action. Habermas views it as solidarity. One may sense an ethical perspective in these understandings of social integration. If one advances with this way of thinking one can strangely enough let oneself become inspired by Durkheim's thinking about ethics. In Durkheim's view morality must be viewed in the relationship between individual and society. The moral elements of the individual and of society exist side by side and contribute to one another. On the one hand, the individual carries the impersonal elements of society in him- or herself. The contents of our ideas and feelings are something we share with other human beings. On the other hand, the individual is – as a consequence of his or her will – able to detach itself from the milieu that surrounds it and thus contribute to collective life. The individual develops his or her individual consciousness and in this way avoids becoming absorbed by society. Concerning the connection between individual and society Durkheim emphasizes that collective is not demeaned by the individual taking form and standing out. To the contrary, society becomes richer and more self-conscious by it:

But while the life of the individual takes shape and expands, the collective life is not thereby diminished. It becomes all the more rich and self-conscious. (Durkheim, 1887/1993, p. 107).

Maybe one could say that sociology has had a tendency to emphasize one aspect of Durkheim's thinking about the interaction between individual and society, the societal and systemic aspect. The other aspect, the one dealing with the will of the individual and the ability to detach itself and contribute to societal evolution has become overlooked. It may be time for us to change the focus of our thinking about social integration more in the direction of the individual and the possibility of the individual to contribute to societal integration.

The societal mechanisms which may enhance an ethical orientation in the individual consist primarily of education and cultivation. Through the acquisition of different types of thinking about ethical problems, human beings become able to think and act

ethically, to find out what is right for their own life and thus for the community, and thus to contribute to social integration.

Conclusion

I have advanced the view that sociological concepts must become formed as constructions, where the individual sociologist on the basis of his or her own cultivation creates new concepts with a personal view of the phenomena which are being studied. The individual researcher will be influenced by research traditions that he or she has been working in. Likewise, his or her personal concerns about particular aspects of societal evolution may influence the choice of research theme and the approach chosen when researching this theme. Finally, the choice of empirical sources will heavily influence, how the construction is formed. I see this as constitutive elements of sociological thinking. It is when carrying out constructions sociology creates its identity as a science.

These constructions can never be taken for reality not to mention with historical driving forces. They are points of view on selected societal phenomena. Therefore, they must continually be objects of debate and confrontation. Different constructions must be compared, and as a consequence revised. Such revisions may take the form of syntheses, when two approaches are linked together and formed into a theoretical construction. A substantial part of present-day theoretical constructions have the character of synthesis between different approaches. With these syntheses often follow revisions of the concepts which have become linked. These revisions take place in the light of new approaches taken to known or newly arisen phenomena. The steady flow of syntheses between different theoretical approaches may also necessitate, however, that elements which are linked, become investigated each in their own right and become reformed in the light of new approaches and types of problems.

It is my view, therefore, that sociology must uphold its tradition for generating concepts and theories through constructions. These constructions are personal for the individual researcher, but they must continually become objected to debate and criticism and thus the possibility of revision. Therefore, sociological concepts will continually become objected to change. They alternate between construction and change.

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