Lecture 1

A Framework for an Emancipatory Social Science

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November, 2007
OUTLINE

I. What is “Emancipatory Social Science”?
II. Three Tasks
III. Taking the ‘Social’ in Socialism Seriously
IV. Pathways to social empowerment
V. Conclusions
I. What is *Emancipatory Social Science*?

**Definition:**

Emancipatory social science seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression and creating the conditions in which people can live flourishing lives.
**Emancipatory**: identifies a central moral purpose in the production of knowledge – the elimination of oppression and the creation of the conditions for human flourishing.

**Science**: recognizes the importance of systematic scientific knowledge – not just philosophy and social criticism – about how the world works for this task.

**Social**: implies that human emancipation depends upon the transformation of the social world, not just the inner self.
II. The Three Tasks of Emancipatory Social Science

1. Diagnosis & Critique
2. Envisioning Alternatives
3. A Theory of Transformation
Task 1. DIAGNOSIS & CRITIQUE

Normative foundations:
radical democratic egalitarianism

1. Social justice: In a socially just society, all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary material and social means to live flourishing lives.

2. Political justice: In a politically just society, all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary political means to contribute to the collective control of the conditions and decisions which affect their common fate.
Task 1
The core critique of capitalism

*Capitalism simultaneously creates potentials for universalized human flourishing and expansive democracy and blocks the full realization of those potentials.*

1. Capitalism perpetuates eliminable forms of human suffering and obstructs the universalization of conditions for human flourishing.

2. Capitalism blocks the full realization of democracy.
Task 2. Envisioning Alternatives

I. Desirability

(1) Desirable alternatives

II. Viability

(2) Nonviable Alternatives
(3) Viable Alternatives

III. Achievability

(4) Unachievable alternatives
(5) Achievable alternatives
Task 3. Elements of a Theory of Transformation

1. A Theory of Social Reproduction: obstacles to emancipatory transformation

2. A theory of gaps, limits and contradictions of reproduction: possibilities of transformation

3. A theory of trajectories of unintended social change: future prospects for obstacles and possibilities

4. A theory of transformative strategy: what is to be done?
Strategic logics of Transformation

1. **Ruptural** (radical break in institutions): Revolutionary socialist tradition
2. **Interstitial** (build new institutions in the cracks of the system): Anarchist tradition
3. **Symbiotic** (use existing institutions to solve problems in ways that transform institutions): Social democratic tradition
III. An approach to Viable Alternatives to Capitalism: Taking the “Social” in Socialism Seriously
Conceptual building blocks

1. Power

2. Types of power

3. Types of Economic Structures

4. Hybrids
Three kinds of power

1. **Economic power**: power based on the control of material resources.

2. **State power**: power based on the control of rule making and rule enforcing over territory.

3. **Social power**: power based on capacity to mobilize voluntary cooperation and collective action.
THREE ECONOMIC STRUCTURES: CAPITALISM, STATISM AND SOCIALISM

**Capitalism**: an economic structure within which the means of production are privately owned and thus the allocation and use of resources for different purposes is accomplished through the exercise of economic power. Investments and the control of production are the result of the exercise of economic power by owners of capital.

**Statism**: an economic structure within which the means of production are owned by the state and thus the allocation and use of resources for different purposes is accomplished through the exercise of state power. State officials control the investment process and production through some sort of state-administrative mechanism.

**Socialism**: an economic structure within which the means of production are “socially owned” and thus the allocation and use of resources for different social purposes is accomplished through the exercise of what can be termed “social power.” Social power is power rooted in the capacity to mobilize people for cooperative, associational action in civil society. In socialism the control over investment and production is organized through diverse mechanisms of social empowerment.
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The idea of HYBRIDS:

All real economic systems are complex combinations of capitalism, statism, and socialism. We call an economy “capitalist” when capitalism is dominant. The possibility of socialism, therefore, revolves around the problem of enlarging and deepening the socialist component of the hybrid. I refer to this as the problem of pathways to social empowerment.
IV.

FIVE PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT
PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Civil Society: Social Power

Economic Power

State Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution
PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

I. STATIST SOCIALISM

Civil Society: Social Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

Economic Power

State Power
Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

Civil Society: Social Power

State Power

Economic Power

AUTHORITARIAN STATISM
PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Economic Power

Civil Society: Social Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

State Power

II. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC STATIST REGULATION
Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

Civil Society: Social Power

Economic Power

State Power

CAPITALIST STATIST ECONOMIC REGULATION

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution
III. ASSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY

PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- Economic Power
  - Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution
- Civil Society: Social Power
- State Power
PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Civil Society: Social Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

Economic Power

State Power

IV. SOCIAL CAPITALISM
V. SOCIAL ECONOMY

PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Civil Society: Social Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution

Economic Power

State Power
MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Civil Society: Social Power

Economic Power

State Power

Allocation of resources and control of production and distribution
Conclusions
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3. There are good reasons for skepticism.

4. But: skepticism is an essential feature of science, including emancipatory social science.

5. Therefore our goal is to continually improve the answers to questions we ask as we engage the three tasks of diagnosis & critique, envisioning alternatives, and understanding transformation in order to get on with the messy business of changing the world rather than just interpreting it.
The full text of book-in-progress, *Envisioning Real Utopias* can be found at:

www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright