Chapter 1
The Tasks of Emancipatory Social Science
draft 2.4

Envisioning real utopias is a central component of a broader intellectual enterprise that can be called *emancipatory social science.* In this chapter I will sketch the overall contours of this kind of social theory.

Emancipatory social science seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression. To call it a form of social *science*, rather than simply social criticism or social philosophy, implies that it recognizes the importance of systematic scientific knowledge about how the world works for this task. To call it *emancipatory* is to identify a central moral purpose in the production of knowledge – the elimination of oppression and the creation of the conditions for human flourishing. And to call it *social* implies the belief that human emancipation depends upon the transformation of the social world, not just the inner life of persons.

To fulfill this mission, any emancipatory social science faces three basic tasks: elaborating a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; envisioning viable alternatives; and, understanding the obstacles, possibilities, and dilemmas of transformation. In different times and places one or another of these may be more pressing than others, but all are necessary for a comprehensive emancipatory theory.

Diagnosis and Critique

The starting point for building an emancipatory social science is identifying the ways in which existing social institutions and social structures systematically impose harms on people. It is not enough to show that people suffer in the world in which we live or that there are enormous inequalities in the extent to which people live flourishing lives. A scientific emancipatory theory must show that the explanation for this suffering and inequality lies in specific properties of institutions and social structures. The first task of emancipatory social science, therefore, is the diagnosis and critique of the causal processes that generate these harms.

Diagnosis and critique is the aspect of emancipatory social science that has often generated the most systematic and developed empirical research. Consider Feminism, for example. A great deal of feminist writing centers on the diagnosis of existing social relations, practices and institutions in terms of the ways in which they generate various forms of oppression of women. Studies of labor markets have emphasized such things as sex-segregation of jobs, job evaluation systems which denigrate job attributes associated with culturally defined feminine traits, promotion discrimination, institutional arrangements which place mothers at a disadvantage in employment, and so on. Feminist studies of culture demonstrate the ways in which a wide range of cultural practices in the media, education, literature, and other institutions have traditionally

reinforced gender identities and stereotypes in ways that oppress women. Feminist studies of the state have examined the way in which state structures and policies have systematically reinforced the subordination of women and various forms of gender inequality. All of this research is meant to show that gender inequality and domination are not simply the result of "natural" biological difference between men and women, but rather are generated by social structures and institutions. A similar set of observations could be made about empirical research inspired by the Marxist tradition of emancipatory theory, by theories of racial oppression, and by radical environmentalism. In each of these traditions much of the research that is done consists in documenting the harms generated by existing social structures and institutions, and attempting to identify the causal processes which generate those harms.

Diagnosis and critique is closely connected to questions of social justice and normative theory. To describe a social arrangement as generating "harms" is to infuse the analysis with a moral judgment.[1] Behind every emancipatory theory, therefore, there is an implicit theory of justice, some conception of what conditions would have to be met before the institutions of a society could be deemed just.

Underlying the analysis in this book is what could be called a *radical democratic egalitarian* understanding of justice. It rests on two broad normative claims, one concerning the conditions for social justice and the other for political justice:

> *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 collectively control those decisions which affect their common fate.*

The first of these principles revolves around the idea of "human flourishing." This is a broad, multidimensional umbrella concept, covering a variety of aspects of human well being. It is like the idea of "health", which has both a restrictive meaning as the absence of diseases that interfere with ordinary bodily functioning, and an expansive meaning as robust physical vitality. The restrictive meaning of human flourishing concerns the absence of deficits that undermine ordinary human functioning. This includes things like hunger and other material deprivations, ill-health, social isolation, and the psychological harms of social stigma. This is a heterogeneous list – some elements refer to bodily impairments, others to social and cultural impairments. But they all, through different mechanisms, undermine basic human functioning. A just society is one in

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[1] It is, of course, possible for someone to agree that contemporary capitalism creates human suffering and still also argue that this is not an injustice. One might believe, as many libertarians do, that people have the right to do what they want with their property even if alternative uses of their property would reduce human suffering. A consistent libertarian could accept the diagnosis that capitalism generates large deficits in human flourishing, and yet argue that it would be a violation of fundamental freedom and thus unjust to force people to use their property in ways other than of their choosing. Nevertheless, most people believe that when institutions generate systematic and pervasive harms in the lives of people, that such institutions are likely to be unjust.

which all people have unconditional access to the means to flourish in this restrictive sense of satisfaction of needs for basic human functioning.[2]

The expansive idea of flourishing refers to the various ways in which people are able to develop and exercise their talents and capacities, or, to use another expression, to realize their individual potentials. This does not imply that within each person there is some unique, latent, natural "essence" that will grow and become fully realized if only it is not blocked. The expansive idea individual flourishing is not the equivalent of saying that within every acorn lies a mighty oak: with proper soil, sun and rain the oak will flourish and the potential within the acorn will be realized as the mature tree. Human talents and capacities are multidimensional; there are many possible lines of development, many different flourishing mature humans that can develop from the raw material of the infant. These capacities are intellectual, artistic, physical, social and moral and spiritual. They involve creativity as well as mastery. A flourishing human life is one in which these talents and capacities develop.

The idea of human flourishing is neutral with respect to the various ways of life that can be constructed around particular ways of flourishing. There is no implication that intellectual talents are more worthy of development than physical talents, for example. There is also no supposition that in order to flourish human beings must develop all of their capacities: people have many different potentials, and it is impossible in general that all of these potentials can be realized, regardless of the access to material and social means.

Crucially, to develop and exercise these potentials requires material resources and appropriate social conditions. The importance of material resources for human flourishing is obvious. Certainly without things like adequate nutrition, housing, clothing, and personal security it is difficult for most people to flourish in either the restrictive or expansive sense. But the development of intellectual, physical and social capacities requires much more than simple material necessities. It requires access to educational settings within which learning takes place and talents are cultivated, not just in childhood, but throughout life. It requires access to work settings where skills can be developed and exercised and activity is to a substantial extent self-directed. It requires communities which provide opportunities for active participation in civic affairs and cultural activities.

A just society is one in which everyone has broadly equal access to these conditions. This does not imply that everyone should receive the same income or have identical material standards of living, both because the "necessary means" to flourish will vary across people and because some amount of inequality is consistent with everyone still having access to the *necessary* means to live flourishing lives. Nor does the radical egalitarian view imply that everyone would in fact flourish in a just society, but simply that any failures to do so would not be due to inequalities in access to the necessary social and material resources needed to flourish.

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[2] The restrictive sense of flourishing elaborated here corresponds closely to Sen's notion of "capabilities" and basic functioning. In his analysis, societies should be judged not on the basis of how much income they generate per capita, but on the extent to which the provide basic capabilities to all. (reference). See also Nussbaum (reference) for an elaboration of the idea of flourishing as a core ideal of the good society.

This conception of social justice does not simply concern class inequalities; it also condemns inequalities based on gender, race, physical disabilities, and any other morally irrelevant attribute which interferes with a person's access to the necessary material and social means to live a flourishing life. This is why the inclusion of *social* means is crucial, since disrespect, discrimination and social exclusion based on status attributes can constitute as serious impediments to flourishing as economic inequality. The radical egalitarian conception of social justice proposed here, therefore, includes what Nancy Fraser has called the politics of recognition as well as material distribution.[3]

The radical egalitarian conception of social justice is also not restricted to the nation state as the only appropriate social arena for egalitarianism. The principle that all people should have broadly equal access to the necessary social and material means to live flourishing lives applies to *all* people, and thus at its deepest level it is a global principle for humanity. As a tool for criticism, therefore, the egalitarian ideal can be directed at any social unit within which access to resources is structured through rules and powers. A family can be criticized as unjust when members have unequal access to the means to live flourishing lives; and global institutions can be criticized as unjust when they enforce rules which sustain such inequality on a global scale. In practical terms most discussions of social justice focus mainly on the problem of justice within the bounded social entities we call "nation states" since these are the social units within which political agency for social change remains largely concentrated, but this practical constraint does not define the core principle itself.[4]

It is, of course, not a simple matter to specify the institutional arrangements which would in practice satisfy this criterion for a just society. Any attempt at doing so would have to contend with a range of difficult issues: How is the moral conviction about the just *distribution* of access to resources balanced against pragmatic considerations of *producing* the social and material means for flourishing? Some talents will contribute more than others to creating the social and material conditions for human flourishing. Should these kinds of talents be encouraged over others? And, if so, doesn't this violate the equal access idea? Some talents are more costly to develop than others, and since in the aggregate there is likely to be a budget constraint on the resources available for the development of talents, this may make it impossible to give everyone equal access to the necessary means to develop whatever talents they might want to develop. Equal access to the means to flourish thus may not mean equal access to the necessary means to cultivate whatever talents one wants to cultivate.[5] A full philosophical defense of the ideal of equal access to the conditions to live a flourishing life would have to contend with these, and other, problems. But whatever else is entailed by this ideal, it certainly implies access to the necessary means to satisfy basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health, as well as the

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[3] See Nancy Fraser – NLR article, book, on recognition. Also note that class inequalities also impose harms of disrespect – Sayer's moral significance of class argument.

[4] It is important to clear on this point: the moral universe for egalitarian ideals is global, but struggles for these ideals are deeply shaped by the practical constraints of different arenas for agency.

[5] This is basically similar to the issue of "expensive tastes" in those theories of justice that focus on equality opportunity for subjective welfare rather than access to the conditions to live a flourishing life.

means to develop and exercise some of one's talents and capacities and the means to be a full participant in the social life of the society in which one lives. We do not live in such a world.

The second normative principle underlying the diagnosis and critique in this book concerns democracy. It affirms not simply that in a democracy there should be formal political equality – all people should have equal legal access to the means of political participation – but that democracy needs to be empowered in ways which enable people to collectively control their common fate. Mostly, in contemporary society, people hold a fairly restrictive view of democracy. On the one hand, many issues of crucial public importance are not seen as legitimately subjected to democratic decision-making. In particular, many economic decisions which have massive affects on our collective fate are seen as "private" matters to be made by executives and owners of large corporations. The demarcation between "public" and "private" is anchored in a relatively strong conception of private property which significantly insulates a wide range of decisions over economic resources and activities from intrusive democratic control. On the other hand, even for those issues which are seen as legitimate objects of public control, popular empowerment is quite limited. Electoral politics are heavily dominated by elites, thus violating democratic principles of political equality, and other venues for popular participation are generally of largely symbolic character. Ordinary citizens have few opportunities for meaningfully exercising the democratic ideal of "rule by the people."

Radical democracy, in contrast, argues for an expansive understanding of democracy. The ideal of political equality of citizens requires strong institutional mechanisms for blocking the translation of private economic power into political power. The scope of democratic decision is enlarged to all domains with important public consequences. And the arenas for empowered citizen participation extend beyond casting ballots in periodic elections.

Radical democracy is both an ideal in its own right – people should have the right to participate meaningfully in decisions which affect their lives – and an instrumental value – the realization of the radical egalitarian principle of social justice in terms of human flourishing would be facilitated by radical democratic institutions of political power. The combination of the radical egalitarian view of social justice and the radical democratic view of political power can be called *democratic egalitarianism.* This defines the broad normative foundation for the diagnosis and critique of existing institutions and the search for transformative alternatives in this book.

Viable alternatives

The second task of emancipatory social science is to develop a coherent, credible theory of the alternatives to existing institutions and social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly reduce these harms. Social alternatives can be elaborated and evaluated in terms of three different criteria: *desirability*, *viability,* and *achievability*. As illustrated in Figure 1, these are nested in a kind of hierarchy: Not all desirable alternatives are viable, and not all viable alternatives are achievable.

Figure 1. Three Criteria for Evaluating Social Alternatives
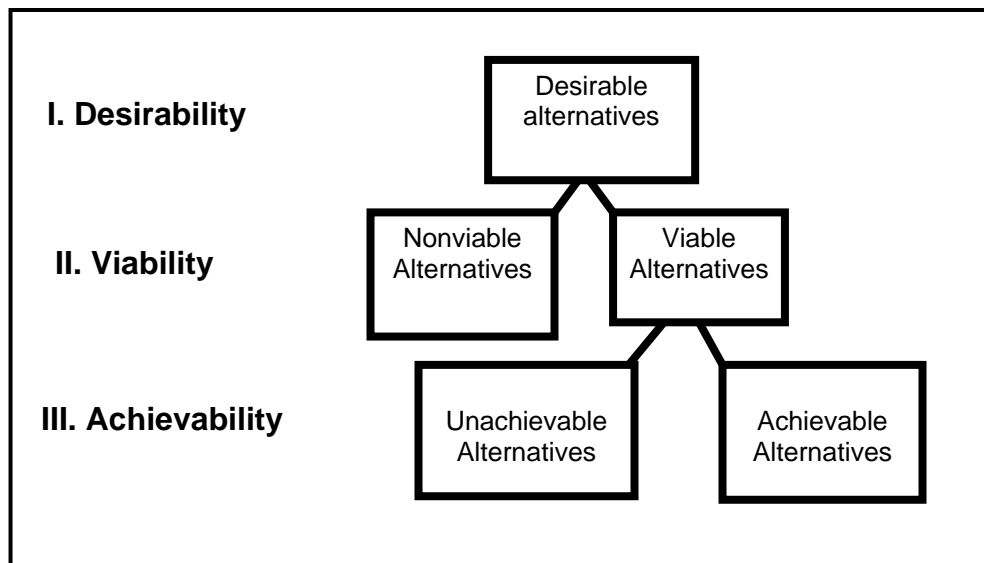
Desirability. The exploration of *desirable* alternatives, without the constraints of viability or achievability, is the domain of utopian social theory and much normative political philosophy. Typically such discussions are institutionally very thin, the emphasis being on the enunciation of abstract principles rather than actual institutional designs. Thus, for example, the Marxist aphorism to describe communism as a *classless society* governed by the principle "to each according to need, from each according to ability," is almost silent on the actual institutional arrangements which would make this principle operative. Liberal theories of justice similarly elaborate and defend the principles that should be embodied in the institutions of a just society without systematically exploring the problem of whether sustainable, robust institutions could actually be designed to carry out those principles in the pure form in which they are formulated.[6] These kinds of discussions are important, for they can contribute much to clarifying our values and strengthen our moral commitment to the arduous business of social change. But purely

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[6] Moral philosophers generally argue that *ought* implies *can* – there is no moral imperative to do the impossible – and thus, at least implicitly, arguments about what would constitute a "just society" – a desirable alternative to the present world – require that viable institutions could in principle be constructed to actualize those principles. In practice, however, very little attention is given to these issues in most political philosophy. John Rawls, for example, argues that his "liberty principle" is lexically prior to his "difference principle"—that is, it has absolute priority and must be fully satisfied before the difference principle kicks in. He does not ask if this is possible in real institutions: perhaps a world in which the liberty principle was given this kind of absolute priority would be unstable and self-contradictory in practice. Furthermore, some violation of the liberty principle may be a necessary condition for making substantial headway on the egalitarian goals of the difference principle, so some kind of "balance" between the two principles would be both superior morally and more stable sociologically. These are the kinds of issues addressed in discussions of viability.

utopian thinking about alternatives may do relatively little to inform the practical task of institution building or to add credibility to challenges of existing institutions.

Viability. The study of *viable* alternatives asks of proposals for transforming existing social structures and institutions whether, if implemented, they would actually generate in a sustainable, robust manner, the emancipatory consequences that motivated the proposal. A common objection to radical egalitarian proposals is "sounds good on paper, but it will never work." The best known example of this problem is comprehensive central planning, the classic form in which people attempted to realize socialist principles. Socialists had sharp criticisms of the anarchy of the market and its destructive effects on society and believed that a rationally planned economy would improve the lives of people. The institutional design that seemed to make this possible was centralized comprehensive planning. As it turned out, there are a range of "perverse" unintended consequences of central planning which subvert its intended goals, both because of the information overload generated by complexity and a range of problems linked to incentives. Another example of the viability problem is the proposal for a generous unconditional basic income, a proposal we will discuss in chapter 6. Suppose everyone were given, with no conditions or restrictions whatsoever, a monthly stipend sufficient to live at a socially respectable standard of living. There are many reasons why from the moral standpoint of radical egalitarian views of social justice, this could be seen as a desirable alternative to existing processes of economic distribution. Yet there are skeptics who argue that a generous basic income is not a viable alternative to the existing world: perhaps it would create perverse incentives and everyone would become couch potatoes; perhaps the tax rates would be so high that it would stifle economic activity; perhaps it would trigger such resentment towards people who lived entirely on the basic income by those who combined the basic income with labor market earnings, that an unconditional basic income could not be politically stable. The discussion of the viability of alternatives explores these kinds of issues.

The viability of a specific institutional design for realizing emancipatory goals, of course, may not be an all-or-nothing affair. Viability may crucially depend upon various kinds of side conditions. For example, a generous unconditional basic income may be viable in a country in which there is a strong culturally-rooted work ethic and sense of collective obligation, because in such a society there would be relatively few people who decide to consume the basic income without any reciprocal contribution, but not viable in a highly atomistic consumerist society. Or, a basic income could be viable in a society that already had developed over a long period a generous redistributive welfare state based on a patchwork of targeted programs, but not in a society with a miserly limited welfare state. Discussions of viability, therefore, also include discussions of the contextual conditions-of-possibility for particular designs to work well.

The exploration of viable alternatives brackets the question of their practical achievability under existing social conditions. Some people might argue: what's the point of talking about some theoretically viable alternative to the world in which we live if it is not strategically achievable? The response to the skeptic is this: there are so many uncertainties and contingencies about the future, that we cannot possibly know now what really are the limits of achievable alternatives in the future. Perhaps we can say something about what sorts of changes we can struggle for right now, what kinds of coalitions are formable and which are unformable, what

sorts of political strategies are likely to be effective and ineffective. But the further we look into the future, the less certain we can be about the limits on what is achievable.

Given this uncertainty about the future, there are two reasons why it is important to have clear-headed understandings of the range of viable alternatives to the world in which we live, alternatives which, if implemented, would stand a good chance of being sustainable. First, developing such understandings now makes it more likely that, if in the future historical conditions expand the limits of achievable possibility, social forces committed to emancipatory social change will be in a position to formulate practical strategies to implement the alternative. Viable alternatives are more likely to eventually become achievable alternatives if they are well thought out and understood. Second, the actual limits of what is achievable depend in part on the beliefs people hold about what sorts of alternatives are viable. This is a crucial point and fundamental to sociological understandings of the very idea of their being "limits of possibility" for social change: social limits of possibility are not independent of beliefs about those limits. When a physicist argues that there is a limit to the maximum speed at which things can travel, this is meant as an objective constraint operating independently of our beliefs about speed. Similarly, when a biologist argues that in the absence of certain conditions, life is impossible, this is a claim about objective constraints. Of course both the physicist and the biologist could be wrong, but the claims themselves are about real, untransgressable limits of possibility. Claims about social limits of possibility are different from these claims about physical and biological limits, for in the social case the beliefs people hold about limits systematically affect what is possible. Developing systematic, compelling accounts of viable alternatives to existing social structures and institutions of power and privilege, therefore, is one component of the social process through which the social limits on achievable alternatives can themselves be changed.

It is no easy matter to make a credible argument that "another world is possible". People are born into societies that are always already made. The rules of social life which they learn and internalize as they grow up seem natural. People are preoccupied with the tasks of daily life, with making a living, with coping with life's pains and enjoying life's pleasures. The idea that the social world could be deliberately changed in some fundamental way that would make life significantly better for most people seems pretty far-fetched, both because it is hard to imagine some dramatically better workable alternative and because it is hard to imagine how to successfully challenge existing institutions of power and privilege in order to create the alternative. Thus even if one accepts the diagnosis and critique of existing institutions, the most natural response for most people is probably a fatalistic sense that there is not much that could be done to really change things.

Such fatalism poses a serious problem for people committed to challenging the injustices and harms of the existing social world since, as already noted, beliefs about limits of possibility are themselves important determinants of what is actually possible. Fatalism and cynicism about the prospects for emancipatory change reduce the prospects for change. One strategy, of course, is to just not worry too much about having a scientifically credible argument about the possibilities for radical social change, but instead try to create an inspiring vision of a desirable alternative, grounded in anger at the injustices of the world in which we live and infused with hope and passion about human possibilities. At times, such charismatic wishful thinking has been a powerful force, contributing to the mobilization of people for struggle and sacrifice. But it

is unlikely to form an adequate basis for transforming the world in ways that actually produce a sustainable emancipatory alternative. The history of the human struggles for radical social change is filled with heroic victories over existing structures of oppression followed by the tragic construction of new forms of domination, oppression and inequality. The second task of emancipatory social science, therefore, is to develop in as systematic a way as possible a scientifically grounded conception of viable alternative institutions.

Achievability. Developing coherent theories of *achievable* alternatives is the central task for the practical work of strategies for social change. This turns out to be a very difficult undertaking, both because views about achievability are vulnerable to "wishful thinking", and because of the high levels of contingency of conditions in the future which will affect the prospects of success of any long-term strategy.

As in the case of viability, achievability is not really a simple dichotomy: different projects of institutional transformation have different prospects for ever being implemented. The probability that any given alternative to existing social structures and institutions could be implemented some time in the future depends upon two kinds of processes: First, it depends upon the consciously pursued strategies and the relative power of social actors who support and oppose the alternative in question. Strategy matters because emancipatory alternatives are very unlikely to just "happen"; they can only come about because people work to implement them, and are able to overcome various obstacles and forms of opposition. The probability of ultimate success, then, depends upon the balance of power of contending social forces consciously attempting the implement and resist emancipatory transformation. Second, the probability of any given alternative being implemented depends upon the trajectory over time of a wide range of *social structural conditions* that affect the possibilities of success of these strategies.[7] This trajectory of conditions is itself partially the result of the cumulative *unintended* effects of human action, but it is also the result of the conscious strategies of actors *to transform the conditions of their own actions*. The achievability of an alternative, thus, depends upon the extent to which it is possible to formulate coherent, compelling strategies which both help create the conditions for implementing alternatives in the future and have the potential to mobilize the necessary social forces to support the alternative when those conditions occur. Developing an understanding of these issues is the objective of the third general task of emancipatory social science: the theory of transformation.

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[7] To quote (out of context) Marx's famous aphorism: "[people] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." Marx (1852 [1968]: 96), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.* The quote is usually taken to mean that social structures impose constraints on human agency, but the actual context of the quote is about the mental conditions of action. The full quote continues: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits from the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language." (p.97) Even though Marx's point was focused on these kinds of cultural constraints on transforming the world, the more general idea is that collective strategies encounter conditions which are not themselves directly amenable to strategic choice.

Transformation

The third task of emancipatory social science is elaborating a theory of social transformation. We can think of emancipatory social science as a theory of a journey from the present to a possible future: the diagnosis and critique of society tells us why we want to leave the world in which we live; the theory of a viable alternative tells us where we want to go; and the theory of transformation tells us how to get from here to there – how to make viable alternatives, achievable.

A theory of transformation involves four central components:

(1). *A theory of social reproduction.* A central proposition of all theories of social emancipation is that the structures and institutions that generate the forms of oppression and social harms identified in the diagnosis and critique of society do not continue to exist simply out of some law of social inertia; they require active mechanisms of social reproduction. This proposition is based on a counterfactual argument: since these structures and institutions impose real harms on people, in the absence of some active process of social reproduction, the people harmed by the existing social arrangements would resist these harms and challenge these institutions in ways which would result in their transformation. The relative stability of oppressive structures and institutions, therefore, depends upon the existence a variety of interconnected mechanisms of social reproduction which block or contain such challenge. In order to transform those institutions, therefore, we must develop a scientific understanding of how this reproduction occurs.

(2) *A theory of the limits, gaps and contradictions within the process of reproduction.* If it were the case that the process of social reproduction was a completely coherent, pervasively integrated system, then there would be little possibility for deliberate strategies of social transformation. Emancipatory change might still happen, but only as the outcome of unintended trajectories of change operating "behind the backs" of people. Some theories of society come close to affirming this kind of totalizing view of social reproduction: domination is so pervasive and coherent, that all acts of apparent resistance merely serve to further stabilize the system of domination itself. Such theories may still embody a diagnosis and critique of society, but they ultimately reject the possibility of an emancipatory social science, for they provide no grounds for believing that effective struggles for emancipatory transformation are possible, and thus scientific knowledge cannot contribute to challenging forms of oppression.[8] An emancipatory theory of social transformation needs to examine the cracks in the edifice, the contradictions and gaps in the process of social reproduction, the ways in which social reproduction is prone to failures – in short, the various ways in which the process of social reproduction opens up spaces in which collective struggles for new possibilities are possible.

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[8] The theoretical framework for analyzing power and domination elaborated by Michel Foucault sometimes comes very close to this view of totalizing, untransformable power relations. Resistance happens, but its transformative potential is denied. To a somewhat lesser extent, much of Pierre Bourdieu's work on social reproduction, with his emphasis on deeply engrained "habitus" (internalized dispositions) offers very little room for strategic challenge and transformation. Social change can happen, and perhaps this might be emancipatory in some historical moments where the match between internalized dispositions and social spaces is disrupted, but this is unlikely to be the result of collective projects of emancipatory transformation.

However, if we take seriously emancipatory social science as a form of *science*, not just *philosophical critique*, then we cannot assume *a priori* that sufficiently sharp contradictions of social reproduction exist to allow for effective emancipatory challenge. The *search* for contradictory processes that open spaces for emancipatory transformation is a central part of the agenda, but the *discovery* of such possibilities depends upon the progress of knowledge.

(3) *A theory of the underlying dynamics and trajectory of social change*. Emancipatory social science aspires to include not simply a sociological theory of social reproduction and social contradictions, but also a systematic theory of the dynamic trajectory of social change. In order to formulate compelling long term projects of social transformation it is obviously desirable to understand not simply the obstacles and openings for strategies in the present, but how those obstacles and opportunities are likely to develop over time. This was the central thrust of the theory of history – historical materialism – in classical Marxism: it proposed a systematic, coherent account of the dynamic tendencies inside of capitalism which propelled it along a particular trajectory of social change. Historical materialism in effect proposed a broad-stroke history of the future. *If* this theory were adequate, it would be of enormous help in formulating long-term strategies for emancipatory transformation since it would give actors a sense of how the obstacles and opportunities for struggles were likely to evolve over time.

As we will see in chapter 3, I do not believe that this classical theory of the immanent tendencies of social change is satisfactory, but I also do not believe that any compelling alternative has been developed. We may have good scientific understanding of the mechanisms of social reproduction and their contradictions, but not of the immanent tendencies of social development generated by the interplay of reproduction, contradictions, and social action. The absence of a compelling theory of the dynamics trajectory of social change is thus a significant gap in emancipatory social science. It means that the formulation of robust projects of emancipatory social transformation necessarily must be formulated with relatively thin knowledge about the likely conditions to be faced in the future. This poses an interesting challenge: any plausible project of emancipatory transformation must adopt a long time horizon, for the kinds of fundamental structural and institutional changes needed for a creating democratic egalitarian society cannot be achieved in the immediate future, and yet our capacity to generate scientifically credible knowledge about social conditions beyond the near future is very limited.

(4). *A theory of collective actors, strategies, and struggles.* In the end, if emancipatory visions of viable alternatives are to become the actual real utopias of achieved alternatives it will be the result of conscious strategies by people committed to democratic egalitarian values. The final central component of a theory of social transformation, therefore, is a theory of collective action and transformative struggle. The theory of social reproduction maps out the obstacles to social change we face. The theory of contradictions helps us understand the opportunities that exist in spite of those obstacles. The theory of dynamic trajectory – if we had such a theory – would tell us how these obstacles and opportunities are likely to evolve over time. And the theory of transformative strategy helps us understand how we can collectively contend with the obstacles and take advantage of the opportunities to move us in the direction social emancipation.