

Chapter 2

The Scientific Frame of This Story

Abstract Social studies cannot abstract from reality, as do mathematics and the logical-formal sciences, for the investigation of reality is precisely their object; yet nor can they adhere strictly to reality, as does the observation-verification method. Put another way, while too great abstraction passes over the object of the social sciences, the ever intensifying rate of social change precludes employment of an observation-verification method based upon the repetitiveness (or, in biology, the quasi repetitiveness) of events. Social reality is the product of the organizational action of man and his inventiveness, yet it is also deeply rooted in the basic content of situation. It follows that the method appropriate to the analysis of social reality must combine the observational and organizational views, thereby encompassing the realms of both being and doing. Moreover, that method must be able to distinguish organizational necessities from choice-possibility and creativeness. This distinction is indispensable if we are to hope to discern the different currents and contributory streams within the flow of social change and capture basic and long-lasting aspects of social systems. In this chapter we identify those basic elements fostering duration and those initiating the propulsive forces of social systems. These elements are denominated, respectively, functional imperatives and ontological imperatives. We also underline the role of long-lasting choices in the history of civilizations. This allows us to make two steps. Firstly, to show how functional imperatives change over long periods, with their nature at any particular moment indicative of a particular historical age. Secondly, to delineate a theory of social and historic processes founded on the operation and interaction of functional imperatives, ontological imperatives and civilizations. Our methodological discussion encompasses also ethical values. These results are in stark contrast to the ethical relativism that contemporary analyses are obliged to embrace due to the innate incapacity of observation verification method to allow a scientific treatment of values. Our methodological approach also takes note of the nature of forms of power and other organizational aspects of social systems.

Keywords Galileian dispute • Social change • Observational and organizational views • Organizational necessities • Choice-possibility • Creativeness • Functional imperatives and historical ages • Ontological imperatives • civilizations • Deep confusion on ethics

Let's insist in recommending to pay attention also to the Appendix to may well understand the methodological content of this book. It may be useful to mention at the beginning of the chapter a subject that will be taken up later, mainly in the last section of the Appendix as well as at some points in Chaps. 12 and 13. This theme concerns a long-standing equivocation on the method of the sciences, which is far from being clarified today and goes back to the dispute, in the Renaissance, between the Roman Church and Galileo. The eventual outcome of this dispute brought mixed results: it gave great relief to our efforts to better understand the natural world; but it caused substantial damage by voiding the doctrines of the Medieval Church that bore upon the interpretation, organization and management of human societies. This latter outcome has weighty, negative, and growing implications for the health of human societies and, at the same time, the ability of religious thought to develop ecumenical action in the service of humanity. We provide here a representation of the contrast in methods of science in a manner that may appear forced but is nevertheless useful for bringing to light some elements of the controversy that are currently ignored, even though they are of great importance to the modern debate on science. Let's put the issue as follows:

The Medieval Christian doctrine maintained that science should direct its efforts to understanding the reason why God has created the world as we see it. Galileo objected that such an effort was senseless because human intelligence is unable to understand the unfathomable divine will, which as a matter of fact is interpreted in very different ways by different religions. As an alternative, Galileo suggested that our understanding of the natural world be derived from analyses of the functioning of creation aimed at capturing its laws of motion. The great fecundity of the Galilean observation-experimental method in the study of natural phenomena has become increasingly evident over time, just as what we may denominate the organizational position of the Church, which emphasized the teleological understanding of nature, has lost credibility. Nevertheless, the position of the Church was actually correct with regard to the understanding, organization and management of human societies. As a matter of fact, given that social reality is a human construction, it makes sense to seek to understand the reason why humans have built and organized the social world as they have, as well as the mistakes they have been built into their constructions. For while humanity cannot understand God's will and actions, humans can understand the will and actions of other humans.

The need for such an organizational vision of society is heavily underlined by the circumstance that the observational-experimental vision requires the hypothesis of 'repetitiveness' or quasi-repetitiveness of observed phenomena, which is indeed found in the celestial sphere and, in a weaker form, in biology, where innovation occurs by way of Darwinian selection only very slowly.

Study of the quasi-stationary societies of the past can, in a sense, accept the observational hypothesis of repetitiveness of the considered phenomena. But serious problems in the use of the observational method for the study of human societies commence when attention is turned to a modern world characterized by the acceleration of innovation and the (mainly economic) tremors and disturbances wrought by competition through innovation. Hence the evident need in social

studies for a method different from the observational-experimental one. And such a need underlines the profitableness of the organizational vision for understanding the behaviour of modern human societies.

An important example, that in fact goes well beyond modern dynamic societies, will help us better to understand this issue; it concerns the ethical problem, which is a crucial feature in characterizing human civilizations. The example will make evident the appropriateness of the ancient organizational vision of the Church in the study of human societies in opposition to the observational-experimental vision. Let's see.

Observation of the content and of the becoming of societies across history shows the alternation of a multiplicity of ethical values that vary greatly across time and space. This shows the impossibility of explaining values through observation. Such impossibility has given rise to the hegemony among scientists of the so-called doctrine of 'cultural relativism', the idea that ethical values cannot be scientifically explained (that is, explained by science as expressed by the observational method). Therefore, according to this doctrine, every ethical principle should be accepted by social scientists as it is, and, because science has no purchase in this matter, considered as having a dignity identical with all other ethical principles.

Cultural relativism is contrasted with what we may define as the 'cultural absolutism' of religions, according to which ethical values express acts of faith.

The current domination of these two conflicting positions is a source of great trouble and exacerbates some of the presently insoluble conflicts in the world: clashes between religions and civilizations, misunderstandings that become ever more acute with the acceleration of the dynamics of human societies. So, the great impetus given by the observational-experimental method to the natural sciences and to technical change condemns human societies to live in a state of growing confusion.

Well, the organizational vision offers the only way to overcome such confusion. *In fact, such a vision makes it possible to prove the scientific character of fundamental values as based on their indispensability to the rational and efficient organization of human societies.* We define such a possibility 'cultural objectivism', contrasting it to the scientific impotence and the dead-end expressed by cultural relativism and cultural absolutism.

Let us mention, *en passant*, that some of the most important of these objective values are expressed in the teachings of the Gospels. Unfortunately, however, Christian social doctrine has no awareness of this fact, being itself a victim and, in a sense, enslaved by the great scientific success of the observational-experimental method. This has reduced the social doctrine of the Church to a condition of embarrassing ambiguity. In fact, the residual organizational propensity of Christian social doctrine, which is increasingly masked and made contradictory by the current identification of science with the observational-experimental method, pushes such a doctrine outside the walls of the academy; a push that is accentuated by the persistent absence of a complete and coherent development of an alternative organizational method (procedure, rules, classifications). Later we shall attempt to bring clarity to this great confusion, showing that the wider problems it generates extend well beyond the above considerations.

Contemporary social thought treats details intensively, often using sophisticated specializations; but it demonstrates a substantial refusal to provide or engage with an overall view of social processes. At the basis of such behavior lies the hidden or sometimes explicit idea that what is needed is simply the improvement of the structural frame and of a well-founded whole of knowledge. But both the pillars of the social building, trembling and in the course of time crumbling due to the growth of innovation and the great changes in the general conditions of development, and the foundations of social thought, need to be renewed.

We have just seen that the disproportion between the cognitive and operational needs of human societies on the one hand, and scientific production on the other, is fuelled primarily by a basic methodological vice afflicting social theory: the dominant tendency to base social studies on the *observational-experimental method*. This method was developed in order to investigate the natural world; it requires the repetitiveness of the observed phenomena or, at least, that they evolve but very slowly. This has been explicitly underlined by K.R. Popper in one of the most rigorous and acclaimed formulations on method,¹ which advocates the ‘piecemeal technique’ for the social studies. But society, being an outcome of human action, is assaulted by creative actions and events; so that *non-repetitive* change is a basic feature of social process and, in particular, operates intensively in modern dynamic societies. This means that the observational approach typical of the natural sciences, if employed by students of social reality, who are chiefly concerned with modern dynamic societies, does not provide any understanding of the future and does not help to govern the present. What is the alternative?

Given that the social world is produced by man (in contrast to the natural world, with which man simply interacts), any analysis of it should penetrate through to the reason why society has been organized the way that it is, and so frame the question as to whether it is possible to do better, but avoiding vacuous theorization and free constructivism i.e. ignoring reality. This means that the study of human societies should combine *observational* and *organizational* views.² The present book will make extensively evident the analytic importance of such a combination. Here we mention three basic notions to which we shall return repeatedly. They concern the question of *continuity* and *change* in the generation of human societies, precisely the way to overcome the analytic bewilderment caused by the increasing intensification in our time of the second term, change. We shall show that the expression ‘continuity-change’ is a very ambiguous one in social studies and should be

¹For intensive discussion on this point, see the analyses on K.R. Popper in two of my books (2010 and 2014) cited in footnote 1.

²A recent book by T. Piketty (see Piketty 2014) underlines the large and growing inequalities in income distribution at the advantage of capital and managerial incomes. The book presents an illuminating historic analysis of important economic variables, but disregards the problem of method, in particular the combination between observational and organizational aspects, being and doing, which is indispensable to grant a scientific standard to social studies. Such a disregard prevents from suggesting more efficacious solutions to the problems he points out.

replaced by those of *necessity* and *choice-possibility-creativity*,³ these being more properly scientific. For the sake of simplicity and concision, I do not consider here the procedure, rules and classification distinguishing my proposal on method. On this matter, see Fusari (2014), Chap. 2, Sect. 2.⁴ I limit this exposition to three basic notions that are a result of the devised method and express some foundations of an institutional-evolutionary approach largely different from the current ones and, I think, more effective than them. This enables to show synthetically the character and profitableness of the adopted proposal on method. Chapters 11 and 12 will further deepen the questions of method and ethics, with the help of our exposition on the hypothesized extraterrestrial society. The organizational necessities that we consider here do not include those imposed by the conditions of nature.

Historical analysis of the functioning and development of human societies distinctly shows the following behaviour, which warrants great attention: to the various levels of the general conditions of development correspond institutional, behavioral and ethical-ideological forms that are indispensable to the rational organization of social systems. They are *signs of time* that, if ignored, assert themselves through spontaneous motion and torturous trial and error. This happens because their possible violation ruinously damages the functioning of the relative social system. I denominate these basic organizational *necessities* “functional imperatives”; but this denomination should not be confused with analogous expressions employed by other students, a point that will be clarified later. In the book entitled ‘Methodological Misconceptions in the Social Sciences, precisely in Part II dedicated to theoretical applications concerning the various social sciences, I give examples of a number of functional imperatives, starting from: the parental relations representing the basic connective tissue of all primitive societies, the division of labour and associated social ranks, the authority principle typical of the power of society supplementing the impotent chiefs’ power in primitives societies. The evolution of the general conditions of development determines the passage to other functional imperative such as the command power and later the state power, with bureaucratic, theocratic, autocratic or democratic forms of political power and a variety of associated civilization forms. I explore the teachings on law (for instance juridical objectivism versus jus-naturalism and juridical positivism) and sociological insights associated to these organizational developments. The advent of the economy as the leading sector of the modern dynamic society implies the advent of some fundamental and controversial new functional imperatives such as

³In this respect, M. Archer’s view that a measure of the appropriateness of social theory is its ability to represent human freedom and constraints appears illuminating see Archer (1997).

⁴From page 42 of such a book, let me quote the following: “To summarize, the method of social sciences must be *deductive* and must derive deductions from *realistic postulates* on the basis of the principle of *organizational rationality*. Moreover, it must be centered on the *specification of rules and procedure of classification* that lead scholars in their research into and corroboration of significant initial postulates,... i.e. *warranting the solidity of deductions notwithstanding the impossibility of an empirical verification of the theory*.”

the entrepreneur, the market and the accountability role of profit rate, but apart from their historically observed capitalist character; these organizational forms are indispensable to the operation of endogenous innovation and to meet the connected presence of radical uncertainty.

Historical analysis also makes evident that the evolutionary power of human society is strongly conditioned by the degree of observance of some principles influencing in a decisive way the evolutionary potentialities innate in human nature. We denominate these principles “ontological imperatives”. Two particularly important ontological imperatives are: the central role of the individual, which is indispensable to fuel creative processes; and the tolerance principle, indispensable for facilitating, through debate, the growth of human knowledge⁵; in modern dynamic societies, these two principles also are functional imperatives. Ontological imperatives may be violated even for very long periods of time, as happened in many primitive societies and in the great empires of the ancient world, which latter were rich in civilization and organizational skills, but which were pushed into dead-ends by despotism and a culture of obedience.

Well, the observational-experimental tradition on method inclines to reject both functional and ontological imperatives if these are in conflict with the observed reality, as increasingly happens.

The above imperatives are flanked by many aspects of social systems that are a matter of choice. It must be underlined that those choices are not completely free; they are constrained by functional imperatives and by the conditions of nature, which they must not contradict. Moreover, the processes of choice must not violate ontological imperatives, although such violations, as we have just seen, have unfortunately occurred over the course of long historical periods. It is important to underline also that the great ideological options give birth to one of the most enduring aspects of human societies: ‘civilization choices’. This makes evident the above-mentioned difference between *continuity* and *necessity* (as opposed to choice) in the study of social systems. Civilization is a prevalently creative construction that, as a consequence of the presence or absence of ontological imperatives (that is, some important institutional and ethic-ideological contents), determines the evolutionary fate of the society under consideration.⁶

The interaction between functional imperatives and civilization provides the most important expression of the dialectic between necessity (mainly in the guise of functional imperatives) and choice-possibility in the becoming of human societies; while the observance of ontological imperatives represents the major propellant of

⁵We can see, therefore, that methodology cannot do without ontology, just as M. Archer writes above: “Ontology without methodology is deaf and mute, methodology without ontology is blind” see Archer (1997), p. 40.

⁶Under this respect, Pellicani’s analysis on the worth of capitalist civilization is useful and appropriate see Pellicani (1988); unfortunately, the analysis does not go beyond such acknowledgement, for instance with regard to the capitalist forms of power, the links between income production and distribution and the implied question of social justice (see Chaps. 6 and 8 of this booklet).

creativity and hence development. *The above interaction, and the presence (or absence) of the ontological propellant, constitute an Ariadne's thread of much importance in the interpretation of social-historic processes.*⁷ But the observational-experimental methodology and tradition lead to confuse the discussed imperatives with civilization forms (that is, necessity with continuity) and hence to reject them as a matter of choice if, as very often happens in modern dynamic societies, the observed reality clashes with them.

The gravitational movement towards functional imperatives (and towards functional exigencies linked to choices of civilization), a gravitation demanded by organizational rationality, has occurred, till now, through torturous trial and error, and in the context of spontaneous behaviour, as underlined by the theories of self-organization. Such gravitation provides an explanation for the work of Providence that Vico saw in historical becoming, that the Scottish moralists called the invisible hand and Hegel the cunning of reason. But the troubles inflicted by such gravitational movement show unacceptable dimensions in modern dynamic societies. As a consequence, the organization and management of societies, and the social sciences, need much more. In fact, every design of intervention on social structures, especially if it is a large-scale one, which ignores the distinction between 'necessity' and 'choice-possibility-creativity' (and the role and notion of ontological imperative), is unrealistic and easy to ridicule by the advocates of the *status quo* and spontaneous evolution.⁸ B. Pascal wrote: "The ties that make strong the respect among people generally are ties of necessity".⁹ Well, the scientific definition of 'necessity' in the organization of social systems is the best way to make those ties strong.

Functional and ontological imperatives represent some of the backbones of the social building; reforming programs for human societies must, first of all, ensure that those basic 'necessities' are respected. But, consistently with those constraints, the fancy of architects and interior decorators can then range over the whole building in tracing the aesthetic of the social edifice (that is, the aspects that can be the objects of choice). In just such a way, creativity and social change can operate thoroughly without undermining the backbones of social systems. These backbones

⁷An important teaching emerges from the analytical categories above: the world is not only condemned to suffer the harsh conflicts among civilizations, as underlined by Huntington (1997); it is also joined by important organizational necessities and the need of propulsive factors expressed by functional and ontological imperatives.

⁸For instance, it is impossible to solve the problem of substituting capitalism with a different civilization form if the distinction between necessity and choice-possibility and the notion of ontological imperative are left out. In fact, such a transformation of society needs the *a priori* indication of the functional imperatives of modern societies, followed by the checking of the civilization forms congenial with them and that respect ontological imperatives, and finally the choosing of the preferred civilization. We shall see that democratic procedures and choices cannot concern the field of 'necessity' (since this is a matter of science), but must concern the field of 'choice-possibility'. The reference of democracy to the field of necessity may cause great errors and abuses.

⁹See Pascal (1952), *Les Pensées*, B.U.R., Milan, thought n° 304.

must be substituted only when the variations of the general conditions of development require new ones (that is, new functional imperatives).

Knowledge of the above notions is crucial for the very possibility of governance of modern societies. For these societies are rapidly changing; and in the absence of such knowledge, the growing pace of social change will cause growing confusion and conflicts, mainly in the field of ethical values; in fact, large geographical areas are afflicted by the resurgence of absurd religious forms, civilization and institutions. It is important to point out, in this regard, that crucial ethical values (those included in the scientific notions of ontological and functional imperatives) are, as such, a matter of science (*ethical objectivism*), not of free choice: just the contrary of the point of view of the dominant ethical relativism, which instead should be referred to minor value choices.

As is well known, Hume asserted that reason is the humble servant of the passion. This says just the contrary of my notion of ethical objectivism. Hume's assertion is coherent with (and results from) his empiricist and merely observational method, while the notion of ethical objectivism is a result of the organizational view on method that I think more appropriate to social sciences. Hume refers to individual reason, at the service of personal interests and passions; but other thing is scientific reason as represented by functional and ontological imperatives. Just an example: we have seen that the tolerance principle represents an ontological imperative and, in modern dynamic societies, also a functional imperative; as such, it is an ethical principle provided with scientific substance, independently on the fact that humans of different civilizations may like, dislike or ignore it.¹⁰

The opposition between cultural relativism (that conceives values as a free choice) and cultural absolutism (that conceives values as an object of faith) cannot say anything with regard to ethical and religious conflicts but exacerbates them: everyone is right in his point of view. Modern world urgently needs the notion of *ethical objectivism* that our development on method sets out. I find disconcerting that the social sciences completely ignore the question of the scientific nature of fundamental ethical values. Of course, such nature cannot be proved through the observational method; (but, let's say, we can observe some ethical behaviour in important animal species).

We have demonstrated and illustrated extensively in Fusari (2000, 2014) that the distinction between functional imperatives and civilizations, necessity and choice-possibility-creativity, and the parallel notion of ontological imperatives,

¹⁰The theories of social value (for instance the contributions of Commons and Dewey in the matter) are strongly damaged by the absence of the notion of objective (scientific) ethical values and the distinction of these from the ethical values concerning 'choice-possibility'. I think that such a distinction is crucial for the theory of social values, but unfortunately it is currently ignored, as far as I know; an ignorance inevitable in the absence of an organizational view on method, with such a view replaced by the observational experimental one that *simply* sees and considers the operation of human interests and passions, what makes the distinction above impossible. Some consideration in Chap. 8, Section "The Circuit of Production, the Abolition of the Wage Company and the Dimension of the Private Sphere in the Dunaan Economy of Full Employment", on the theory of labor value and Chap. 12 on ethics will add clarification.

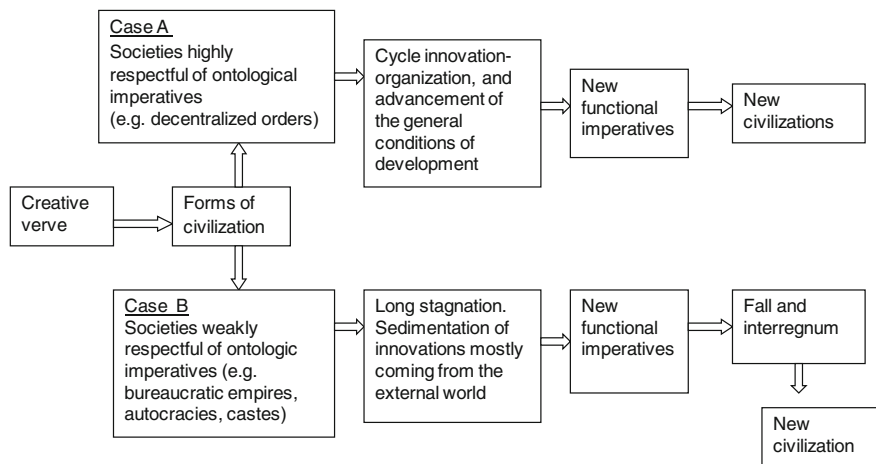


Fig. 2.1 A representation of our evolutionary-institutional theory of social process

lead to the formulation of a theory of social-historical process that combines structural organization and change. It can be expressed by the diagram (Fig. 2.1).

It is evident the evolutionary and institutional content of our model.¹¹ The civilization form (a largely creative product) will block or promote, as a consequence of its exclusion or inclusion of ontological imperatives, the evolutionary process. In the case of promotion (in the context of the process innovation-structural organization), the consequent variation of the general conditions of development will demand new functional imperatives (organizational forms) congenial with them, and hence new civilizations congenial with the new functional imperatives. On the contrary, in case of extended stagnation, the prosecution of the development process could be caused by innovations coming from the external world and will be accompanied by ruinous falls and long periods of interregnum.

¹¹But the model must not be assimilated to the evolutionary social thought inspired by Lamarckian and Darwinian biology even if with some minor adjustment however ignoring the notions of: civilization, ontological and functional imperatives, basic features of social change and innovation and, in sum, ignoring the main substance of the evolution of human societies. In this regard, a critical reference to important evolutionary social students is obliged: for instance, a recent stimulating book by G.M. Hodgson and T. Knudsen, entitled 'Darwin's Conjecture', (see the Appendix) and the higher flexibility in the matter by U. Witt. The analysis by A. Hermann on institutional economics and its interdisciplinary orientation (see A. Hermann 2015) can provide some useful illustration on the subject.

It is inappropriate to deduce from the trial and error process, which is typical of the growth of knowledge in all fields and of human action at large, the explanatory fecundity of Darwinian or Lamarckian variation-selection-replication. In fact, that deduction is mistaken if trial and error is (or can be) complemented by intelligent decision-making and is not a merely casual stance.

The diagram above can be extended to the interpretation of historical processes through a scientific definition of the historic stages (or phases) of development based on the advent of new functional imperatives¹² (generated and asked by the advancement of the general conditions of development), and an insertion in the diagram of a block designated ‘new historical phase’, immediately following that for the new functional imperatives.

What becomes evident here is both the role of ‘necessity’, as represented by functional imperatives, and the role of ‘choice-possibility-creativity’, as represented by civilizations (long-lasting choices), by innovations and other choices punctuating the life of social systems.

The observational method of the natural sciences possesses a conservative character; it accepts the observed reality, trying to understand but not to change it. So that students of social science who use such a method accept the existing mode of production (since this is what they observe) and theorize on it. By contrast, the attempt to free social systems of current difficulties and dominating organizational forms—along with their attached interests, exploitation, and mystifications—is obliged to make use of the organizational method: a method that, starting from basic aspects of the observed reality, attempts to define organizational forms superior to existing ones, more efficient than them and more appropriate to current conditions.

Unfortunately, even the great revolutionaries who set out to build a new world deviated from their aims through use of the observational methods. Marxist thought and the vicissitude of ‘real socialism’ provide the clearest examples of such misunderstandings. Marx was fascinated by the observational method, which had facilitated the great advancement of the natural sciences. He considered Darwinian teaching an important model for the study of human societies (and in the Appendix we shall see that today Darwinism is given great credence by the modern institutional school). But social reality differs greatly from the small, incremental and very slow changes observed by biologists and explained by Darwin. The great and growing non-repetitiveness of social systems cannot be understood by the way of observation employed by the natural sciences. Thus the veneration accorded to the scientific method of observation ensured that Marxism (as also other revolutionary teachings) was unable to specify the content of the desired new social system. Marx assigned this absolutely crucial task to the ‘fantasy of history’, which consequently, in the name of Marx, generated one of the most degenerate forms of society known by the modern world, real socialism. Only the organizational view and method provide a scientific way to build and understand the basic content of society, and hence to wisely change and govern it.

¹²See Fusari (2014), Chap. 4.

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