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INTRODUCTION: Beyond Dualism, Substantialism and Nihilism in Sociology Through Nagarjuna's Middle Way Perspective

> This world, O *Kaccayana*, generally proceeds on a duality, of (the view of) existence and (the view of) non-existence. But he who with right insight sees the uprising of the world as it really is does not hold with the non-existence of the world. But he who with right insight sees the passing away of the world as it really is does not hold with the existence of the world. Everything exists - this is one extreme. Nothing exists - this is another extreme. Not approaching either extreme the *Tathagata* (the Buddha) teaches you a doctrine by the middle.[1]

This quotation is an early Buddhist discourse referring to the dualistic opposition between two views, one of which is the view of permanent substantialism or eternalism (*sassatavada*), which upholds that all things really exist inherently and independently. This is also called extreme realism. The other extreme is the view of nihilism or annihilation (*ucchedavada*), which advocates that all things do not exist in any sense. This is also called extreme skepticism. The former is sometimes referred to as *bhava-ditthi*, the belief in being, and the latter as *vibhava-ditthi*, the belief in non-being. The world at large has a general tendency to lean toward one of these two views. To fall to the extreme of substantialism is to hold that, in the final analysis, phenomena truly exist. To fall to the extreme of nihilism is to hold that phenomena don't have any kind of existence at all. The middle way perspective attempts to free the individual from these two extremes and affirms neither being nor nonbeing. This view is advocated using *Madhyamika*-style arguments to show the incoherence of all extremist views, with the realization that no attachment of being, nonbeing, both being and nonbeing, neither being nor nonbeing is rationally justified. One who correctly understands the emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominality of the world should be able to unchain him/herself from the extremes of substantialism and nihilism.

Likewise, many theories in social science, as profound as they may seem, cannot break away from this "either-or" dualism. There are a variety of dualistic substantialisms in terms of the "either-or" dichotomies like: methodological individualism vs. methodological collectivism; positivistic sociology vs. intepretivist

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[1] From the *Kaccayanagotta Sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya XII 15*, where the Buddha addresses *Kaccayana Gotta* (on Right View). Cited from "The Buddhist Critique of Sassatavada and Ucchedavada: The Key to a Proper Understanding of the Origin and the Doctrines of early Buddhism," by Y. Karunadasa, in *The Middle Way,* August 1999, p. 69 (volume 74:2).

sociology; agency vs. structure, and so on. In addition to that, there is also another kind of dualistic dichotomy, that is, universalism vs. relativism, or nihilism. Many sociological theories are ensnared into one of these views and cling to it as the only right one, except only very few of them try to transcend these pairs of oppositions in terms of the relational-processual perspective. Such as Mead's notion of "social self," "the dialectic between I and me;" Elias' notion of "figuration," "civilizing process," "interdependence between socio- and psycho-genesis;" Bourdieu's notion of "habitus," "field," "interrelationship between social structure and mental structure." We will articulate these views and alternatives in the later discussion.

What intrigues me here is the truth that through the demolition of the two-extreme views, Buddhist *Madhyamika* polemics are presented to unfold its own non-dualistic, non-substantialist and non-nihilistic view, a middle way relational-processual perspective so to speak. According to the middle way perspective, based on the notion of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominality, phenomena exist in a relative and nominal way, that is, they are empty of any kind of inherent and independent existence. In other words, phenomena are dependently arisen in relation to the dependent arising of other phenomena. Phenomena are regarded as dependent events existing relationally and processually rather than permanent things, which have their own entity *sui generis*, or self-nature. Besides, phenomena are non-substantial and nominally true. To be true in this sense is to be true in virtue of a particular linguistic convention. Thus, the extreme of substantialism should be refuted. By the same token, dependent co-arising is something more than just none, or non-existent. Because if a thing is non-existent, how could it have a condition? Without condition how can we talk about something like non-existent? Therefore, nihilism is unacceptable too. The insight of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominality are therefore central to *Madhyamika* (the middle way perspective.)

Inspired by Nagarjuna's non-dualistic, non-substantialist and non-nihilistic middle way perspective, the attempt of this dissertation is to form a critical response to the "either-or" dichotomization in sociological methodologies and theories, by subjecting various theories in social science to a critical scrutiny. Nagarjuna's middle way perspective emerges as a relational-processual approach, based on the insight of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal designation, can transcend the dualism between methodological individualism and collectivism, positivistic and interpretist sociology, universalism and relativism or nihilism, and also the agency/structure dichotomization. However, after a critical examination of the problem of dualism,

substantialism and nihilism at various levels, we are not going to say that the whole Western social science is worthless and fundamentally wrong. After all, this kind of total refutation of the "West" is itself substantialist and dualistic, which on the one hand homogenizes the "West" as an essential whole, and on the other hand degrades the "West" in opposition to a glorified East. This attitude is unacceptable according to the middle way perspective. Therefore, it is important to note that we are also going to be sympathetically appreciative. An appreciation of the relational-processual approach, already practiced in sociology, will also be our endeavor. In that case, a discussion of Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu's relational or processual theory and methodology will be conducted accordingly.

Social science today must overcome the fundamental delusion of assuming the individual as an inherently and independently self-existent substance and affirming individual on the assumption of "methodological individualism" that asserts that social phenomena can be adequately explained by showing that they are the outcome of individual behaviors. The individual conceived by methodological individualism is often seen as an absolutely rational, inherently disengaged unit, such as Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito, ergo sum*).[2] This is Descartes' "Archimedian fulcrum," the single fixed point of certainty by which he believed he could move out of his world of doubt. The self is perceived as a thinking substance—*res cogitans*—without extension (such as its relatedness with others) or materiality (which are the attributes of bodies). Descartes had now established that he existed as a mind distinct from any extended body—*res extensa*. And with this distinction—the infamous "Cartesian mind-body dualism" and its derived subject-object dualism—the origination of sociology was being mostly dualistic and substantialist and part of them become methodologically individualistic that asserts a conscious self as an indubitable point of certainty concerning the explanation of social phenomena. On the other hand, some thinkers of methodological individualism propose the assumption of *homo oeconomicus*[3] that postulates individual as a rational maximizer of self-interest that attributes the causal precedence of all human actions. For example, most, if not all, rational-choice theories are based on the model of the *homo oeconomicus*. Due to its simple mathematical structure, this model is becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences. Moreover, some social theorists assume *"homo psychologicus"* as a

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[2] Ayer, A. J., "I think, therefore I am" From *Modern Studies in Philosophy –Descartes – A Collection of Critical Essays* – Ed. by Willis Doney, Macmillan, 1968. (7s.)

3 In my opinion, this is a kind of imperialism of economism, which asserts an atomized, individualized and egoistical (self-interested) view of social actors.

bearer of volitions, in which variables such as the perception or sensation of individual is considered the primal cause of social phenomena. This approach implies the introduction of a subjective (and, therefore, strictly psychological) component into sociology. Various kinds of methodological individualism share at least one thing in common, namely, their excessively voluntaristic view of human social life in terms of active decision-making and strategizing by the individual with free choice. According to the middle way perspective, this view tends to substantialize the individual and its action and is thereby unable to explain the changing conditions and consequences of the existence of the individual. Unless we can move beyond the view of the substantiality of the individual and recognize the emptiness of it we can hardly ever understand the dependent co-arising of the social world and the individuals.

On the other hand, some social theories postulate so-called "methodological collectivism" by asserting "social facts" as things (or entities, essences, systems) in which there exists a reality s*ui generis*[4] that is completely external to and coercive of the individual and cannot be reduced to individual psychological attributes. According to this perspective, social phenomena can be explained by invoking the properties of social entities that are irreducible to the individual. Closely connected with the objectivism of the scientistic approach, methodological collectivism treats wholes like society, the economy or a particular collectivity as definitely given entities about which we can discern social logics by observing their structural operation as wholes. While the individualist approach of sociology starts from our knowledge of the inside of individual's actions, which assumed to construct "the social," methodological collectivism tries to view social phenomena from the outside. It treats social phenomena not as something of which the individual action is an active part, but as if they were entities unswervingly alleged by us as wholes. For collectivists, entities like "the social," "nations," "classes" have, in some sense, a real existence over and above the lives and minds of the individuals. This substantialist view of "the social" tends to ultimately become anthropomorphism which assumes social entities with human characteristics and with a life of their own. As Durkheim stated: "If society is to be considered as the normal goal of moral conduct, then it must be possible to see in it

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[4] Durkheim argued that "the social" was in fact an autonomous reality, called a "society". This "society" was, argued Durkheim, an entity in its own right. It did not depend upon the intentions and motivations of individuals for its continued existence. "Society" is, argured Durkheim, a reality *sui generis*. Society is a thing-like entity which exists on its own terms. Thus "social" or society had a life and logic of its own. Sociology, for Durkheim, is a science of proving that there exists a social reality, as *sui generis*, which cannot be reduced to social or individual psychological foundations. Thus, it is society, as an entity, that creates individuals.

something other than a sum of individuals; it must constitute a being *sui generis*, which has its own special character distinct from that of its members and its own individuality different from that of its constituent individuals. In a word, there must exist, in the full meaning of the word, a social being. On this condition only is society able to perform the moral function that the individual cannot."[5] In addition to Durkheim, methodological collectivism also refers to modern social theories –structuralism, structural-functionalism, structuralist-Marxism, statistical "variable" analyses, and so forth – which give ontological status to structure or system and thus grants them an explanatory primacy. According to the middle way perspective, methodological collectivism is also flawed by its substantialized and fixated view of "the social."

Additionally, positivistic sociology, using the methods developed in the natural sciences, engaged an even more radicalized realist and objectivist sociology. Thus, the belief in the correspondence between sociology and social reality became ingrained deeply in the social imaginary of many sociologists. Quantified method and its application enthrall most of sociology. However, where the natural science created statistics from universes of millions of units, the social science developed with universes of symbolically mediated and meaning-embedded people. Yet as the methods of statistical analysis become more and more sophisticated, and went from the descriptive to the inferential, the scientific quest for certainty or truth, proclaimed by positivistic sociology turned out to be self-contradictory, uncertain and arbitrary. The credibility of its truth-claim became lost, mutated, and shaky. However, today, quantitative analysis is still rigorous in most sociology departments in spite of the huge amount of work it produces with the deplorable follow-through of a payoff. In other words, positivistic sociologists' understanding of the social and of humanity has not improved "proportionally" to the output of their works. What happened is that, the processing of data on the human units from which this data stems is basically disengaged and disconnected from their social practice, which is supposed to be relational and processual, and hermeneutical.

The positivistic sociologists hold that the external social world is what it is, inherently real, independent of people's consciousness, knowledge, judgment, beliefs, hopes, wishes, or fears – that social facts are facts. That nominal A is real A, that "the socials" are what they are. They suppose that the faculty that identifies and integrates

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[5] Durkheim, Emile, 1973b, *Moral Education: a study in the theory and application of the sociology of education*, London: The Free Press. p.60.

the material provided by the senses is completely reliable and fully competent to know the facts of "the social." Some even believe that since "what is" is true, it can be applied to the practical world and be the basis of value judgment, that is, "what ought to be." In addition, just as scientific logic is the only guide to knowledge, so it is also the only guide to the logic of practice. According to the middle way perspective, the absolutely inherent, independent and external social reality is untenable and thereby unidentifiable by any means. There is no such thing as fixated facts which exist "out there" and can be perceived by our "transparent" sense faculties. Besides, our sense faculties are not as transparent as positivists thought, we have horizons, traditions, social involvements, values, beliefs, desires and fears that always come before, synchronized with and after our sense experience. Therefore, positivistic sociology is problematic in this sense.

In order to overcome the fallacy of positivistic sociology, some sociologists turn to emphasize the importance of the subjective consciousness for the understanding of social phenomena. Interpretist sociology presumably rejects any notion of positivistic approach to human enquiry. It holds that interpretive understanding (or *verstehen*) is the only proper means to "grasp" the subjective meaning of individual's action, which is taken by interpretists to be the only "real" cause of social phenomena. Whether it is an interpretation of historical event, text and contemporary social occurrence, interpretists reply upon empathetic understanding and intuitive grasping of the meaning of actions, beliefs, and epochs which come from a total immersion, in an attempt to "re-present" the original intentions of the individuals. Sociological interpretism does have a significant contribution in understanding social phenomena. For example, Schutzian phenomenology, inspired by Weberian insight, tries to reinterpret Weber's ideal type methodology in order to make a more objective analysis of meaning of commonsensical social world. He utilizes the concept of "typification" to describe the true type of meaning of people's actions. The interpretism of Schutzian's, however, still obsessed with an objectifying attitude that still assumes that there is something certain to be grasped. In order to capture a more objective outer meaning, Schutzian phenomenology attempts to offer theoretical techniques and methods (typification) for better illuminating the human meanings of social life with a detached "objectifying" attitude to the context in question. This is pretty much similar to the externalist point of view proposed by positivists. According to the middle way perspective, this ambiguous combination of subjectivism and objectivism is still obsessed by its substantialist assumption of the social world and human experience. It still imagines a graspable "thing" in the social world and human

experience. However, the social world and human experience are both empty of their graspable essence. They arise co-dependently, thus, their existences are relational and processual and thereby uncertain.

The social sciences abound with all kinds of approaches, such as rational-choice theory, behaviorism, various atomized individualism [6], norm-based models, collectivism and structuralisms[7], statistical "variable" analyses[8] and interpretism. Many of them share the substantialist view in their basic theoretical or analytical units by affirming the idea that it is substances that preexist first and relations among them follow only subsequently. This view dominates strongly throughout much of the discipline. Unfortunately, substantialism distorts the dynamic, relational, continuous and processual world into a static, isolated, discontinuous and eternal world. Not only have these distorted "grand theories" and "empirical researches" misguided the epistemological and ontological assumption of social theory, but they also, ethically speaking, have given rise to the knowledge-constitutive power-effect in their form of substantialist presupposition. Such as orthodox Marxism's historical materialism, Freudian sexual essentialism, Social Darwinism, Parsonian Structural-Functionalism, Skinnerian Behaviorism, or to say only a few, whereby their theories on paper turned "the things of logic" into "the logic of things" and were imposed on lifeworld practices, causing tremendous suffering (*dukkha*) to numerous people.[9] Indeed, historically speaking, sociology is also an inseparable part of social practices, which can acquire an altogether conventionally real constructive power, and can possibly lead to a kind of symbolically initiated violence caused by theorists, or intellectuals, intentionally or unintentionally. This is a significant issue that requires social scientists to take into account seriously and reflexively.

Methodological individualism, methodological collectivism, positivistic sociology and interpretist sociology are substantialist in different respects. They all assume something existing inherently and independently and therefore can be captured by the right method from the correct epistemological position. By contrast, in opposition to

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[6] Any theory that takes individual, whether in its idealistic or materialistic form, as an entity and analytical unit of starting point for causal explanation is problematic.

[7] Including Structural-functionalism, system theory, structuralism and many other collectivist approaches.

[8] Variable-centered researchers use a lot of quantitative methods to test their causal hypothesis, including multiple regression, factor analysis, and event history approaches. They take variables as measurable attributes that can explain the causal relation of phenomena. As Abbott (1992a, p.58) notes, "The realist metaphysics implicit in treating variables (universals) as agents was last taken seriously in the age of Aquinas…but in this [approach] the 'best' causal sentences are clearly realist ones in which variables act."

[9] See Bourdieu's *In Other Words*.

the substantialist view of the self and "the social," a relativist or nihilistic trend emerges by abandoning the possibility of unity of the self and the validity of socially constructed reality. In relativist tone, all points of view are equally valid, this means all values are equally right and all beliefs and worldviews are equally true. According to the middle way perspective, this view is incoherent because it will destroys its own claim by accepting the other's claim: "that relativism is wrong." Besides, relativism also abandons the possibility of dynamic mutual influence and mutual understanding between relatively different views. It also undermines people's learning capacity and their trying to learn and embrace the other's views and traditions.

Likewise, relativism also ignores the possibility of social change that involves interchange and interdependency between different societies. In other words, relativism is still dualistic, non-relational and non-processual. Moreover, nihilistic tendency in social sciences attempts to claim the death of the self as well as "the end of the social." Indeed, by criticizing the power effect of substantialist theories, some thinkers leap to a totally opposite propaganda, that is, the nihilistic view of the world, which falsifies any perspective that affirms a foundation or a structural property of society or individual. Baudrillard, one of the post-modernists, for example, in his 1978 text "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities,"[10] proclaimed "the end of the social" by saying that 'the energy of the social is reversed, its specificity is lost, its historical quality and its ideality vanish in favor of a configuration where not only the political becomes volatilised, but where the social itself no longer has any name.' (1978:18-19) Others, such as Bauman (1989), provide examples of sociological approach without subject, and try to empty the subjectivity of any possible meaning, content or responsibility.[11] However, despite their anti-substantialist views, such nihilistic approaches, whether at the social or the individual level, are still unacceptable for their total refusal of the conventionally and practically meaningful social construction of reality, the co-arising and co-ceasing of all kinds of social relations and structures, and the formation of disposition (habitus) of individuals. The nihilistic break with solidified substantialism seems to be an insightful moment of de-reified thinking. But it also abandons the belief in the existence of ultimate truth, as well as the conventional truth. It proclaims non-existence. This move is even more problematic simply because nihilism is still trapped negatively in the reified and fixated view of reality, by seeing the world as non-existent, as completely void, which ignores the dynamic becoming of the phenomenal world. But they fail to carry out a

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[10] Baudrillard, J., 1978, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.* Pp.18-19.
[11] In Bauman, Zygmunt's work, *Modernity and the Holocaust,* 1989. Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press.

second and more difficult break away from their own rigidified nihilism. Sociologically speaking, just like substantialism, the nihilistic discourse also becomes part of social reality, or power/knowledge complex, which inevitably incurs another power effect, another (anti-) theory intervention of the social world, so to speak. That is why Habermas charges some postmodernists as young or neo-conservativists, who can barely be constructive but destructive. Thus, I strongly believe, sociology, as a self-reflexive discipline, should include a reflexive sociology that examines the intellectual construction of the socially constructed reality in which it contributes to the construction, or destruction, of this world. Sociologists, including relativists and nihilists, therefore should be aware of their possible detriment to social life in terms of their knowledge production.

In order to overcome the essentialized dualism between methodological collectivism and individualism, positivism and interpretism, and transcend the extreme polarization between substantialism and nihilism, social theories should find a middle path beyond two extremes and propose a non-substantialist and non-nihilistic approach, or a relational-processual perspective, so to speak. Presupposing the right method and the correct epistemological position in order to quest for certainty, or, by contrast, presupposing the non-existence of any right method and correct epistemological position, are symptoms of what Richard Berstein calls "Cartesian Anxiety." "Cartesian Anxiety" is based on a dualistic way of thinking, which assumes that only two options are available for those who inquire into matters of knowledge and action:

> Either some ultimate ground of knowledge and action exists, some objective and ahistorical foundation against which claims to know can be measured and the utility of actions ascertained, or we are beset by relativistic skepticism and are unable to speak of knowledge or "justified" action in any meaningful sense. We are enveloped, in the latter case, by moral and intellectual chaos that form an ever-expanding plurality of positions. This opposition, states Bernstein, includes a 'variety of other contrasts that indicate the same underlying anxiety: rational versus irrationality, objective versus subjective, realism versus antirealism.'[12]

From the middle way perspective, these approaches and their methodological and epistemological presuppositions are problematic in some way due to their dualistic,

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[12] Jeffery L. Bineham, "The Cartesian Anxiety in Epistemic Rhetoric: An Assessment of the Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 23 (1990): 43-62.

non-relational and non-processual way of thinking. The dualistic way of thinking of either extreme asserts the absoluteness of its view and simultaneously excludes the other extreme. Actually, dualism must presuppose duality, or relativity, and any extreme therefore arises dependently and relatively in relation to the other, even if no one consciously acknowledges that. In this sense, absolutism of each end is self-contradictory. Besides, the absolutist attitude of relativism and nihilism in antagonism to the absolutist attitude of absolutism is itself self-contradictory too. Relativism and nihilism should not be absolute. Therefore, every view, taken as exclusively true, ultimately ends up in self-contradiction. Clinging to extremes, one is necessarily led to contradictions and dead ends. If sociology accepts such a dichotomous division, then we either swing from one extreme (say, substantialism) to another extreme (nihilism), or reject the validity of the whole enterprise of thought altogether, or subjecting ourselves to self-exile in an intellectual wasteland.

According to the middle way perspective, this is unacceptable. Thus, in order to transcend this "either-or" situation, we must deconstruct the symptomatic assumption of both extremes for their fallacy of thinking dualistically, non-relationally and non-processually. But it does not mean that there are no insightful approaches in sociology worth of appreciation. Actually, there are several authors in human and social sciences whose thoughts are non-dualistic, relational and processual. For example, Gadamer's hermeneutics, Mead's pragmatic theory of the self, Elias' figurational, or process sociology and Bourdieu's methodological relationalism.

Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, wages many theoretical debates at the same time. Most importantly he disputes the dualism of modern epistemology, subjectivism concerning personal experience, the *Verstehen* historicism of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. He argues that modern epistemological and methodological procedural rules are detached and therefore indifferent to the dynamic nature of the object, of which knowledge is sought after. This way of thinking is dualistic and non-relational and ignores the dynamic relation between the observing subject (researcher) and the observed object (text, event or lay people). This differentiation could only do violence to the object rather than truly understand its reality. This subject/object dualism actually reduces the meaning of truth to merely *techne*, or in other words, technological control. In order to understand better the relational-processual truth of human world, Gadamer conducts his hermeneutics. He starts with the illumination of the human mode of experience, that is, especially *Erfahrung*.

Erfahrung is the German word for "life experience." Life experiences *(Lebenserfahrungen)* are more inclusive than lived experiences *(Erlebnisse)*. Life experiences are the interpersonal long-term accumulation of lived experiences and the understandings and sense we may have made of these experiences. Gadamer illuminates that certain *Erfahrungen*, such as in the case of aesthetic truth experiences, can have a transformative effect on our human being. The dependent co-arising of human existence in this sense must not be substantial but relational and processual. Based on this notion of human experience, Gadamer poses a relational-processual view of *Verstehen*, which is different from both Schleiermacher and Dilthey's individualist accounts. For Gadamer, the relation of empathy between the interpreter and interpreted is intersubjective, rather than monological as an internal psychological phenomenon or externalized psychic fact uninfluenced by the interpretation. For Gadamer, the dualism of subject and object – the knowing subject and the object of knowledge – which marks modern social sciences thus fails to satisfy the attempt of understanding as a dialogical process. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics lays the keystone for an ascending in the social sciences to move beyond the subject/object dualism demonstrated in interpretism and positivism and towards a more relational-processual approach. Understanding is a temporal process, occurring in the mutuality and relatedness of an event and an interpreter. We cannot thereby assert a method in whatever sense, which can be external to and detached from the interpreted. Rather, the relation of interpretative understanding is a relation of participation in a process of meaning production, which Gadamer calls, "tradition." Similar to the middle way perspective, Gadamer seeks a mediation that would neither attribute absolute, determining properties to an identity nor difference, neither to the self nor the other, neither to the present nor to the past. Hermeneutics is relational as well as processual whereby both sides, interpreter and interpreted, are participants in an understanding or fusion of horizons. Gadamer therefore rejects the dualistic idea of either this or that. He affirms neither an active self and a passive other nor a passive self and an active other nor even an equal activation of both sides in terms of two substantial selves.

Talking about the "self," Mead's theory is a great illustration of how we can transcend subject/object dualism and the deluded view of a substantial self. The self, perceived by Mead, is not so much a substance as a process in which social process is the constitutive of it. Therefore, the mind of the self includes the attitudes of others, so that it becomes what he calls social attitudes rather than roles of separate individuals. How could this process of relating one's own self to the other in the interaction be

possible? Mead claims, this interaction process is actually imported into the conduct of the individual with the dialogue of the "I" and the "me." Therefore, the self is actually the constitution of the dialogical process of the "I" and the "me." The social process with its various implications therefore becomes the experience of the individual through the dialogue between the "I" and the "me." Thus, Mead argued that there can be no isolated self apart from society, and society must be understood as a structure that emerges through an ongoing process of communication, through transactions between persons who are mutually oriented toward each other. Hence, the social must also be conceived as non-substantial. Consciousness for Mead is understood as a thought-stream dependently arising in the dynamic relationship between a person and his/her environment, specially his/her social surroundings. In opposition to physiological view of human mental phenomena and the disengaged conception of the Cartesian subject, Mead argues that the individual is continually involved in a succession of joint enterprises with others, which form and shape his/her mind. Thus, consciousness is not given; it is emergent. According to the middle way perspective, Mead's notion of the self is non-substantial, it roots out all notion of the pre-existing and most intractable ground of own-being of the self. The self is neither merely physiological nor psychological. Nagarjuna would agree with Mead that the self is temporal, which is not identical throughout the temporal process due to its conditional existence. The individual of one moment is relatively different from the other moment because of its dialogical process between the "I" and the "me," and between the self and society. Mead's social theory of temporal and relational selfhood clarifies how the self is not an unchanged entity with a fixed essence, but a relational process whereby a person is re-created in each new social situation.

Elias's notion of Figurational Sociology, or as he later came to call it Process Sociology, is also highly relevant to our discussion of the middle way relational-processual perspective. The basic theme of his relational-processual thought is that, "Reciprocity between peoples creates the figurations of social interaction." Hence, his figurational sociology emphasizes that humans form chains of reciprocal relationships through which individuals and society cannot be separated - individuals are mutually embedded together on many levels and in many ways. Human individuals can thus only be understood in their interdependencies with each other, as part of networks of social relations. Moreover, instead of considering individuals as possessing an inherent and independent identity, with which they then contact with each other and relate to some other substantial thing we call a "society," Elias contends that we are relational, or social, to our very foundation, and only arise in and

through our relations with others, developing a socially constructed "habitus" or "second nature." From his figurational insight, we can unambiguously observe the relatedness and mutuality of the constitution of human selves and society. From here we see how Elias refutes the substantiality of both the self and the social. Bearing relatedness and mutuality of human selves and society in mind, Elias' claims that the progression of social development and transformation – what he called *sociogenesis* – must co-dependently connected to the analysis of *psychogenesis* – the process of psychological development and transformation, the changes in individual disposition or habitus which go along with and somehow bring about social changes. It is here we also see Elias' processual thinking concerning the genesis of the self and the social.

Elias detects the fundamental processuality of social constitution in historical progression in order to go against any static or non-processual sociology, which he despised as "process-reduction." For Elias, all sociology and research must have a processual imaginary of social reality; it is impossible to pursue a non-processual sociology. Human societies can therefore be understood as a dependent arising of long-term processes of movement and change, rather than as fixated states or forms. Interpreting Elias' notion of the social and the self in the context of the middle way perspective, we can say that Elias refutes the inherent and independent existence of the self and the social. The self and the social to Elias, therefore, are empty of substantiality but still arise co-dependently in a temporal process.

Bourdieu's image of the self and the social is also relational, processual and non-dualistic. According to Loic Wacquant:

> Against all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological
> priority of structure or agent, system or actor, the collective or the individual,
> Bourdieu affirms the primacy of relations. In his view, such dualistic alternatives
> reflect a commonsensical perception of the social reality of which sociology must
> rid itself. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15)

Through the process of reflexive thinking, Bourdieu claims that sociology will realize the relatedness between people, the environment, and institutions. "To think in terms of field is to think relationally. The relational (rather than more narrowly 'structuralist') mode of thinking is, as Cassirer (1923) demonstrated in Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff, the hallmark of modern science." (1992: 97). Bourdieu's emphasis on relational thinking is very important to transcend the dualistic

and substantialist thinking ingrained deeply in conventional sociology. Through relationships human transaction is detected, which is taken by Bourdieu as the mystery of the human condition, which is not graspable by Cartesian epistemology. As Wacquant points out:

> Based on a non-Cartesian social ontology that refuses to split object and subject, intention and cause, materiality and symbolic representation, Bourdieu seeks to overcome the debilitating reduction of sociology either an objectivist physics of material structures or a constructivist phenomenology of cognitive forms by means of a genetic structuralism capable of subsuming both. He does this by systematically developing not a theory of *stricto censu (sic)* so much as a sociology *method* consisting essentially in a manner of posing problems, in a parsimonious set of conceptual tools and procedures for constructing objects and for transferring knowledge gleaned in one area of inquiry into another. (Wacquant, 1996: 5)[13]

Bourdieu's notion is also analogous to the non-dualistic, relational and processual notion of the middle way perspective, which takes notions of the ontological emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal convention to overcome such familiar substantialisms as self-determinism, other-determinism, atomism and holism. Likewise, Bourdieu's methodological relationalism also attempts to transcend the opposition as individualism-collectivism and agency-structure.

"Field" (*champ*) is a very important notion in Bourdieu's sociology. It delineates the structural characteristic of the social setting in which habitus operates. Fields signify stadiums of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to mount up and dominate these different kinds of capital. Bourdieu thus perceives a field as a relation of forces, as structured spaces, which organizes itself around specific types of capital or combinations of capital, within which individuals and organizations operate. This kind of structured space will limit, to a large degree, and, in a way, enable the possibilities for agents to act, think, feel and appreciate. From the middle way perspective, field is not a substance, it is not nothing either. It is a conventionally constructed condition that influences the action of individuals at different levels. On

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[13] Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, L J.D. 1996, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

the other hand, the individual action or practice is empty of subjective and objective essence and thereby retains a degree of indeterminacy and spontaneity due to its mutual involvement with social dependent arising. Therefore, habitus is a socially related subjectivity rather than the mere reflection of the psycho-physical attributes of the individuals. Because of its mode of development, habitus is never "fixed," whether through time for an individual or from one generation to the next. As positions within fields change, so do the dispositions, which constitute the habitus. In general, Nagarjuna's middle way perspective would be in line with Bourdieu's relational notion of "field" and "habitus."

Nagarjuna, presented his seminal middle way (*Madhyamika*) perspective, an approach based on the insight of emptiness (*sunyata*), dependent co-arising (*pratitya-samutpada*) and nominal-verbal designation (*praj-napti*). The middle way perspective shows us a path whereby we can go beyond the ignorance (*avidya*) of both substantialism and nihilism of various kinds. In short, the middle way perspective should say of the dependent co-arising of things that: neither is nor is not, nor both is and is not, and nor without any condition. In other words, the purpose of this line of thought is spelled out: those who take the middle way attitude will gain detachment from the views of own-being (*svabhava*), self-nature (*atman*), other-nature and nihility. In this research, I claim that the ancient perspective of Nagarjuna provides a fundamental insight into the resolution of the substantialistic/nihilistic, individualist/collectivist and positivist/interpretist dilemma in sociology.

I am hoping that this kind of middle way perspective of reality proposed by Nagarjuna, which emphasizes the pervasive empty, open, dynamic, relational, processual, nominal and hermeneutical qualities of reality, can brightly contribute to the methodological nature of sociology and the epistemological and ontological picture of social reality. Basically, this dissertation will discuss selected topics, which illustrate the absurdity of methodological and theoretical substantialism and nihilism, and, on the other hand, exemplify the elective affinity between sociological imagination and the middle way perspective. In other words, I will consider the possibility of the theoretical connection between them. Hence, inspired by Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka prapanca* (the middle way perspective), I will rekindle the appreciation of relational-processual insight in sociology demonstrated by thinkers like Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu.

It is true that practitioners of sociology have gradually been contemplating various analytic alternatives that challenge these aforementioned delusive presumptions, and conceive social phenomenon instead in terms of figuration (Elias),[9] structuration (Giddens),[10] social becoming (Sztompka),[11] morphorgenesis (Archer)[12] and so forth. Despite their wide-ranged challenges to the two reigning extremes, substantialist and nihilistic assumptions, some are still suspected of being theoretical eclecticism, mixing up of collective and individual substantialism or blending together of substantialist and relational assumptions, which renders their theories subtly or fundamentally problematic. Besides, no one seems to appreciate the Eastern wisdom concerning the non-dualistic, relational and processual view of the phenomenal world, which perceives the world as dynamically interdependent and continually flowing. The knowledge formation at the global level should also be a relational process that enables a fusion of horizons, otherwise the insulation of one knowledge system from others (say, sociology from the middle way philosophy) will be ethnocentric and thereby dualistic and substantialist in its deep root. As Dalai Lama once stated:

> I have long thought that Western science and Eastern philosophy should join together to create a really complete and full-fledged human being for the modern world. Only in this way will we emerge strengthened from our present condition and become whole. ---His Holiness The Fourteenth Dalai Lama[13]

The purpose of this dissertation, in turn, is to promote a cross fertilization of ideas from the East and the West. That is, to lay out the basic tenets of the Buddhist middle way perspective, with the insights of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal convention, for a re-examination of social phenomena, a reappraisal of some current social theories and then form a synthesized view regarding the constitution of society. It begins by presenting the middle way perspective in a broad outline, by way of a comparison with competing dualistic substantialist (individualism-collectivism, positivistic-interpretist, agency/structure) and nihilistic (or relativist) approaches. Then, it critically affirms and combines some relational-processual insights in sociological tradition—Gadamer's hermeneutics, Mead's pragmatism, Elias'

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[9] Elias, Nobert, 1978, *What is Sociology*. Translation Published in 1978 in Great Britain by Jutchinson and Co.(Publishers) Ltd and in the United States of America by Columbia University Press.
[10] Giddens, Anthony, 1984, *The Constitution of Society—Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles.
[11] Sztompka, Piotr, 1991, *Society in Action—The Theory of Social Becoming.* The University of Chicago Press.
[12]. Archer, Margaret S., 1995, *Realist Social Theory: the morphogenetic approach*. Cambirdge University Press.
[13] The Dalai Lama,1995, *My Tibet*, p.96. Publisher: University of California Press

figuration, or process sociology and Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and methodological relationalism—with our middle way perspective.

Moreover, in addition to the middle way methodological and theoretical reflection of different approaches in sociology, it is also very important to exemplify an ontological deliberation of the constitution of society. We therefore also attempt to analyze phenomena or processes of the self and "the social" that appear to exist independently, inherently and essentially, and argue that they cannot so exist. Nonetheless, though lacking the substantial existence imputed to them either by naïve common sense or by sophisticated realistic social theory, social phenomena are not nonexistent—they are conventionally real. Based on this awareness, we then engage in an ontological contemplation on the basic constitution of society, such as temporality and spatiality, linguisticality, the self and "the social."

Based on the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising, again, Nagarjuna attempts to show that neither time nor space have own-being, or self-nature. Nagarjuna's method is to divide time into the past, the present, and the future and to argue that if the one of these time units have own-being, the conception of time will then lose its coherence and become self-contradictory. In other words, none of these can be said to be inherently existent. He employs his dialectic to demonstrate the emptiness of substantial time in any sense. Despite Nagarjuna's deconstruction of the absolute existence of time and phenomena, his notion of dependent arising does not deny the fundamental non-duality, or mutuality, of time and things, in which change is basically related and inseparable. Hence, as Nagarjuna points out, that with no things to be temporally related, there is no time. We therefore can express his view this way: phenomena are always phenomena-in-flux and time is always flux-in-phenomena. That is, "the only mode of existence that time has is as a set of relations among empirical phenomena. Apart from those phenomena and those relations, there is no time." (Garfield, 1995: 257) By the same token, the only mode of existence that phenomenon has is a set of relations that occurs in temporal process. Sociologically speaking, there is no "Time" and "Social Reality" that persist permanently, but only a changing of social phenomena over time, or a flow of time through social phenomena. It is therefore necessary to take into account the temporal dimension in every socio-historical phenomena and the constitution of the self. Whenever we speak of the unfolding of socio-historical phenomena in operation, or the mobilization of individuals for action, the time dimension is implied.

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Following the same method, related spatial concepts such as the highest, the lowest, and the middle, or here and there, identity, difference, etc., should be empty of substantiality. The emptiness of the substantial spatial location is in turn implied. In other words, the distinguishing of spatial locations always already involves spatial interrelations. Thus, one cannot attribute the substantial quality to any spatial unit that exists independently and inherently. Therefore, according to the middle way perspective, we cannot accept an absolutist view of space and things as proposed by classical Newtonian physics and other realist approaches; yet we still affirm a relative, or conventional, existence of things and its spatiality. Indeed, sociologically speaking, the geographical spaces and places drawn by geographers, historians, state administrators, and others, for instance, are socially produced through discourses and value-laden experience. These constructed spaces and places are empty of absolute spatial essence but still being nominally and conventionally real to a large extent, due to their dependent co-arising in relation to people's territorization in their practice at different levels. According to the middle way perspective, we can question and deconstruct the absolute relationships between material conditions and imagined territories and simultaneously understand the relatively constitutive compel of spatiality within and without the self and "the social."

Language is a product as well as a constitutive part of humanity, and a source at once of meaning and of the uncertainties that call for interpretation. Language is deeply embedded in the constitution of society. Language in this sense is indispensable to understanding, and is more than just the spoken or written words. It encompasses our vision and corporality. Therefore, the constitutive power of language is very pervasive in human social life. Since language is the constitutive part of society, neither can we think about actions and institutions conceived apart from the language. Hence, we cannot escape the judgments and processes that are built-into the language one uses. This acknowledgment can facilitate us to shift our sociological emphasis away from the priority traditionally granted to "consciousness," "interest," "system" or "structure" in the discussion of social phenomena, thereby opening up the possibility of new insights into the "linguistic turn" in social thinking. It seems that language is the condition of possibility of our social existence through which we develop our self-identity and social relations. However, according to the middle way perspective, an over-attachment to language's substantiality and its correspondence to reality is problematic. Indeed, no matter how well language is initially handled, Nagarjuna teaches that if one has not yet been awakened, the predicament of the propensity of the human mind to become entangled by language has to be dealt with over and over

again. In actuality, there is no essence for the word to represent. We divide up the linguistic terms into "objects" according to conventionality. Once we have made the distinction, we are able to construct reality according to our social convention. However, while the conceptual distinction is designated, it doesn't mean that the world will stop its changing process. Thus, it is not plausible to slip back into the assumption of "essences" because there is no such thing existing inherently. In the middle way perspective, the notion of emptiness is used to express a condition in which there is no ontological substance in the process of becoming, and no reality independent of a language system.

According to the middle way perspective, the self is also non-inherent in any sense. Neither can the self have any characteristics of its own, nor any possessions of the self can be substantial. The problem about the possessor of the aggregates of the body and mind and properties of the self occurs only given that one conceives of them as properties and aggregates that are substantial of something. We must then be cautious of constructing the substantial notion of "I", "me" and "mine." "When one stops grasping the aggregates and the self as independent entities or as the possessions of independent entities, one recognizes one's own lack of inherent existence. One also recognizes the lack of inherent existence of the aggregates, as in the case of perception." (Garfield, 1995: 247) This is not to say that one does not exist conventionally. This is nihilistic and unacceptable. Rather, one should understand one's existence and that of other entities in the context of emptiness and dependent co-arising and, hence, to regard that existence as necessarily relational and processual. Sociologically speaking, the self is always related to broader society, in terms not only of ontological sense but also ethical. The self-making process is thereby inseparable from our mutual embeddedness with other people, other conditions within society. Therefore, any kind of antinomy between self and society is fundamentally problematic. Thus, I agree with Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu; the self is not an isolated "I" or Cartesian subject but an interrelation of *Erfahrung* and fusion of horizons, I and Me, psychogensis and sociogensis, mental structure and social structure.

Subsequently, I will delineate some of the ontological grounding behind the theories of society. By means of the middle way examination, I will question the essentialist assumption in sociology. What constitutes the social? Is the social an entity sui generis? Does it have causal precedence over the self? John Urry contends that it is such a "myth" to believe that "there is an essence to sociology, that it has some

essential characteristics that give it and its practitioners a unity, coherence and common tradition."[14] Indeed, in the history of sociology we can find that different authors, schools or methodological presuppositions imagine "society" differently. In other words, if the condition of possibility of the formation of social theory relies upon the essential nature of its object of investigation—society, then, due to the incredible difference amongst different sociologists, it's hard to believe that various social theories have captured the unitary essence of "society." It is even more difficult to believe that there are multiple essences of society identified by different theorists, because according to Nagarjuna, neither unity nor difference is acceptable in a substantialist sense. The middle way perspective proposes that no self-nature (own-being, essence) of beings occurs in the conditions. Since self-nature in not findable, other-nature does not occur either because other-nature also presupposes a self-nature from its own side. Sociologically speaking, the essence of social entities is neither present in the conditions nor in the consequences, otherwise there will be no dynamic relation and process possible. If there was no essence of social entities ever existed, neither can any other-essence ever exist to determine the rise of social entities. Social entities are neither self-caused, nor do they come to be through the power of other causes. That is, there is no causation when causation is thought of as substantial. Therefore, we have to deconstruct any kind of essentialism concerning specifically social reality in terms of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal designation. In the complex arising of various social conditions we can find no self-existence of social entities. Where self-existence is deficient, we should also leave no room for otherness-essence that determines the existence of society. Since social reality has no essence, how can it become the causal precedence of the self?   In agreement with Bourdieu's notion of field and Elias' figuration, the middle way perspective proposes that emptiness and dependent co-arising, or dynamic and complex relations and processes, are constitutive of "the social," and hence we cannot conceptualize "the social" merely in homogeneous, static and substantial terms. Nagarjuna's karika points out that we should affirm neither identity nor difference; neither existence nor nonexistence; neither permanence nor impermanence, by showing the relativity of all conceptions.

Finally, my conclusion will make a retrospective contemplation on the reading strategies of this dissertation, in which I suggest a symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic reading. The examination of related methodologies and theories in the following parts is designated to be symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic all at once.

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[14] John Urry, 1995. "Sociology as a Parasite. Some Vices and Virtues". In *Comsuming Places*. London: Routledge, pp. 33-45.

Not one of them should be conducted alone, but only in conjunction with the other two. Idyllically, and hermeneutically, these three dimensions should be used together simultaneously for examining any author's works in particular or the social world at large. I believe an open and empathetic reading attitude towards other's texts or experiences must be at once a fusion of symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic attitudes. After all, reading is a dialogical process leading us toward an illuminating dynamic and a fusion of horizons. Throughout the process, I will critically examine the symptom of substantialist and nihilistic tendencies evident in the texts. But it does not mean that there is nothing to be appreciated or worthy of learning. Therefore, a sympathetic attitude is always already implicated and engaged in the act of reading, in addition to a willingness to synthetically embrace everyone's relational and processual insights. In other words, I suggest, the circularity of human understanding is an unfinished venture, through which we get a better understanding of each other throughout countless dialogues.

PART ONE: The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way Perspective: Nagarjuna's Muulamadhyamakakarrikaa and Its Sociological Implications

1. The Core Insight of Nagarjuna's Madhyamika

Debating Two Extremist Trends in Indian Context

Madhyamika is the philosophical school of Mahayana Buddhism, founded by Nagarjuna, in the second century C.E., who came from Southern India to the Buddhist university of Nalanda, where he engaged in a fundamental debate with other schools in Indian philosophy. India had a diverse tradition of philosophical thought, debate and writing with regard to especially the ultimate nature of the self and the ultimate reality (*atman* and *Brahman*). Generally speaking, Indian philosophical schools include a sharply theistic, atheistic, skeptical and by and large materialistic tradition, an Atomist tradition, a viewpoint centrally concerned with questions of logic (such as the school of Nyaya), and viewpoints mainly concerned with the interpretation of texts. Amongst them, the Nyaya was interested in the nature and proper conduct of formal debates, in identifying the sound sources of knowledge and the sound forms of syllogistic inference; where the Atomists saw the physical objects we experience as arrangements of atoms; the Enumerationist viewpoint saw the physical objects as moments in the evolution of the primordial stuff, *prakrti*.

Speculation about the material universe went on alongside with attempts to identify the ultimate nature of the self (*atman*) and the ultimate reality (*Brahman*). The Enumerationists saw each individual self as a pure consciousness confused itself by misidentifying it with material, bodily realities. Other schools within the Vedanta viewpoints, claim the absolute identity of atman and Brahman, while some sharply distinguishing God from souls and both from matter, and other seeing the entire universe as God's nature or God's power. In opposition to all those religious schools, there arose also an anti-religious, or skeptical school of Carvaka worldly philosophy. It is renowned for its atheist, anti-religious stance. They trust only in experience and reject any kind of existence after death. This is a very materialist or nihilistic view, which believes that the self (both body and mind) is annihilated at death.

Nagarjuna accepted neither the belief in eternal existence (either the self or Brahman), nor the attachment to the view of non-existence. In order to transcend these two

extremist viewpoints asserted by different schools of Indian thought, inspired by Buddha's teaching that everything is impermanent and devoid of self and his doctrine of dependent co-arising, Nagarjuna proposed his *Madhyamika*, the middle way persepective. The emergence of the *Madhyamika* was a far-reaching turning point in the progression of Buddhist thought in terms of which the untenability of substantialism of early Buddhism is established. Henceforth, *Madhyamika* Buddhism gave a new direction to Indian philosophy as such.

Debating Other Traditions in Buddhism and The Adoption of the Prasangika School of Madhyamika

Within Buddhism, there are a variety of philosophical schools developed after the Buddha passed away. Their were four main philosophical schools developed, each with a number of subschools, i.e. the *Vaibhasika*, *Sautrantika*, *Madhyamika* and the *Yogacara*. The former two are schools of the Hinayana, and the latter two are schools of the Mahayana.

The *Vaibhasika* early developed 18 subschools, two of which are of particular importance -- the *Sthaviravada*, which is the immediate ancestor of the Theravada, the principal Buddhism of Southeast Asia, and the *Sarvastivada*, which is the basis of monasticism in Tibet and the Tibetan community today. The *Vaibashikas* assert that outer phenomena are made up of subtle, undividable particles or atoms and that consciousness or mind, the internal facet, is made up of undividable instances of consciousness. These undividable particles and instances of consciousness are said to have relative and absolute existence, relative existence in terms of the coarse physical matter being compounded of many subtle particles, and absolute existence in terms of their indivisibility. In addition, they assert that objects can be perceived directly by means of the sense faculties.

The *Sautrantikas* in general also believe in smallest particles and instances of consciousness, but they say that objects cannot be directly perceived via the sense faculties because a connection between that non-material consciousness and the material world is not possible. They assert a substance, an image of which is only perceived by the sense consciousness. Besides, the *Vaibhashika* theory of the reality of all the elements of past and future was criticized by the *Sautrantikas* on the ground that what we really know is only in the present. On the other hand, contrasting the *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, they reject the notion of an efficient cause in the form of a

supernatural, metaphysical reality called God. But it does not means that they believe in the total change of an object. The solution for them is to claim the double character of a thing, in which a thing is constantly changing in its component elements or atoms, but it remains unchanged for an extensive period of time. Therefore, a thing-in-itself in its specific form is considered transitory; but a thing-in-general in its generic form, appears to be permanent. They thus still persist in the substantiality of a thing behind its appearance. A subtle form of dualistic clinging (between appearance and reality) is also asserted, for their separation of the perception of outer objects from the inner essence.

The *Cittamatra*, or Mind-Only school of the Mahayana, claims that it is not possible to directly perceive outer material objects, because they are by nature different from the perceiving mind, rejects the belief in the substantiality of things, in whatever sense. According to the *Cittamatra*, there can be nothing else than mind, because no matter what is perceived is necessarily to be matching to the same nature as mind itself in order to be fitting to be perceived at all. Thus, since the substantiality of things behind appearance could be perceived by our mind they could never exist in themselves. Therefore, the *Cittamatra* adherents believe in a truly existent consciousness. In the last instance, the *Cittamatras* assert, the mind is by nature uncompounded and free from all dependent phenomena. This is called non-conceptual awareness free from duality.

Even though the Mind-Only school rejects the substantiality of the outer objects, it still insists on a fixed reference point, the Mind, or the consciousness. For the *Madhyamika*, the *Cittamatra* is still a form of dualism, which divides the true reference point (Mind) from the untrue object. For the *Madhyamik*a, all fixed reference points are untenable. Phenomena are beyond all pairs of opposites. The core notions of the middle way, the emptiness, the dependent co-arising and the nominal convention, indicate that all phenomena are empty of inherent and independent existence and without any true substance.

There are two main sub-schools within *Madhyamika*, the *Svatantrika* and *Prasangika*. These two traditions share the insight that the self-nature of the person as well as the self-nature of phenomena does not truly exist. They also negate the two extremes of substantialism and nihilism. About A. D. 500 Bhavaviveka, heading the *Svatantrika* school of the *Madhyamika*, held that the middle way position can be put forward by positive argument, whereas, the *Prasanga* school, led by Candrakirti, tends to remain

a simple negation of opponent's fallacies without affirming any true position. What distinguishes them most is that, for the *Svatantrikas*, the discussion of the relative reality is seen as the means for arriving at absolute reality, while the *Prasangikas* refute everything by means of *reductio ad absurdum* and do not attach to any sense of reality. *Prasangikas* refute the opponents' wrong view by showing their logical inconsistency, with the aim of freeing the mind from all speculative views, which are the source of attachment that prevents enlightenment. They claimed to have no view of their own and to be attempting only to refute the views of their opponents. The differences between the *Svatantrikas* and *Prasangikas* are very slight and are not significant for the purposes of our discussion. But our discussion will be in harmony with *Prasangika* school, especially Candrakirti's interpretation of Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika,* which I will articulate later on.

After the previous brief discussion of the context of Indian thought and the subdivision of Buddhist philosophy, we might have a general vision of how Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* emergent as an important wisdom to transcend all kinds of extremist views. I subsequently will not go into a more detailed characterization of Indian thought or Buddhist thought. Instead, I shall now consider it in more general terms, which permits me to consciously disregard its subtle variants and enables me to present the *Madhyamika* as a segment of a more comprehensive analytical venture in this dissertation. After all, the main purpose of this dissertation is not to present a full-scale grasp of the middle way philosophy in the broad spectrum of Buddhism, because by doing so we will be flooded by various interpretations and schools of thought within Buddhism, and won't be able to focus our argument on the central philosophy of the middle way. Since our aim is not a study of Buddhism or *Madhyamika* in general context, so I will choose to put aside those delicate dialogues among differing interpretations and disputes among opposing traditions in the history of Buddhism.

Other than some supplemental sources, my primary reference of *Madhyamika* will be Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika* translated by Jay Garfield as *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. All quotations from the *karika*, unless otherwise noted, are from Garfield's translation. This is the fourth complete English translation of Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamikakarika* (literally *Fundamental verses on the Middle Way*). Garfield's book holds up well as a translation, in many respects outshining the earlier translations of Streng,[15] Inada,[16] and Kalupahana.[17] Garfield's translation is

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[15] Streng, Frederick. 1967. *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*. Nashville: Abingdon.

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very lucid (from Tibetan) and his philosophical commentary on the text is particular insightful. The interpretative attitude towards the text is basically the Tibetan *dGe-lugs-pa* of *Prasangika-Madhyamaka* school, one of the schools of *Madhyamika*, which was espoused by Buddhapalita and Candrakirti and was considered highest learning in Tibetan Buddhism that is truly the zenith of the entire *Madhyamika* tradition in all of its variety.

The Central Notion of The Middle Way

The Sanskrit word "*Madhyamika*" means "one who holds to the middle," it is thus translated as the "Middle Way" in English. The concept "Middle way" in Buddhism begins with the Buddha's description of his path to enlightenment as one which avoids the extremes of indulging in worldly pleasures, on the one hand, and engaging in severe ascetic practices on the other. Nagarjuna, then, extended this insight to all dimensions of the world's phenomena. Any conception, however subtle, affirms that a phenomenon either absolutely exists or absolutely does not exist is considered problematic in *Madhyamika* sense. The perspective of the middle way rejects both extremes of substantialism and nihilism, and espouses the middle way as the true attitude of practice and contemplation, which implies a balanced view and approach to life. However, while the word "middle" denotes balance, the middle way should not be confused with passivity, nihility or a kind of middle-of-the-road compromise. Rather, the middle way implies ongoing practice of non-attachment to two extremes, or "either-or" dualistic thinking.

As *prajnaparamita-sutra* stresses: "not being, and not not-being". It indicates not simply the negation of being, but also the operation of double negation-the negation of being as well as the denial of non-being-or the negation of negation. It thereby disclosed the middle way as transcendence beyond both substantialism and nihilism. That is, it revealed ultimate wisdom (*prajna*) of life. Since then, at various points in the history of Buddhism, Buddhist scholars have attempted to clarify and define the true nature of life. Around the second century C. E., Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* insight of the emptiness and non-substantial nature of the world explained that there is no eternal, or fixed "thing" behind the continual flux of changing phenomena. In the

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[16] Inada, Kenneth K. 1970. *Naagaarjuna: A Translation of His Muulamadhyamakakaarikaa*. Tokyo: Hokuseido.

[17] Kalupahana, David J., 1986. *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New York, State University of New York Press.

Mulamadhyamakakarikas (Fundamentals of Middle Way), Nagarjuna used a critical dialectic of argument of *reductio ad absurdum* (*prasanga*) to show how all viewpoints or concepts presumed to describe reality are really empty of any self-sustaining substance and thus do not exist. In doing so, the notion of emptiness and dependent co-arising became radically more manifest and profound than it had been in its earlier version. It has been recognized that Nagarjuna instigated a "Copernican revolution" in both Buddhism and Indian philosophy as a whole by expanding the meaning of emptiness and dependent co-arising from being mere elemental relations to defining a full dialectical method.

Nagarjuna criticized the adherents of substantial essentialism of his time who held that things really exist and correspond to concepts. To him, the substantialist view is an illusory one, which ignores the vivid dynamics of the phenomenal world. In addition to his rejection of substantialist view, Nagarjuna also opposed the nihilistic view of taking nothingness and non-being as unchangeable fact. For transcending this dualistic gap, he provided the middle way standpoint. Nagarjuna inexorably analyzes phenomena or processes which appear to exist substantially and argues that they cannot so exist. And yet, though lacking the inherent existence, these phenomena or processes are not nonexistent either. They are, he argues, conventionally real. Nagarjuna sought to liberate the mind from its tendencies to cling to either-or dualism, the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising indicates that existence is relational and processual, and relation and process resist both substantialist and nihilistic account. Therefore, according to Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika*, there is no absolute, non-relational, non-processual, independent "presence" that is unconditioned.

The "middleness" of the middle way, does not mean a mere compromise of a middle point between two extremes, as the Aristotelian notion of *to meson* might suggest. Rather, the middle way overcomes through the two extremes by transcending the dualistic standpoint as such, and it points to the non-dual ultimate truth, which is realized by the Buddha and every other awakened thinker. The notion is somewhat similar to what Max Weber used to express in order to repudiate the *naïve* idea, which holds that simply because policy positions differ from one another, a 'mid-point' synthesis that steers a line among them is somehow more objective and less partisan. In the realm of cognitive judgments, for instance, this kind of middleness would entail a bizarre idea that the statements like "This box weighs 10 kilos" and "This box weighs 20 kilos" could be "synthesized" into the statement "This box weighs 15 kilos".

According to the middle way perspective, this procedure has no place in relation to either normative judgments or factual judgments.

According to the *dGe-lugs-pa*'s *Prasangika-Madhyamaka*, the emptying of deluded view must be radical. In other words, in a polemical context, the advantage of understanding the view of emptiness as a radical negation is that the *Prasangika-Madhyamaka* is not indispensable to bring in a counter-thesis against its adversary. The fundamental *Prasangika* vision is that no things inherently exist, so in tackling other views the *Prasangika* merely unveils the contradictions intrinsic in views derived from the postulation of inherent existence or non-existence. This does not mean that *Prasangika* has no position at all. What they do not have is simply the attachment to the position about inherently existing things, which *Prasangikas* regard as entirely spurious and delusory. On the other hand, in undertaking *Madhyamika* analysis, the *Prasangika* negation cannot be overemphasized as to totally refute everything. Otherwise, one will just be throwing stones in the dark and will become mired in nihilism. Therefore, a proper identification of the negandum is crucial to the *Prasangika-Madhyamaka*. One should not bewilder what is being negated with what is conventionally existent. In other words, what is negated by *Madhyamika* analysis is the inherent or independent existence rather than the conventionality of existence. If it is essence in existence that must be negated, then conventionally existent things are not negated as nothingness in a nihilistic sense. In short, the middle way analysis does not refute a conventional phenomenon per se, but only the misconception of its inherent existence.

Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* analysis is made possible by setting up the central dynamics of a two-truth perspective, which discloses the fundamental limits of human construction and yet recognizes the conventional validity of its construct, as illustrated in verse XXIV. 8:

> The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths: A truth of worldly
> convention and an ultimate truth.

The first is the truth of worldly convention (*samvrti-satya*), indicates a reality that is based upon agreement. This is the ordinary truth, the one that we understand through our everyday observation. (Garfield, 1995: 297)[18] Or put it more sociologically, the

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[18] Garfield, Jay L. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. Oxford University Press.

truth of worldly convention is in accordance with what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe as "the social construction of reality."[19] It relies upon general agreement between people about how things appear to be. This can be best illustrated by the most pregnant sentence that Thomas ever wrote: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[20] The conventional truth develops into a common standard by which we evaluate other things and know that our understanding is in complicity with that of others. Ultimate truth, on the other hand, is the truth that is left when our conventions are stripped away. The term "ultimate truth" (*paramartha-satya*) is truth whether we consider it or not. The ultimate is emptiness, which can only be realized through our awakened insight by transcending the attachment of characterizing truth in terms of concept.

According to Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika*, the root of all suffering lies in the ignorance of clinging, the error of mistaking the worldly convention for the ultimate, the relative for the absolute, the conditioned for the unconditioned. We take conceptual dichotomization as essential; we perceive conditioned things as existing unconditionally, as inherent and independent substances. Due to ignorance, we confuse the worldly convention with ultimate truth in an absolute sense. "The error of misplaced absoluteness, the seizing of the determinate as itself ultimate, is the root-error."[21] The fundamental *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* is the antithesis to this error, the antidote for suffering. It is a skillful means for better understanding social life too. In his logical *karika*, Nagarjuna utilizes a dialectical argument to stress that all things are empty of inherent and nothing arises independently of anything else. In other words, things are dependently co-arisen. Nagarjuna's *karika* is actually the groundwork of the *Madhyamika* and all the main themes of the Mahayana tradition are to be found in it. Thus, Nagarjuna's *karika* is commonly taken as the single most influential work in all of Buddhism after the original sutras.

Lest the reader be kept in suspense and having difficulties comprehending Nagarjuna's thought, due to its sometimes obscured and simplified statements in some verses, it is thus necessary to elaborate on some basic themes contained therein. In addition, we will present its core notions relevant to the concern of our study, the methodological and theoretical assumptions of the social sciences. Only after this has been done can a further application for the examination of central social theories and concepts be extracted. The following exposition of the *karika* will try to focus only on

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[19] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
[20] William Isaac Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1923.
[21] K. Venkata Ramanan, 1975. *Nagarjuna's Philosophy.* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. P. 247.

the few most crucial themes of the *karika* and avoid unnecessary prolixity. Let me start with the verse 18 of Chapter XXV of the *karika*:

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness. That, being a
> dependent designation, is itself the middle way. (pp. 69, 93, 304)

According to Garfield's interpretation that emptiness, as dependently co-arisen, is termed a nominal designation. In other words, Nagarjuna asserts three fundamental characteristics in this passage, which are in harmony with one another and thereby inseparable: (1) emptiness, or the ultimate truth; (2) the dependently originated, that is, the phenomenal world; and (3) verbal convention, or dependent designation. (Pp. 93-94) Therefore, whatever is dependently co-arisen is nominally established and is empty. Nagarjuna explains emptiness as something that arises dependently. Emptiness lacks (is empty of) essence, or independent existence. And emptiness itself is also assumed to be a dependent designation and is thereby asserted to be merely nominal. Something that is empty depends upon verbal reference, or conventional characterization, for its existence. (Garfield, 1995: 305) Emptiness and the conventional world are, Nagarjuna suggests, two different interpretations of the same things; something from the conventional standpoint, and it is empty from the ultimate view. When we characterize a thing we give it conventional existence with verbal designation, but it retains its fundamental emptiness.

Non-duality Between Ontology and Epistemology

Moreover, the gist of Nagarjuna's argument is at the same time ontological as well as epistemological, which cannot be differentiated essentially as two discrete realms. Nagarjuna therefore does not oppose ontology to epistemology, existence to knowledge. The notion of emptiness negates the existence of ultimate own-being (*svabhava*); therefore, the ontological foundation of phenomena is not thingness in the substantialist sense, rather, it is emptiness. On the other hand, phenomena are not non-existent they are dependently co-arisen and hence conventionally real, existing relationally and processually. Also, phenomena are imputed by a designating consciousness. This means that they are what they "are" in dependence upon our knowledge that conceptualizes these phenomena. The mental activity and its related verbal convention is the condition of our knowledge. And the conventionally constructed knowledge is the constitutive foundation of the ontological make-up of phenomena. The distinction between our episteme and reality is therefore untenable. Because without verbal conventions (in XXIV18, the *praj-napti*), through which we

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know about, describe and explain reality, we can never get to know how "real" the reality is. As Garfield expounds it, Nagarjuna's middle way "is achieved by taking conventions as the foundation of ontology, hence rejecting the very enterprise of a philosophical search for the ontological foundations of convention." (p.122)

Emptiness, dependent co-arising and verbal convention are three states of one truth. These three states condition and are conditioned by one another, and at once enforce and enforced by one another. Emptiness is synonymous with dependent co-arising, so there is no emptiness as something to attach to that can escape the condition of dependent co-arising. Emptiness, itself merely specifying dependent co-arising, is not a concrete fact either, or more "real," than it. Moreover, emptiness as a verbal convention has no independent reality existing "out there" and separable from conceptual imputation. Since the verbal convention itself has no substantiality, emptiness as a conceptual construct must empty itself of inherent characteristic. Similarly, dependent co-arising cannot be understood without the insight of emptiness. If things were not empty of inherent and independent existence, they can never be able to arise, and thereby cease. Neither can they have any relation and interaction with other conditions. In the meantime, dependent co-arising is also a nominal convention that is not a realistic description of the hard-and-fast world.[22]

The ontological dependent co-arising of all conventional phenomena can never be distinguishable from our epistemological mental activity and conceptual construction. Furthermore, verbal convention as our mental construct is empty of self-nature too. The emptiness of nominal convention reminds us that the reification of language, concept, or human consciousness in the broader sense, is also implausible and dangerous. Our conceptual framework can never be justified by demonstrating their correspondence to an independent reality. Rather, what counts as real depends relationally upon our conventions. The dependent co-arising of nominal convention also implies that our language and mental activities are also undergoing a continual flux in temporal process. Finally, there is neither verbal convention nor mental activity that can exist independently without relating to other conditions.

Thinking Sociologically

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[22] As Garfield states: "Whatever is dependently co-arisen is verbally established. That is, the identity of any dependently arisen thing depends upon verbal conventions." (p.305)

Here, let me briefly link the above discussions concerning the triple characteristics of the *Madhyamika* to our social scientific relevance structure. Basically, the foremost subject-matters the social sciences address are the links between agency, action, and their mutually embedded and dynamically involved social relations and social processes, emphasizing how social relations and social processes can emerge as conditions and consequences of people's practices and actions, both intended and unintended. These social relations and social processes subsequently contour people's actions not by strict determination but by providing flexible orientation points which may either constrain or enable what is possible. Whilst some, relatively durable, action serves to stabilize their patterns, rules and institutions, other actions enable agency to change the social relations and processes in time and thereby reshape new patterns, rules and institutions.

These two dimensions (the agency and the structure) of the social world are not mutually exclusive. They are like the two sides of the same coin. The existence of the agency is empty of self-nature and is dependently arisen in the context of the social (relations and processes). The existence of social relations must be processual and agentic. Meanwhile, they must be empty of substantiality otherwise they will have no condition to arise and change. In other words, social relations must be dependently co-arisen and the dynamics of social processes must be relational and conditional. Relations and processes are dependently constructed and reconstructed by the agency. Moreover, the belief in the self-generating process of the agency and the structure, otherwise, the self or the structural change will be self-caused, which is nonsensical and contradictory. In actuality, social change must occur co-dependently relating to numerous causes and conditions. And because of this unidentifiable complexity of causes and conditions, the consequence of social change is also hardly predictable completely as something determined. Social phenomena, both the agency and the social (relations and processes), as the object of our social research, are construed and explained through our conceptualized scheme of theories and methods. Besides, we are studying socially constructed reality that is already mediated by the nominal convention of lay actors'. Therefore, it is only by safeguarding the lay actors' mutually influenced mental activities that we will have a guarantee "that the social sciences do in fact deal with the real social world, the one and unitary life world of us all, and not with a strange world of fancy that is independent of and has no connection with our world of everyday life." (Schutz, 1940, p.60)[23] We must thus shield our

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[23] Schutz, A. 1932. *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston. Northwestern University Press. 1967).

sociological perspective from the unwarranted intrusion of objectivism, which tends to search for ontological essence behind social reality, or outside of conceptual imputation.

An objectivist approach ignores the meaningful intelligibility of lay actors in a dynamically interrelated meaningful world. Sociological interpretation as a "second-level" reference, that is, from the point of view of the scientist, refers to our attempt to understand the implications of mutually influenced meaningful actions among lay people in everyday life practice, which is seen as the "first-level" construct. In knowing human understanding, the task is first and foremost one of rendering intelligible the actions, thoughts, feelings and appreciations of social actors involved, and to trace out the unrecognized conditions and unintended consequences of those actions that involve the traditions or horizons the actors live within. Conventional knowledge (first level) and sociological knowledge (second level) are mutually influenced; they both are linguistically mediated and are constitutive foundations of social reality and social practice.

In general, the triple characteristics of *Madhyamika* perspective (emptiness, dependent co-arising and verbal convention) are insightful for social research. What Nagarjuna implies in the middle way as relevant to our interest is to show that we cannot possibly "get behind" interdependent, conventional social phenomena to find any independent explanation of them; that is, our explanations of the reality of social facts must themselves be linguistically mediated and thus dependently co-arisen and empty of own-being and self-existence. Let me articulate these three characteristics of *Madhyamika* in a more systematic way, as follows.

1.1 *Sunyata* (Emptiness)

The *Madhyamika* school of Mahayana Buddhism propounded by Nagarjuna is also known as *Sunyavada* (theory of emptiness). The whole philosophy, in fact, can be construed as different aspects of *sunyata*. One of the central themes of *karika* is therefore *sunyata* (emptiness)—the Buddhist technical term for the lack of independent existence, inherent existence, or essence in things. *Sunyata*, as emptiness, means that the conventional world, the socially constructed reality for instance, is not, as some stubbornly think, composed of substance inherently and independently existent; in *Madhyamika*, these entities are devoid of inherent existence—they are empty. *Sunyata* is the skillful means (*upaya*), which unravels oneself from

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unsatisfactory attachment and clinging. In other words, emptiness discloses the non-substantiality of phenomena and hence frees oneself from fundamental unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*).

Sunyata is a refutation of the possibility that any phenomenal object can have own-being (*svabhava*) and independent of its conditions and consequences, and isolate from our nominal imputation with which it is named and conceptualized. *Sunyavada* is contrary to the common substantialist view that regards all phenomena as having individual separate identities. To the *Madhyamika* nothing exists "inherently" or "from its own side." All phenomena are radically empty of any defining essence. Consequently all have no fixed entity and are in a state of impermanence- change and flux- constantly arising and ceasing. Not only are all things constantly processing, if we examine any phenomenon with subtle observation we can hardly find anything identifiable and thereby definable by our also unfixed and non-substantial mind.

What *Madhyamika* view of emptiness does for our critical thinking is that our intellectual concept of phenomena does not encapsulate any underlying essence, and each social fact in substantialist sense is found to be without basis. The ultimate un-discoverability of the real nature of all phenomena-their lack of inherent existence is usually referred as "emptiness" in English, which is a translation of the Sanskrit word *Sunyata*. Nonetheless, according to David Loy (1996), the English word emptiness tends to have a more nihilistic connotation than the original Sanskrit. Actually, the Sanskrit root *su* also conveys the meaning of "to be swollen," "like a hollow balloon but also like a pregnant woman; therefore the usual English translation 'empty' and 'emptiness' needs to be supplemented with the notion of 'pregnant with possibilities.'"[24] Emptiness, therefore, implies at once the condition of the possibility of existents. Qualities such as freedom, action, interaction, creativity, social movement, institutionalization and social change are realizable only because of the empty nature in which substantial elements are lashed out, and negated in the on-going process.

One, on the other hand, should never take the understanding of the emptiness of things as itself absolute, this again would be an act of clinging: clinging to *sunyata*. As Nagarjuna argues in XXII of *karika*:

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[24] Loy, David. 1996. *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*. Humanities Press: New Jersey. p.88.

Empty should not be asserted. Nonempty should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. They are only used nominally.

It is therefore important not to confuse emptiness with total nothingness because everything is *sunya* is the potential openness for change and transformation. In fact, a major portion of the chapter on "The Examination of the Noble Truths" (*Aryasatyaparik*) is devoted to a refutation of the view that "emptiness" is "nothingness" or "nihilism" (*nastitva*). *Sunyata* does not imply a dead void, it must in turn empty itself and so cannot itself be an object of attachment, dynamic *sunyata* therefore empties itself out as just the things-in-themselves. Emptiness shouldn't detriment the foundation of dependent arising, only nihilism does. Thus, the self-emptying of *sunyata* can also be stated as the *sunyata* of *sunyata*, or the emptiness of emptiness, that is, in the ultimate sense even *sunyata* is empty of absoluteness, or nihilistic quietism. Instead, *sunyata* is the foundation of all things, and it is the basic principle of all phenomena. In other words, if the world was neither empty nor impermanent, then all resulting phenomena could not have arisen or ceased due to the substantial existence of various essences. The nature of emptiness, from this perspective, is of positive significance. Thus emptiness implies the negation of unchanged, fixed substance, and thereby the possibility for relational existence and change. This insight is important to the observation and contemplation of social phenomena.

The Sociological Implication of Sunyata

Buddhist middle way regards the persistent delusion of "inherent existence" as a major obstacle to awakening, and the root of many other consequential delusions. One of these delusions is the realist belief in an objective reality existing independently of human experience. For instance, by asserting that the social reality exists inherently as brute facts external to and coercive of actors, it denies that human experience has any relevance to or influence on the social reality, or even any existence at all.[25] The delusion of inherent existence is deeply ingrained in our intellectual world and daily practices. It has also been embedded in the dominant stream of the social sciences since their beginning.

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[25] Durkheim, in 1895/1964:xliii (*The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: Free Press), argues that social facts are to be treated as things, which "cannot be conceived by purely mental activity"; they require for their conception "data from outside the mind."

Sociologically speaking, it is important to point out that what *Madhyamika* negates is not the socially constructed reality but our clinging to it as substantially real. Thus, it is not the views or practices of social conventions as such which are refuted by *sunyata* but rather our attachment to them, our misconceptions with respect to them. *Sunyata* does not denounce the conditioned, relative social world; it only denies our mistaking of it as absolute. Furthermore, the conditioned social relations and processes do not vanish when its true *sunya*-nature is realized. It is rather the condition of possibility of "the social." Similarly, social theories themselves, as knowledge and conceptual framework, cannot immune from the state of emptiness, because it is the only condition of the possibility of any explanation and interpretation of the social. Only by so doing, our theoretical reification can be overcome.

Conversely, differing from the aforementioned positive perspective, we can also state that there is no arising and no cessation. Even though we just realized from the previous discussion that arising and cessation are the resulting characteristics of emptiness, which have no inherent existence in processes. All phenomena are always impermanent and thereby are in the process of arising and cessation. However, most people habitually concentrate on arising in the substantialist sense. They think that the world and life are the reality of a continuous existence. *Sunyata*, in opposition to that, promotes the value of a continuous cessation. Nevertheless, this cessation does not imply that it ceases to exist anymore either. Instead, a continuous cessation of arising and cessation of cessation is just a state rather than an essence in the continuous processes of phenomena. Everything ceases to arise as one state of existence makes cessation the home of all existence, and the foundation for all activities so to speak. In other words, *Madhyamika* philosophy claims that all things arise and cease out of emptiness and do not arise and cease out of fixed substance or dead non-existence.

All social phenomena do not exist as things in themselves or cease as annihilation in itself due to their ultimately empty of inherent existence and non-existence. All social phenomena arise and cease relationally in dependence on other phenomena, which are themselves empty of essence and dependently related to other phenomena and so on. Therefore, as in social research, no matter how thorough or empirical we search and observe, no phenomenon can ever be found which is substantial as a "thing-in-itself."

Let us look, then, at the various meanings of emptiness.

First, emptiness does not obstruct the dependent arising of things. Emptiness permeates everything everywhere in the social world, but it does not obstruct social phenomena anywhere. Emptiness has no essence in itself therefore it does not reify anything from their constant arising and ceasing. All sociological concepts, such as social institutions, structures, organizations, groups and so on, are not static nouns corresponding to their referent objects. Their real state is like a verb in the continual process of arising and ceasing, like the process of institutionalization/ de-institutionalization/ re-institutionalization, structuring/ de-structuring/ re-structuring, organizing/ dis-organizing/ re-organizing, grouping/ de-grouping/ re-grouping. All these social phenomena are evolving with no inherent essence, in other words, no eternally given elements behind social institutions, structures, organizations and groups that is ever possible. Only if social phenomena are lack of inherent essence can that social dynamics be possible. The emptiness deconstructs any obstruction that might be presumed by people or social scientists as substantial and unchanged, such as the concept of "the self" and "the social."

Second, emptiness is equal everywhere. It has no preference for one person or society over another person or society. We cannot say that some parts of social phenomena have inherent essence and some don't. For the blending of substance and emptiness is not comprehensible, due to the contradiction and incompatibility between independent-inherent existence and relational-processual existence. Conventionally speaking, some social phenomena appear to be more stable and "solid" and thereby change more slowly, or latently. But even so, they are still empty of inherent essence and arise dependently. On the other hand, some social phenomena seem to be more transitory and liquid-like and thus alter more rapidly, or manifestly. Nonetheless, they are still conditioned by other relational conditions and do not arise or cease independently and permanently. No matter how structurally conditioned the social phenomena are, their emptiness is equal everywhere. Therefore, the structurality of various social phenomena cannot be explained by the degree of emptiness. We cannot say that some social phenomena enjoy more emptiness while others receive less. Their emptiness is equal. Their difference of structurality is just a matter of the relative difference of their conditions, or dependent co-arising.

Finally, emptiness has no identifiable self-nature. According to *dGe-lugs-pa* interpretation, the "emptiness of emptiness" consists in the fact that "when a phenomenon is not found by a valid cognition which analyzes the ultimate that does not mean that [such a valid cognition finds] the nonexistence of that phenomenon.

This follows because a phenomenon's not being verified by a certain valid cognition does not imply that that valid cognition perceives that phenomenon to be nonexistent."[26] Therefore, the emptiness of emptiness implies the impossibility of positively identifying anything that could answer to the description of a phenomenon's "emptiness." Hence, we cannot possibly find anything that makes our explanations possible, not even the "nonexistence" of anything. As we have discussed before, emptiness has no essence-in-itself we therefore shouldn't presume something called emptiness that deconstructs everything else but sustains itself. Because this presumption is self-contradictory, which, while negating others' existence, exempts its own existence as an exception. That is why, in order to avoid this kind of nihilistic extreme, it is important to stress the emptiness of its own emptiness in the meantime. We must negate its own nature and abandon all attachments to it.

Sociologically speaking, when we conceptualize the ideas of de-institutionalization, deconstruction, disorganization and so forth, we realize the impermanence of social phenomena, but we cannot say that these referred social phenomena are destroyed by emptiness or disappeared into emptiness. Emptiness is not like an abyss that draws things into bottomless hole with no return. In actuality, social phenomena are not annihilated by or hidden in emptiness, they are just changed or ceased co-dependently due to the shift of their conditions, and they are in the mean time arising co-dependently. Therefore, conventionally speaking, due to the fundamental emptiness of things and emptiness itself, social phenomena must cease and in some sense arise constantly, either gradually or rapidly, and thereby make possible the dependent co-arising of its derived consequences, probably another re-institutionalization, reconstruction or reorganization. With these understandings, we can say that emptiness is somehow the flip side of dependent co-arising.

The notion of *sunyata* of the middle way perspective inspires us that in practicing sociology we must first abandon the inquiry to the "essence" of social reality or the "real" meaning and "true" causal relationship. Weber rightly illustrated this view, revealed in his sociology of religion, whose social inquiry focuses only on the social conditions and effects, not on the essence. " The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social action." (1968:339)[27] Quite divergent from this, according to the notion of

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[26] This is the statement of mKhas-grubdge-logs-dpal-bzang-po, in Jose Cabezon, trans, *A Dose of Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the sTong thun chen mo of mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 100.
[27] Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society*. Edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. New York: Bedminster

sunyata, Marx's inquiry of the "essence" of empirical reality is erroneous. Society for Marx, for instance, is the essence of human beings: "The human essence of nature exists only for social man. Society is therefore the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature." (1844)[28] Furthermore, in his later writing, he presupposes that material forces of production as the "real" basis of the "essence" of human beings: "This sum of productive forces, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as substance and essence of man " (1978:165).[29] The middle way perspective decisively rejects such Marxian presumption of social scientific knowledge, which asserts the essence of social reality.

All phenomena exist solely in dependence on other phenomena, which are themselves empty and dependently related to other phenomena and so on. No matter how deeply or far back we search, no phenomenon can ever be found which is essential or a "thing-in-itself." Neither the observer nor any observed phenomenon exist independently, but are inextricably intertwined. This viewpoint is known as dependent relationship. From this perspective, we can say that human beings and human societies are empty of self-essence and do not exist independently, and thereby are interdependent and interweaving. And unless we can recognize the ongoing arising and ceasing of all social phenomena, manifestly or latently, we can never truly understand the reality of the self, the social and their historical change. Apparently, this viewpoint implies another important notion in *Madhyamika*, which is known as *Pratitya-samutpada* (Dependent co-arising), conditioned relations and process so to speak.

1.2 *Pratitya-samutpada* (Dependent co-arising)

> Something that is not dependently arisen, such a thing does not exist. Therefore a nonempty thing does not exist. (XXIV. 19)

> Those who see dependent arising will see the dharma; those who see the dharma will see dependent arising.[30]

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[28] Marx, Karl. 1844. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

[29] 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. (2nd. Ed.). Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

[30] This is Buddha's saying, Quoted in Gadjin M Nagao. *Madhyamika and Yogacara*. New York: State

The root *i* means motion; the preposition *prati* means the arrival or attainment. But the addition of a preposition alters the meaning of the root. So, in this case, the word *pratitya*, as gerund, means the "attained" in the sense of relying, depending and meeting conditionally or relatively. The verbal root *pad* (to go) is preceded by the preposition *samut* (*out of*) means arising or becoming manifest. Hence, the full meaning of the *pratitya-samutpada* is that which arises, or becomes manifest in reliance upon conditions, in dependence upon conditions, meeting through the force of causal conditions (*pratyayas*).[31] *Pratitya-samutpada* has been translated in such various ways as, "causal chain," "chain of causation," "causal genesis," "dependent origination," "theory of twelve causes," "relational origination," "conditioned origination," "dependently-coordinated-origination," and "dependent co-arising" etc. In this dissertation I choose the last translation for our use.

If emptiness is said to be the mode of subsistence of all phenomena, it is because of the working of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising is seen as the supporting condition for emptiness. In comparison with *Sunyata*, the notion of *Pratitya-samutpada* is a relatively more positive aspect in *Madhyamika*. If emptiness was the latent condition of possibility of phenomena, then dependent co-arising is the manifest descriptions of the condition. They are like the ontic as well as epistemic condition of universe, humankind, social formations and individuals. Therefore, dependent co-arising is without a doubt of supreme importance for Nagarjuna, no wonder he started his *karika* with a dedicatory verse that took dependent co-arising at the center of his homage of the Buddha.[32] Nagarjuna explicitly equates "*sunyata*" and dependence in the form of *pratityasamutpada* not in order to argue that dependent things are non-existent and therefore empty, but to argue that emptiness expresses the dependent nature of all things. Thus, everything exists insofar as it is dependent.

The core of all formulations of the middle way perspective is the mutual interdependence and interweaving of phenomena. Every phenomenal thing is at once both conditioning and conditioned by others. Likewise, every thing is immediately an effect and a cause. However, causality cannot be transcendental, there is no universal law of cause-and-effect independent of the relation and process of an empirical world.

University of New York Press, 1991:104.

[31] Candrakirti offers a very detailed articulation of the connotation of *pratitya-samutpada*. Please see Mervyn Sprung. *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters of the Prasannapada of Candrakirti*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979.

[32] Dedicatory Verses states: "I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha, the best of teachers, who taught that whatever is dependently arisen is unceasing, unborn, unannihilated, not permanent, not coming, not going, without distinction, without identity, and free from conceptual construction." Garfield, 1995:2.

Therefore, there is only a relative "before" and "after," only relative causal sequence. On the one hand nothing is independently existent, and on the other hand nor is there any other higher force external to and dominating the relations and process. In contrast to some commonsense and social scientific misconceptions with detecting external and dominating prime causes against which causal sequence could be deployed, *Madhyamika* stresses recognition of relations and process of contingency. The conditions and consequences of occurring things are sustained by their own interdependence.

The Sociological Implication of Pratitya-samutpada

Sociologically speaking, both individual and society cannot have independent existence. Nor can society be a transcendental force external to and coercive of individuals, and vice versa. Society and individuals arise through relations and conditions, and as such are said not to exist from their own side in some separate way. Since no thing exists on its own, no thing is sufficient in itself. Also, society and individuals, as verbally imputed concepts by social sciences, find no correspondence between them (their concepts) and their assumed substantiality. Similarly, causal relationship between them (cause and effect in substantialist sense) starting from either directions are also illusory. They are, rather, depending on each other. Some theories in social sciences seem to offer a perspective of dependent co-arising by proposing interactionist approach, but their intent was not successful. They understood the interaction to mean the interplay of relations between two or more substantial and discrete things, in which whose independent entities still sustains the temporal succession and remain intact. Since each element has its independent and inherent existence, they must be self-sufficient and self-subsist without any relation and process. Talking about the interaction between unrelated elements and the process of temporally given things are paradoxical. According to *madhyamika*, substantiality and relatedness are incompatible.

From the true perspective of dependent co-arising, things do not independently produce or cause others to happen, they condition each other's occurrence by being in the background, locus or context, and, in so doing, are interacted. There is mutuality between them, a reciprocal dynamic. People who still hold the substantialistic view do not realize that the dependent co-arising of social phenomena is only relatively real instead they see it as describing the interactions between always already existed elements. Thus, we must be radically aware of that as long as the substantialistic

assumption remains unaffected, however subtle or minor it is. Dependent co-arising implies there can be absolutely nothing whatsoever that is real or eternal behind this phenomenal world and beyond the interdependence of everything. Because of that mutuality all existences are fundamentally empty of own-being. In a relational-processual understanding of social phenomena, there is recognition of continual flow and thus radical impermanence of all things, as well as the continual interlocking of various conditions in a context of the relevant social occurrence. No social feature, whether material or conceptual, is then aloof from change. Factors of social existence are mutually conditioning/conditioned, providing occasion and context for each other's emergence and subsiding. Unless we hold the middle way perspective, that is, viewing the emptiness of inherent existence of things, and the relatedness and mutuality of their transaction process, we can never have a right view of dependent co-arising in the social sciences. From the middle way perspective, the constitution of society and the formation of self are both dependent upon the relational-processual arising of other conditions which are also constituted by other intricate relations and processes and have no independent essence, exteriorly or interiorly, of their own. The main fallacy in thinking of things as independent is own-being (*svabhava*), or self-nature (*atman*). Anything that is dependently arisen, Nagarjuna said, must be empty without own-being.

The social sciences have always been concerned about the tragic or paradoxical condition of human existence in the form of alienation, anomie, "iron cage" or reification and so forth. The Buddhist middle way response is to recognize that human suffering is caused by the interplay of factors, and especially by the delusion, aversion, and craving of people toward things that arise from their misapprehension and attachment of them as substantially fixed and attribute to them physicality or essence. Human suffering in turn can be understood as a result of reifying and clinging to what is by nature contingent, relational, transitional and transient. According to the middle way perspective, I suggest, all things, especially linguistic objects, are dependently contingent and have no inherent and independent existence. Sociologically speaking, all objects are socially contingent.

Ironically, some social theories themselves are not immune from reifying and clinging to what is by nature empty of inherent and independent existence. Their theoretical assumptions are thereby flawed by substantialistic and metaphysical fallacies. The perspective of dependent co-arising can therefore help to overcome all metaphysical fallacies in the social sciences, particularly the problem concerning causality. For

example Marx deterministically reduces social phenomena into the general causal law of material production: "religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only particular modes of production, and fall under its general law." (1867)[33] Marx's quest for the "ultimate" cause presupposes the materialistic stance: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their beings, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." (1978, 4)[34]

However, the middle way notion of *pratitya-samutpada*, I contend, is resolute that various factors of social phenomena do not engender each other as in linear causality. According to Nagarjuna, causality is neither rationally nor empirically verifiable. For the *Madhyamikas*, the concept of causality as the cosmic principle or reality of all things is as untenable as the concept of "determining causal law." Thus, *Madhyamikas* accept neither transcendental nor positivistic justification of the principle of causality. The objective causal law governing the constituents of the world can be stated and known only from the standpoint of conventional truth and which is useful and insightful to some extent. However, if we try to detect substantially what a causal relation really is, we will be perplexed. Nagarjuna contends that it is impossible to explain the relationship between a cause and an effect and to relate entities. A view of causation leads to certain inconsistencies and absurdities.

Historically speaking, according to the principle of *pratitya-samutpada* the pursuit of the origins or telos is substantialist and thereby perplexed. Foucault also expresses this insight while articulating his genealogy through the elaboration of why Nietzsche challenges the pursuit of origin (*Ursprung*). For Foucault the quest for the historical origin is essentialist:

> "because it is an attempt to capture the exact, and pure, [transhistorical, immanent] essence of things," it assumes a world of forms preexisting the world of accident and succession i.e., history… "But he who listens to history finds that things have no pre-existing essence, or an essence fabricated piecemeal from alien forms." (78)[35]

In actuality, not the "inviolable identity of their origin" but the emptiness and the dependent co-arising of beginninglessness of things that counts. The middle way

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[33] 1867. Capital.
[34] 1978. The Marx-Engels Reader.
35 Rabinow, Paul, *The Foucault Reader,* ed. By Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books 1984), 78.

perspective would agree with Foucault's criticism of the pursuit of origin. As he stated:

> The 'origin' makes possible a field of knowledge whose end is to recover the origin, but as a thing lost, fleetingly to be glimpsed, and creating a sense that truth and truthful discourse can coincide. But history reveals 'origins' in a proliferation of errors. What truth is "is the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it has hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history." (79)

A middle way perspective, like genealogy, will never confuse itself with a quest for historical origins or telos but will cultivate the understanding of contingencies and openness that accompany every moment of dependent co-arising.

In contrast to the essentialist concern with detecting prime causes against which effects could be arbitrarily anticipated, *pratitya-samutpada* stresses recognition of circuits of contingency. The factors of concern are sustained by their dependent co-arising. Sociologically, how is the causal explanation possible? Since the intricacy and contingency of social phenomena cannot be exhaustively recognized, due to numerous causes and conditions, which are always infinite and there is nothing in the things themselves to set some of them apart as alone meriting notice, we cannot thus substantially affirm a true causal explanation of them. But it is also unfeasible to positivistically perceive a complex of countless individual events and to make a factual judgment about things without any conception or pre-judgment. Even if this kind of perception is possible, a closer examination of every single perception, we realize only an infinite number of constituent perceptions that can never be exhaustively described in a judgment. Therefore, a "real" causal explanation out of our direct perception is not tenable.

Does it mean that we can never conduct any kind of causal explanation? Isn't this methodologically too nihilistic? In actuality, one of sociology's main trusts, in addition to interpretative understanding and critical reflection, is the causal explanation of the conditions and consequences of social events. I would argue that sociological causal explanation is possible only if we take into account the *pratitya-samutpada* of things. Things influence each other's arising by providing background, occasion or context. In so doing they in turn are affected through a mutuality or reciprocal dynamics. The emergence of social phenomena arises not from particular causes but from the relatedness between various conditions. Therefore,

etiology, the doctrine of origination, genesis and some historicism (like historical materialism) are overcome because there is no absolute beginning or first cause traceable and discernible in the social sciences, rather, there is only a temporally indeterminate welling up of mutually conditioned conditions. Similarly, teleology, and other forms of eschatology is transcended because, since the development of history is still open, indeterminate, and conditioned by numerous conditions, the ultimate end of history is unpredictable and untenable. Teleology reduces history to a non-history since the end is already inscribed in the process. Out of emptiness, dependent co-arising and verbal construction in temporal process, there is no final point of history sensible in the social sciences. Those which arise dependently, are free of inherent existence and independent origin. Likewise, those which ceased dependently, are free of predestined ultimate effect.

Generally speaking, *pratityasamutpada* is not a strict causality principle or a simple causation theory. It is not a universal law or a formula that govern the order or the structure of the world or the individual. In actuality, it only depicts the multifaceted dependent or relational arising of ordinary experiential process, that is, how events come and go or arise and subside.

In the meantime, since causal imputation of social-historical occurrences is a mentally effected construct. Our conceptual schemes are brought into the chaos of perceptions, but only a part of them is interesting and significant to us, because it is related to the evaluative framework of our time and horizon with which we approach reality. Only certain aspects of the countless experiences or infinitely complex phenomena are therefore knowable or perceivable. Under such circumstances, some social researches may make a "meaningful" causal explanation of the phenomena. But, again, an exhaustive causal explanation of any concrete phenomena in its full reality is not only practically impossible it is simply meaningless. Social research conceives only those conditions and consequences to which are to be interpreted in the individual event, the "meaningful" aspects of it. The question of causality in this context is not a question of universal laws but of relatively dependent and particular relationships. It is neither a total inclusion of all events under some general axioms whereby each event is seen as a proof. It is rather a question of interpretation as a consequence of some culturally significant complex of cause and conditions, or dependent co-arising.

Moreover, dependent co-arising is more than just about the observable or identifiable phenomena, which are only the few focuses out of unobservable and unidentifiable

background. Social sciences try hard to observe or identify causes, logics and structures of social phenomena, but hermeneutically speaking, the dependent co-arising of the social, is more than what empirical and analytical approaches can think of. Our background horizon is the condition of possibility of our knowledgeability. It is therefore pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic to us that is in turn unidentifiable. Thus, both subjectivism and objectivism in social sciences are flawed by their illusion of the identifiability of things. Social scientists should humbly admit the limit of their social research and theoretical reasoning. The dependent co-arising of the social, in turn, may be related in ways that are not obvious at first, until some of them, still only small portion of them, become manifest and recognizable by our consciousness. According to the middle way perspective, all phenomena (including the social) are impermanent in continual flux, but some of their causes and conditions are obvious when most of them are not. That is why the unacknowledged conditions and unanticipated consequences of social actions are always the concern of some reflexive social theorists. Nagarjuna's *madhyamika* is useful to remind social scientists that all propositions regarding a subject or object in the substantialistic sense are not essentially real. The supposed persistent existence of things depends not on some property of substantiality, but entirely on the social contingency of reality. They are dependently real and related to numerous conditions and consequences in continual flux.

1.3 *Praj-napti* (Verbal designation)

As quoted above: "Empty should not be asserted. Nonempty should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. They are only used nominally." Indeed, according to the middle way perspective, *sunyata* is used nominally as *praj-napti*. If we investigate the "core" of all things, we will realize that everything is conditioned and has empirical names. Those empirical names are provisional concepts as our thought constructs for describing the dependent arising of reality. Actually, the word "reality" is derived from the roots "thing" (*res*) and "think" (*revi*). "Reality" means whatever you can think about, and thereby assign a name to. This is not "that-which-is." No thought-construct can capture "reality" in the sense of "that-which-is." Things have no permanent identity and are empty of inherent and independent existence, and are dependently arisen in relation to our culturally effected knowing and naming. Unless we notice them and identify them perceptually or conceptually out of our cognitive continuum we cannot get to know the existence of things. In other words, the condition of possibility of the existence of things is

dependent on this noticing in the first place and naming accordingly. The concept of verbal designation (*praj-napti*) provides a way of handling cognitive abstracts without concretizing them, or assigning substantial value to them. This understanding of the process of nominal abstraction is perhaps the greatest achievement of the middle way perspective. It transcends the substantialist belief that all the parts of a true statement must be true knowledge corresponding to existent objects.

Things are dependent for their designation upon the collection of whatever designated. For example, one of the material basis of designation for a nation's flag is a piece of cloth, which is itself composed of numerously interweaved threads and thereby without self-nature of something called "flag." The image of flag at present must be perceived or conceived by specific viewers with their value-relevance, and it also depends upon what has caused it to occur, such as the social-historical process of collective representation that makes meaningful and intelligible the symbolic representation of the flag. Some might think that there ought to be something out there (like the flag), or someone, or institution, which prevents the substantial world from being so much depend upon our judgment. Instead of asserting any such kind of positive assertion concerning the essence of things, Nagarjuna indicates that any such substantialist thesis is incoherent. Rather, our nominal conventions and our conceptual frameworks can never be justified by identifying their correspondence to an independent reality. In actuality, what deems to be real is conditioned and thereby depends upon our value-laden conventions. Therefore, in the last instance, since reality depends on our value-relevance, it is impossible to capture coherently a reality independent of nominal conventions, or verbal designations. In this sense, an entity does not exist by its own nature as being a basis in itself for the verbal designations we apply to them. A national flag is not substantially a flag it is rather collectively imputed as a sacred symbol for verbal and conceptual designation by virtue of relational-processual dynamics of collective representation. "Essence" and "particularity" of the national flag is often imaginatively attributed to entities, in which some people die for it while some identify it as the equivalence of the "essence" and "particularity" of the nation. Actually, the formation of national flag is dependently arisen from the imputation of the name-as the signifier- to the conceptual form perceived-as a signified. These names and concepts ascribed to the objects (in this case, a piece of colored cloth), which seem to be "inherently established" through their intrinsic substance, are actually conventionally constructed. The establishment of a nation's flag to be self-identical with a piece of cloth in the sense of substantialism is thereby false. This ascription of sacredness of a nation's symbol to a piece of cloth

is relevant to a historically specific process of collective representation. It is this social process that makes a particular symbol and its attached material object meaningful and transcendental. Therefore, their "transcendental" existent characteristics are the effects of the imputation of people's collective representation. The process of collective representation and mental imputation can be possible if and only if they are empty of inherent existence and arisen co-dependently.

To say of a thing that it is dependently arisen is to say that its identity is nothing more than being the referent of a verbal designation and a conventional perception. To isolate an element of the national flag (whether it is a material form, symbolic representation, states-of-mind, nation) as existent independently and inherently is to take a first step towards conceptually reifying that element. Each of these elements shows their significance and meaning through their interweaving process and they are also constituted by states-of-mind, verbal designation and discourse, which are dependent more or less on our explanatory interests and value judgment. The meaningful verbal designation and discourse of empirical reality is only possible in relation to our interest and value relevance. Without relating to them, a mental ordering of things regarding social objects does not make sense. One's inquired reality must be related to one's value-relevance to make the order of things sensible.

Nevertheless, people's habitual perception of things (such as the flag) as self-sufficient entity, which bears their own essential characteristics independently of our perception and conception, is still a fundamental distortion in the cognitive process that generates reified binary oppositions. For example, people are used to applied us/them, sacred/ profane, good/evil, right/wrong, reason /unreason and superior/inferior format in their daily practice. A binary opposition is a pair of opposites, which structuralists consider as cognitive mechanism to powerfully form and organize human thought and culture. Some are commonsense, such as raw/cooked; however, many opposites, as those pairs we just mentioned, imply or are used in such a way that privileges one of terms of the opposition, creating hierarchy. This can be in English with white/black, where black is used as a sign of darkness, danger, evil, etc., and white as purity, goodness, and so on. Similarly, the concepts like "us," "sacred," "good," "right," "reason" and "superior" are usually privileged and associated with dominator. And yet "them," "profane," "evil," "wrong," "unreason" and "inferior" are underprivileged and linked with dominated.

What the middle way perspective can do is to recognize the dependent co-arising of the working of binary oppositions in ordinary or academic languages and then demonstrating how these languages are empty of essence and whereby negating the hierarchy and substantiality asserted or implied by the opposites. From the middle way perspective, the ultimate core of all social distinctions and their contents are emptiness, which is pervasive in numerous networks of interdependent and continuous processes and they are only recognized by us through expedient provisional names and classification at the level of relative, or conventional truth. The working of verbal designation is to make an object or individual distinguishable from other objects or individuals; their characteristics are only conventionally valid. Upon seeking the essence of the object, the individual and their classificatory mechanism, one will not find anything that really is exactly that essence. Emptiness is actually a negation of the inherently existent essence, but not an attempt to negate the phenomena as nominal and relative existences that we perceive or conceive.

Therefore, the principle of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada* does not limit to the observation of objective phenomena, it must at once also apply to verbal designation. The constituents of discourse, no different than other phenomena, are brought into manifestation in the same way—they have neither ontological nor empirical independence, but can only arise and be defined in relation to other constituents. If all concepts or words are dependently arisen, then they are not arisen independently, on their own. If not arisen on their own, then they cannot be asserted to exist on their own. They must rather arise in a relational-processual context, through which the conceptual binary opposites are related and interdependent. If any one of them becomes independently existent without relative context, they will immediately become unrealizable by our cognition anymore and thereby become non-existent at once. The paradox is unsolvable unless we abandon the possibility of both extremes (existence and non-existence) immediately and accept the relatedness and conditionality of concepts and words.

Non-duality Between Ontology and Epistemology Again

The traditional paradigm of modern scientific metaphysics draws a sharp line between epistemology, what is known, and ontology, what exists. From the middle way perspective, this is less of a clear and distinct line. What is known and what exists are dynamically interrelated. Even in the West, since Kant, there is a strong case to argue that epistemology encompasses ontology, i.e. that there is only a 'known reality' to us,

and that philosophizing on ontological issues cannot establish the nature of reality independent of a human 'knower'. The perceivers, or conceivers, must have been perceiving/perceived, or conceiving/conceived of something, in the sense that its existence relies on people's knowledge. Otherwise, if we are completely oblivious of it, then as a practical matter it doesn't exist for us. Substantialists assume that if an object exists, it exists absolutely, whether we know it or not. However, the insight of dependent co-arising implies the relational and processual character of its existence, which is at once the emptiness of its inherent and independent substance. In other words, an object has no self-nature. Its existence in our mind as a conceptualized object is the condition of its existence. Without this condition, the existence of the object won't be sensible.

Also, the knowers and the knowledge they have concerning the object, as part of the conditions of possibility of the existence of the object, have no self-nature either. One of the reasons why we are able constantly learning things is because of the emptiness of our stock of knowledge. We don't have any innate or fixed knowledge of the world, not even the schemes of perception, conception, and appreciation are of our own. As a practical matter, we are constantly learning to know things. If we do not know about some things, maybe somebody (such as our significant others) will tell us about it sooner or later, or maybe we will learn about it through other more anonymous medium. If significant amount of people know about something that something is thus relatively and adequately exists in spite of my personal unknowing. This is a notion in which the commonsensical world is made possible. As we are born into the world filled with others, we have continual contact and interaction with the others. However, if nobody in our community knows of something, then it does not exist at all. The commonsensical world is actually our ontological condition, which Gadamer calls "horizon," which is the constitutive of our experience. In other words, our experience is always already part of the communal experience. Our knowledge is also based on the communal-ontological working that provides us with the basis on which we can build knowledge. Whereas, there is no essence in communal-ontology, ontology depends on intersubjective epistemology that is at the relatedness of the community, not the isolated individual experience.

The Sociological Implication of Praj-napti

When we say that the existence of a social fact appears totally objective and does not require the participation of our mental imputation, it seems true at least to the material

social facts. A monument for instance appears hard-and-fast in front of us. But even so we still can deconstruct their substantiality and thereby disclose their relatedness to human mental imputation. The grounds of a monument could be the geological processes which produced stone, iron or copper ores. But it couldn't be built without the efforts of the miners, metalworkers, sculptors, designers, component manufacturers, architect and so forth. Unless some people happen to participate in one of these professions to transform the raw material into the finished work, the shaped mode of existence of the monument cannot so exist. Moreover, the materiality of the monument must stand for something meaningful and symbolic, either in memory of a person, event, etc. In some cases, it can be an enduring evidence or notable example of interest for its historical significance. It is usually built, preserved and maintained by a particular social agency. Most importantly, a monument is designed as a meaningful object to serve as a memorial or reminder of something worth to be honored or commemorated.

Therefore, people's constant commemorating activities must be one of the crucial parts of the monument's meaningful existence. Of course, in a way, the perception of the monument depends on its materiality, but it is not an independent and inherent existence. Its existence is very much more conditioned by how people choose to define, shape and commemorate it. In other words, it relies on our value-loaded mental imputation and symbolic designation. This is another example of the emptiness of social facts, and the dependent co-arising of its nominal, conventional existence. We might have rich memories relevant to the monument and our memories of that monument must constitute a web of memory-complex. In other words, the memory is value-loaded in every detail and there is no independent physical essence about my knowledge of that memory-complex. Some might acknowledge that social demand for establishing a monument caused the builders to create a physical object to meet the demand. It that sense, social demand was a prior condition of such object. Indeed, social demand is a phenomenon of social conceptualization, not a material thing.

Immanuel Kant in the Western context introduced the idea that what we experience as reality is actually conditioned by our concepts and categories. However Kant's notion of these conceptions and categories is understood as stable and transcendent. From the middle way perspective, there are no such grounding kind of conceptions, or categories that Kant held to be *a priori*. Nagarjuna's idea of *Praj-napti* (Verbal

designation), or mental conception and category, is changeable and empty of any transcendental fixation, and driven by the conditions of dependent co-arising.

Likewise, the conceptualization and categorization of social phenomena by social scientists are in actuality shaped and driven by conditions of which we are embedded with and within, conditions of which we feel significant and meaningful. In other words, our conceptualization and categorization are socially constructed and full of context-bound value relevance. As Weber contends with regard to the formation of meaningful knowledge: "Without the investigator's value-ideas, there would be no principle of selection of subject-matter and no meaningful knowledge of the concrete reality." (1949:82)[36] A selection of social facts is influenced by researcher's value-laden background. Every selection has been mentally imputed and symbolically designated according to his/her contextual value-orientation. The assumption of social facts as such existing independently is therefore self-deception: "If the notion that those standpoints [cultural values] can be derived from the facts themselves continually recurs, it is due to the naïve self-deception of the specialist who is unaware that it is due to the value-ideas." (1949:82)[37] This is undoubtedly in opposition to Durkheim's presupposition that there are "social facts as things," which hold " an independent existence outside the individual consciousness." (Durkheim, 1938: 30)[38]

Many social scientists are reluctant to admit that their observations and theories concerning social phenomena are merely nominal. They try to find the essence of the phenomena, whether it can be taken as social entity, social structure, national spirit, civilization and so on. According to the middle way perspective, one should admit that it is not possible to find anything substantial in itself conceptualized by the empirical researches and theoretical frameworks of social sciences. The existence of things is actually a conceptualization, and the nature of that conceptualization changes through temporal process. This would seem to say that there is no reality, which serves as a variable holding the name of some object to be. What it really means is that if social scientists try to find and grasp something substantial, they will work in vain. There is no substance that can be found in the basis of nominal designation, none outside of the basis of nominal designation. The mind has to participate by

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[36] Weber, Max. 1949. "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.
[37] Ibid.
[38] 1938. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Translated. By Sarah Solvey and John Muellet. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press

applying analytical effort to generate the view of existence. This is exactly what Weber means concerning the relation between scientific knowledge and the dependent arising of social reality.

> It is not the "actual" interconnections of "things" but the conceptual interconnections of problems which define the scope of the various sciences. A new "science" emerges where new problems are pursued with new methods and truths are thereby discovered which open up significant new points of view.[39]

For Weber, the social world of human beings is divided into analytical slices: economic, political, or religious motivations or ideals in general are equally detectable in the behavior of individuals, while the disciplinary question is no more than a strategic tool useful to scientific activity and empty of any claim to ontological or substantial precedence. Every conceptual interconnection of problems and analytical slices cannot escape from its nominal presumption. Even a simple extract from of a historical documentary reflects the presumption of the document's writer. There is thus no description without presumption. As Weber pointed out that it is unacceptable to assume that " the knowledge of historical reality can or should be a presuppositionless copy of objective facts." (1949: 92) "All knowledge of cultural reality, as may be seen, is always knowledge from particular points of view." (1949:81) This view tackles the self-deception of the advocates of objectivism who "unconsciously approaches his subject matter, that he has selected from an absolute infinity a tiny portion with the study of which he concerns himself." (Weber, 1949:82)[40] Yet the objectivist insists that the existence of objects does not depend on human knowledge. Ontology is thus utterly non-contingent on social epistemology in objectivism. In fact, this presumption strains our ability to practice interpretative understanding. According to the notion of *sunyata* there is no such existence that is absolutely non-contingent.

By doing social research, empirically or theoretically, there is something social occurring in the evaluative framework of researchers' mental structure shaped by a long-term disciplinary training. This evaluative framework is so weightily ingrained that it cannot be proved by scientific means, but it is to some extent a belief or conviction. There is usually no room to prove its universal validity. But throughout the dependent co-arising process, we transliterate and verbalize our evaluative

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[39] Weber, Max. 1949. "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, p.68. New York: Free Press.
[40] Ibid.

presumption and judgment into words. Then the association of words in the writing transforms our sense perception into conception, and then into theory. The theory will be presented or published by us, and thereby received responses from the relevant scientific community. Throughout the dialogue among colleagues, we might modify our theory and solidify it. Eventually some kind of consensus regarding the theory might be established and becomes the evaluative framework of the discipline. In the mean time, lay people relevant to the social occurrence may have the chance to read or learn about the theory. Whether they agree or disagree, their attitudes and behavior toward the occurrence must be, more or less, different from their previous practice, in which the consideration of the current theoretical judgment did not exist. Moreover, after this dynamic process between lay people and social scientists, the subsequent social occurrence will be definitely influenced by this process and thus, to some extent, different from the occurrence of the previous moment. Unless researchers can sense this dynamic circularity and constantly modify their theory accordingly their research will be outdated and deviate from the social occurrence they study.

However, since absolute simultaneity between theory formation and social occurrences is not feasible, the one-to-one correspondence between them is therefore impossible. The pursuing of correctness or precision in social research is basically delusory. The dynamic spiral between social occurring (praxis) and knowledge formation (theory) must both be empty of inherent and independent existence and arise co-dependently. The conventional truth in terms of conceptual scheme must be fundamentally non-substantial. That is why any kind of own-being view or metaphysical presence is particularly hindering. We are thus in the position of making conventional knowledge always as a provision of the particular tradition, or horizon, in which reality is perceived.

Moreover, a nominal convention or verbal designation could have a slightly or vastly different meaning to every person who encounters it due to his/her particular perspective, evaluative framework or background. In addition to that, the dependence on the words surrounding it makes things even more complicated. If every person who reads the writing understands words differently, then every sentence is understood differently, and there can be no claim about the correct or precise meaning of the writing. If everyone (including the lay person) reading it gets a different meaning, how can it be inherently existent, meaning something from its own side? No, it cannot; the meaning must be perspectival and context-bounded. Again, according to the middle way perspective, all phenomena exist by dependence on other phenomena,

which are themselves dependently related to other phenomena and so on. No matter how deeply or how far back we search, no phenomenon can ever be found which is substantial or a thing-in-itself. This principle also applies to the observer and any verbal designation. Neither the observer nor any verbal designation exists independently, but are inextricably intertwined.

In general, there is no unmediated knowledge of "reality." Knowledge is a social-mental construction mediated by symbols. What we know are signs, which are empty of any inner or transcendental essence, which are dependently arisen. Therefore, there is neither the knowledge of essence, nor the essence of knowledge, but only of mentally imputed and symbolically mediated knowledge of reality. Even our knowing of our mental experience is empty and dependently arisen, and is thus mediated knowing. There is no "pure" knowledge of reality except, as Nagarjuna suggests, conventionally symbolized and mental designated knowledge of reality, which arises dependently upon our interrelated and processual world. It is therefore important to understand empirical sociological knowledge as theory ordering, that is as the conceptual construct of empirical reality. The theoretical ordering of social reality is only possible from certain evaluative frameworks, by which the researcher is motivated. However, they are not substantially real, for there is no substance within our mental functioning and behind empirical appearance. The social sciences' treatment of, or viewpoint concerning any social facts or aspects of social reality shouldn't be verbally definitive, or even metaphysical. Knowledge constitution in terms of verbal designation and nominal convention is, for Nagarjuna, the provisional means of conventional truth in order to understand the ultimate truth. Without relying upon convention, the ultimate truth is not understandable. Without understanding the ultimate truth, human freedom is not attained. Thus, the interdependency between conventional truth and ultimate truth makes our effort to the understanding of ultimate truth promising, and yet the fundamental truth of *sunyata* also highlights the openness and flexibility of our conventional knowledge that undermines any insistence on closure within a given conceptual scheme.

2. From Madhyamika Towards a Non-dualistic, Relational and Processual Way of Thinking

2.1 Non-dualistic Thinking

> …Whatever is dependently arisen is unceasing, unborn, unannihilated, not permanent, nor coming, not going, without distinction, without identity…

> Neither from itself nor from another, nor from both, nor without a cause, does anything whatever, anywhere arise. (I1, p.3)

> … neither an existent nor a nonexistent thing is a condition appropriate. (I6, p.4)

> Suzuki writes: "The power of dichotomizing has made us forgetful of the source in which it preserves its creative potentialities."[41]

The dualistic way of thinking has been misconstrued by many as the only right view since the early age of human civilization. In Plato's thought there is an ultimate dualism of being and becoming, of ideas and matter. Aristotle criticized Plato's attachment of the transcendence of ideas, but he was unable to surpass the dualism of form and matter, and in later metaphysics this dualism takes many forms. For example, in Immanuel Kant there is an epistemological dualism between the passivity of sensation and the spontaneity of the understanding and an ontological dualism between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. Therefore, we can define dualism as: "the use of two irreducible, heterogeneous principles (sometimes in conflict, sometimes complementary) to analyze the knowing process (epistemological dualism) or to explain all of reality or some broad aspect of it (ontological dualism)."

As analyzed previously, the middle way perspective is neither merely ontological nor epistemological, neither substantialist nor nihilistic, or neither existent nor non-existent so to speak. Hence, the "neither-nor" double negation is the basic attitude espoused by the middle way perspective to deconstruct all essentialist, dualistic clinging. By and large, unreflective people tend to think in terms of "either-or" or "both-and" logic instead of "neither-nor." Consequently, they see reality as "either existence or non-existence," that is, "either this or that," or "both this and that." But this is delusory based on false dichotomization or amalgamation. The middle way

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[41] See D.T. Suzuki's " What is Zen?" (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 3.

perspective is ridding us of all kinds of essentialized binary opposition and its conflation. There are no absolute dualisms in the actual world of conditional relativity. The middle way perspective denies the essentialist assumption that the principle of binary opposition is substantial and universal prior to the dependent arising of the concrete, historical and contingent social world. If we stubbornly attach on such dichotomization, or its combination as substantially real, there is no end to the world of wrong views. On the contrary, if we come to realize the truth of the middle way, then contradictions and confusion due to dualistic thinking are overcome.

Its Sociological Implication

Sociologically speaking, all social phenomena in the social world are neither essentially existent nor essentially non-existent, nor both, nor without a cause. According to the middle way perspective, all principles of our social existence are relationally situated and are contingent to the interplay of various conditions, mediated through the nominal conventions. All classificatory schemes and dualities in the social world are historical, contingent and relational rather than substantially established.

The problem with "either-or" way of thinking in the social world is that people tend to reify the provisional frameworks and ignore their socially constructed character. The belief behind these opposites is typically dichotomizing and polarizing: if it's not one it must be the other. When people attach to either this or that, or both this and that, side of the opposites in their social practices, many kinds of illusion, conflict, domination and suffering may emerge. Since the ingrained thought is not only personal, but also collective in actuality, it is difficult to become radically aware of the dichotomized bias of our thinking.

The "neither-nor" thinking is inspiring to us for its not clinging to any essentialized distinction or identity in society. Similarly, social scientists should discard any metaphysical assertion that affirms either substantialist or nihilistic assumption of social theory. The theoretically constructed binary oppositions concerning social relations are just heuristic devices for conducting our understanding of the dependent co-arising of the social world. If we obstinately correspond those taxonomies and theoretical pairs to the social phenomena we analyze, we will not only have perverted the view of society, but probably also do violence to the social world whenever the theory becomes the dominant doctrine of social practices. It is therefore important to

transcend dualistic assumptions in social theory in order to conduct a better understanding of society, or to awaken people from their attachment and derived discontents.

Dualism in the social sciences tends to assume that the society is made up of two elemental categories which are incommensurable. For instance, on the one hand, in a holistic approach, individuals are basically defined as being very much at the receiving end of the social system. According to this view, the individual's position, characteristics, thought and behavior are all determined by the social structure at large. In other words, their social behaviors, relationships, and their very sense of personal identity as human beings are existent not from itself but from another (social structure). The process whereby they are socialized into the society's norms, laws and values appropriate to the role they are to play in society is unidirectional. Social action is thus the mere product and derivative of social structure. The holistic approach regards the reproduction of social relations and practices as a mechanical outcome, rather than as an active co-creative process in the webs of interweaving subjects. On the other hand, in total opposition, the sociology of action conceptualizes social structure and system as the derivative of social action. A social world is deemed to be produced by its members, who are thus asserted as active, purposeful, self-generating beings. The consciousness, intention, belief, interest or preference of individuals are thereby taken as self-caused, spontaneous. Regardless of the contextual conditions whereby individuals are involved with, this approach substantializes the self-nature of the isolated self.

Both of these extremes of social theory is a form of dualism one could call it "epiphenomenalism," which contends that there is only unidirectional causal connection between the realms. Either individual consciousness is just a byproduct of social structure or vice versa. Moreover, "parallelism" would be another kind of dualistic thinking in social sciences which contends that both realms are existent independently of each other. Thus having separate entities, they have no causal connection and have no interaction. Since each realm is self-subsistent the relation between them can never be established. Social structure can thus exists without individuals. In the mean time, individuals can also exist without social structure. The bifurcation between these two and the preservation of the existence of both at the same time are definitely a deviation from the sociological imagination, which stresses the mutuality between society and individuals as condition and consequence of one another.

Indeed, any system of sociological thinking that analyzes social phenomena in terms of two distinct and irreducible principles, such as methodological individualism and methodological holism, subjectivism and objectivism, action theory and structuralism, mind and body, good and evil or universal and particular, can be defined as dualistic. Some people try to favor the one as determining cause, while downplaying the other one as merely a receiving effect. Some insist on the self-sufficiency of one substance (individual or structure) without taking into account the influence of other factors. Some attempt to establish both ends of the opposition, as two discrete elements, as essentially coexisting. A significant flaw that traps dualism is that it is incapable of resolving the rift created between the two opposing elements. Even though many social theorists try hard to build up theories in order to overcome the contradiction between these two realms, as long as they assert the dualistic assumption in the substantialist sense, the efforts of social research will be futile.

By contrast, the rejection of the dualistic logic may lead some logicians or theoreticians to think it one, especially when they are unable to rectify the dualistic flaw. They thereby incline to adopt monism by removing any possibilities of relatedness between the two realms whatsoever, by eliminating one end of them altogether, or by reducing one completely to the other. In appearance they seem to conduct a kind of non-dual thinking by attempting to transcend the tension within either-or dualism, by eliminating the dichotomy. Since the dichotomy is fundamentally eliminated there is no difference between things anymore, things are in turn identical to one another simultaneously. However, as Nagarjuna stressed: " If in identity there were simultaneity, then it could occur without association." (VI 5, p.17) The difficulty of this alternative is that in identity, the plural word "things" is in contradiction because it implies non-identity. Besides, the relation and interaction between things is thereby sociologically untenable due to their being identical without any difference. Moreover, the notion simultaneity becomes unthinkable because it does not make sense to say that one thing exists simultaneously with oneself. Therefore, all explanations or analysis without regard to the relation and process of social phenomena will be impossible. In identity, there is no dependent co-arising. That which is associated does not arise together. That is, if identical, the "co" of "co-arising" is meaningless. Generally speaking, monism in opposition to dualism is not a true non-dual thinking. To assert the identity of things is still dualistic, for identity is an antinomy to distinction. It is still trapped in the oneend of the dichotomy between two extremes, the essential monism and the essential dualism, that is,

monism in relation to dualism. In other words, it remains a dualistic concept in the substantialist sense.

The middle way perspective is neither dualistic nor monistic. Instead of starting with dualism, or monism, epistemologically or ontologically, Nagarjuna wants us to have a non-dual thinking, which makes no attempt to dichotomize or conflate phenomena in a substantialist sense. As quoted above, the non-dualistic thinking of *madhyamika* asserts neither distinction nor identity, neither existence nor non-existence, it is thus non-substantial and non-nihilistic in any sense. This non-distinction of epistemological and ontological must couple with non-identity as the thrust of *madhyamikan* non-dual thinking. It is only after we can overcome all kinds of dualism, or monism, that we can then talk about the dependent co-arising of the duality of social phenomena non-dualistically.

Conventionally speaking, there must be some kind of provisional verbal distinction imputed to things for people to skillfully act, think, feel and appreciate in relation to other people or things. Otherwise, without distinction there would be no need for two or more words to describe the undistinguishable state. For some reason which cannot be exhaustively articulated, people still utilize the distinguishing mind and words in their practical life. Hence, the dependent arising of many schemes of distinction are designated in social world. But we must bear in mind that all socially constructed forms of distinction are empty of self-nature, that is, they do not have inherent and independent existence. They are artificial so to speak. Exactly because there is no essential difference among things, there is no substantially fixed social distinction at all, nor is there any annihilation of distinction in the nihilistic sense either. There is only the relative arising of distinctions dependently conditioned by people's constant and dynamic involvement in the historically specific social background.

A universal framework of distinction across all time and space is therefore unconventional and thereby un-sociological. It is not acceptable in social research so to speak. Ironically, it is often perceived that, throughout a long term observation, when an essentialized conceptual distinction has been established, the pursuit of one extreme of the opposites will somehow eventually lead to its own negation, its conversed dependent co-arising of the need for its own opposite. The political schism of oppositional identity is a good example, where two modes such as individualism and collectivism label themselves to a large extent in opposition to each other. Particularly as they turn out to be more and more mutually exclusive, it is liable to

likely that other mode will sneak in through the back door, in a dynamic that is expressed in the saying, " We become what we hate." Therefore, since the polar oppositions are in actuality conventionally constructed, and we don't always favor one extreme, diagonal shift is always possible, it is not tenable to substantialistically attach to a form of eternal dichotomy.

Additionally, despite their relatively specific cognitive interest and particular conceptual distinctions, the social sciences should not separate themselves dualistically from the observed social world and insist on the independent existence of their conceptual distinction. The dynamic circle of mutual involvement and influence between theoretical world and practical world requires social scientists to be reflexive and hermeneutical. To some extent, the theoretical world is in the practical world and thereby is constitutive of it. Likewise, the practical world is in the theoretical world and is also constitutive of it. There is no essential distinction between them, otherwise the mutual involvement and influence will not occur. In general, inspired by the middle way perspective, the sociological way of seeing the world must be non-dualistic. Anyone who holds the "either-or" way of thinking is being dualistic. The danger of this is, as Nagarjuna warned, that a wrong grasp of the doctrine of emptiness and dependent co-arising dualistically leads to suffering.[42]

2.2 Relational Thinking

Relatedenss Implies Sunyata and Pratitya-samutpada

If all dualism (including substantialism and nihilism) is to be denied, then what is the general characteristic and pervasive feature of existing things? According to the insight of dependent co-arising, this characteristic or feature is relationality, or relatedness. And there is no absolute way to portray a differentiating boundary around the world, or to demarcate its extent or to impose the referential point of our epistemic schemes. This suggests that both the ontological constitution of things and our epistemological schemes are just as relational as everything else.

The notion *pratityasamutpada* discussed above inspires us to think of social phenomena non-substantially, or relationally. It approaches human existence and social phenomena not as centered or essentialized upon subjective or objective presence, but as relational and interdependently arising. Human beings are considered

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[42] *Muulamadhyamakaarikaa*. XXIV.11.

as participating within particular social context whereby they are conditioned and in the mean time the constructors of social context. From the insight of *pratityasamutpada*, all individuals are located in, and can only be understood in relation to the interweaving social figurations. Therefore, we should observe social phenomena and human behaviors according to their interrelationship. With the caution of non-substantiality, we should observe the actual dependent co-arising of all social phenomena. Meanwhile, we should be horizontally aware of all kinds of interrelationships that make things conceivable. By observing phenomena via interrelationships, we can realize that nothing is independent of conditions and relations, and that everything is without self-nature. Selflessness implies the empty characteristics of all phenomena. As we have discussed above, *sunyata* is not different from selflessness and we can observe the profound significance of *sunyata* from the perspective of interdependent relationships. Based on this understanding we can thereby establish a theoretical foundation for using the relational principle of society as a general characteristic, not only of material social phenomena but also of mental experiences. This, the fundamental cognitive switch of theoretical vision from substance to relation, is the core of our argument. It is therefore important to investigate more reflexively the relatedness of the social world.

The middle way relational thinking seeks to overcome the dichotomous thinking, which, on the one hand, tends to conceive human beings in the self-sustaining and self-generative sense in which the individual is disconnected and isolated from the social background. On the other hand, it tends to interpret human beings as completely determined by the surrounding social structures, which are external to and coercive of the individual. Both approaches are non-relational, and cannot really explicate the dynamic changing relations of the social world as have discussed above. What kind of relation are we proposing? From the middle way perspective, *pratityasamutpada* implies that relatedness is not only extrinsic to human existence, as though we were individuals who are just structurally or strategically coping with others and the world. Rather, interrelationships should be understood as a constitutive, integral and primordial dimension of human beings. We exist and are present even to ourselves as we are always already embedded in a social world that we share with certain relevant others. We are fundamentally relational internally and externally.

The relatedness of human existence is made possible only if things (such as history) are at once fundamentally empty of substance. The middle way theme of *sunyata* and *pratitya-samutpada* remind us that nothing in the phenomenal world is

self-explanatory or self-contained. Therefore, based on this understanding, we should see that each relation in the social world carries the aspect of emptiness within. As we have stated, that which is empty is also open and thereby possible. Thus, to be empty is to open up, to dissolve those reified things (which we ourselves construct by attachment) which separate us from seeing or appreciating one another and our background world. In a way, emptiness implies the openness within ourselves which leads us to recognize and cherish the fundamental relatedness that binds us to one another and all that constitutes our world. This mutuality of one another reaches to the very foundation of who we are and draws us toward our background which is interdependent and inter-relational. Fundamentally speaking, we are interconnected and carry an aspect of one another within ourselves. Thus, this accounting points to the actuality that emptiness represents the extensive openness and dynamic relatedness within and without us as well as our societies. Nothing is left out nothing substantial is added on either.

Relatedness Can Be Asymmetrical

Some might think that concepts like interdependency, mutuality and interconnection imply some kind of symmetrical relations in which, the relatedness of social world is basically seen as harmonious and stable. They are thus not able to detect the asymmetrical relations which makes dependence unequal and hierarchical. In fact, before attaining awakening with the right middle path, we are still entrapped in different kinds of suffering caused by a variety of afflictive emotions that we cause through our attachment. This is actually the reason why even though we are all interconnected and interdependent, our relationships are not always in harmony. They are sometimes in tension and thereby asymmetrical.

Conditioned by various intended or unintended afflictive emotions, some social relations are sometimes not cherished by practitioners despite their undeniable relatedness. Many relations are composed of conflicting interests with one another. The co-arising of opposing interests, whether idealistically or materialistically, might constitute a process of reciprocal tension. Accordingly, opposites appear to be engaged in an adjustment of conflicting tensions, interlocking in a dynamic that forms a continuum of continuous tension/less tension or harmony/less harmony. Since there is no substantiality in relations, this dynamic continuum thus has no fixed state. When the conditions of the relation change, the relation changes too. Tension, as a form of interrelation, might constitute certain degree of equilibrium. But that situation cannot

be maintained unless the conditions are still working. Nonetheless, since nothing is permanent, the equilibrium cannot be sustained forever. Therefore, the dynamics of continuous tension and harmony with one another take place in a mutual-perpetuating process, which is sometimes in a state of equilibrium, sometimes not.

The middle way perspective, I argue, is capable of explaining the asymmetrical relations in which the dependent arising is diachronic. Indeed, we are simultaneously related to one another, but the content of this relation involves various mutually oriented actions that require some kind of temporal deferral. Some take a short moment, while some last longer, for each act in the process of transaction or interaction. Nagarjuna was aware of asymmetrical relations, as can be seen from his acceptance of conditionality (*pratyaya*). In a way we should characterize *pratitya-samutpada* as an asymmetrical interdependency, which is more compatible with its processual worldview. Generally speaking, no matter what kind of relationship in which we are engaging, we are somehow always already related. Hence, a relational thinking is necessary to rightly understand the complex social world, in which we are made possible, whether we recognize it or not.

Its Sociological Implication

By observing the relatedness of the social world, we must first transcend the subject-object dualism in the substantialist sense, which interprets human beings in an attitude that cuts off the relational actuality in which we vividly perform ourselves within the social world as part of it, not apart from it. Individual action is embedded in a meaningful nexus of social relations. Far from being a problem, the social relatedness of human action is the major source of our knowledge about one another. Relational thinking realizes our fundamental openness to the historical-specific social relatedness, which embraces us, and out of which we act, think, feel and appreciate, and become who we are. In other words, we constantly empty ourselves of any ossifying immanence and engage with the already embedded dynamic world. We thus become who we are relationally out of our connecting with the world. The formation of our schemes of action, conception, perception and appreciation are in turn related to the background world we are thrown into. It is only within the historical-specific relational context of social activity that individuals will have access to the knowledge required to appraise alternative courses of action, thought, feeling and appreciation. Outside of that relatedness, the requisite knowledge won't be able to exist. Without this shared meaningful background, social life would be continually chaotic.

Relatedness as the ontological foundation of social constitution indicates that human making must be dependently arisen. There is no essential line separating us from the world. There is, in short, relatedness that extends beyond the percipient as well as within the unnoticed process that makes up the percipient itself. In other words, the relational actuality of the social constitution and the self-making are working both externally and internally, or explicitly and implicitly.

In our daily practice we are embedded in the world, for that is where our social self takes shape and becomes manifest as we engage in the day to day concerns, whether mentally or physically, deal with the tasks at hands, orient to one another, and try to pursue what is often a significant personal identity. The relational background where our daily practices occur is the locus where we become ourselves for the most part. Thus, it evolves as a viable vantage point for understanding the social. This vantage point leads our social research to acknowledge that people's involvement with one another and engagement within the social background is integral to what we are.

Actually, however far back in history we go, the fact of dynamic relatedness emerges as the most fundamental foot, for it is dependent co-arising of all other fundamentals. We are born into a family, granted a nationality, and received education, without our choosing any of them; and it is these conditions which in turn influence our more "voluntary" dispositions and action frames of reference in which we subsequently acquiesce. Undeniably, the family we grow up with, the nationality we are granted, the school we go to, the media we watch, the things we do, the work and careers we pursue, the interests we share with family and friends, the church we attend, the community we grew up in and so on, are not mere superfluities additional to our selfness as some quantitative social researches implicitly assumed. They are the very paths through which we become ourselves at all. They are also the working fields where we are within and in the mean time involved with and mutually influenced by one another. That is to say, we do not exist inherently and independently in a world of our own making, but in a world we make and provide for one another, a world that includes many fields which we tacitly count on continuously, though usually unable to articulate them discursively or analytically. The social consequences of which, is that we become mutually tied with one another in a social world of, at certain levels, shared interests, worldviews, fates, sufferings, etc.; we are at once mutually constructive and obstructive to one another.

Despite certain degree of relative distinction, we are at least interconnected in a subtler sense. We take our bearings from one another more than we might acknowledge and there is little about us that does not dependently arise in some sense from our togetherness or mutual embeddedness, thus little does not include others as part of who we are. As Whitehead says that the "connectedness of things is nothing else than the togetherness of things in occasions of experience."[43] If we realize this fundamental connectedness we have within the world of togetherness, we might recognize that there are no self-contained or self-sustaining individuals. Rather, we are actually partaking a mostly unnoticed or unconscious intersubjective event of networking whereby we mutually condition one another and are contingent upon one another. The networking constitutes the social world from which each of us lives. Rare is the individual who has one and only one intersubjective network. The togetherness and mutuality among members of a dependently durable tradition, which emerges as social collectivity identified by members as a culture, holds up the tacit sense of intersubjectivity among members. So when encountering a social event or object, we tacitly will sense that there is a dynamic historicity behind it and within our intersubjectivity. Of course, such sense of history shouldn't be substantialized, otherwise, our tradition will become simply a social determinant *sui generis* that creates us without being influenced by our intersubjective experience out of the dynamic involvement with the newly emergent world situation. This substantialized view of history is unrelational and thereby unacceptable.

Sociological knowledge is the knowledge of the relatedness of the social world. In actuality, it is also part of the relatedness of the social world. The mutuality and interdependency between conventional knowledge and sociological knowledge is therefore undeniable. To some extent, their relation might be asymmetrical but it does not necessarily mean that sociological knowledge always dominates the conventional knowledge. The possibility of their relatedness can be varied depending upon their historical-specific conditions. Nonetheless, there is one thing for sure that due to their intricate and dynamic relationships the sociological knowledge cannot capture the fixed essence of social reality. Because it presupposes a position without presupposition, that is, a vantage point which can detach from the relatedness of itself and the social world and perceive the independent existence of objective facts. *Sunyata* and *pratitya-samutpada* of human mental faculty cannot formulate an independent essence existing out there, but just

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[43] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: Macmillan, 1933. pp. 299-300.

dependently perceives the condition and effect and the intersubjective meaning of social reality. Sociological conceptualization constructs only relatively and intersubjectively adequate meaning and plausible interpretation of social phenomena, rather than objectively fixed facts or subjectively true interpretation. The advocates of objectivism assume that they perceive something which is independent of their inquiry, which has an existence in itself, and has pre-existing properties which are revealed by the inquiry. But this assumption is untenable because at the relational-processual level what is inquired is a result of, or greatly influenced by, the dynamics of mental imputation, measurement, reciprocity between inquirer and inquired, dialogical process among inquirers. In other words, sociological knowledge is related to many significant conditions which are necessary to make the perception of reality possible. The problem with objectivism is its verification of this "reality", with which scientific knowledge is supposed to accord, other than by some dynamic relations and processes of scientific venture. If social reality is what is known by means of social inquiry itself, then it is tautologous to say that sociological knowledge is in accordance with reality. This is actually a conspiracy between subjectivism and objectivism.

On the other hand, the campaigners of subjectivism espouse the conviction that an individual's subjective consciousness creates his or her own reality. However, in the social scientific community meaning-adequate and plausible interpretation of social reality is not "reality" unless more than one person agrees regarding what conditions and effects it involves. Therefore, there is no such thing as "one's own reality" without involving any relational conditions. Social reality is what is intersubjectively plausible at least among many researchers. Anyone, it is said, with the suitable textbook learning and academic training can shape his or her scheme of sociological cognition and thereby enabling him or her to interpret social occurrences sociologically. In this sense, his or her sociological knowledge must be relational. Of course, this relatedness of researcher's knowledge does not mean that he or she cannot challenge a sociological orthodoxy, but this must occur in the relational context and to some extent be accepted by significant amount of researchers. Indeed, a constant challenge of dogma is also the condition that makes possible the knowledge in continual flux. The formation of sociological knowledge is thus not only relational but also processual. A non-relational monologue of a single researcher is therefore not sociologically conceivable.

2.3 Processual Thinking

All Things Are Impermanent Due To Their Sunyata and Pratitya-samutpada

Those who place the primacy of the substance over that of the process must stick to an oversight that is accustomed to stress the visible or tangible nature of things. This is a substantialist view which always obstructs our processual imagination and thereby misguides our worldview. Nagarjuna's interpretation of *pratityasamutpada* holds that all that can be said to have any reality is a co-creative process, not the fluctuating substances comprising the process. Those with the middle way perspective understand the conventional world by observing vertically the temporal relationships among preceding, current conditions, and future orientation, through which we can realize the fundamental impermanence of all social existence. The doctrine of *anatman* (non-self) precisely indicates that there is no way in which a thing can ever be given a definitive (persistently fixed) status within the impermanent actuality of things. All things, be they material or mental, be they the objective world, or the subjective state of human beings, are subject to continuous change. It seems some social phenomena may have certain states of existences in which they remain unchanged or are in equilibrium on a temporary basis (for example a totally administered society). However, when we examine them with processual thinking, we will find that not only do they keep changing on a long-term basis, but also that this change occurs at every quick moment. Immediately after the current state of conditions have ceased to function, the newly co-arisen state starts operating. This is the process of the state of co-dependent arising and ceasing. The rising and ceasing of each short moment discloses that all phenomena are ever moving and ever changing. Some scientists do have some awareness of the changing dimension of social phenomena in terns of social change. However, they still cannot overcome the distortion of the substantialist view, they try to make sense of the changing process in terms of linear causal explanation. As we mentioned previously, the unidirectional explanation of social phenomena is not able to understand the deeper truth of all existences. All things appear, from the perspective of temporal process, to be ever changing, and never remain identical for the briefest moment. Impermanence negates the permanent entity and unidirectional development of phenomena. Only those with the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising realize and understand that all forms of fixity are delusory.

Though translated as emptiness due to its etymological origin, *sunyata* actually also refers to the state of impermanence of phenomena, that is, giving the static, eternal

flavor of things to the process. And in this sense, the underlying actuality of phenomena is not substance it is rather a set of processes in flux, which indicates the constantly changing nature of social reality. *Sunyata* makes tenable the fundamental processuality immanent in all phenomena, opening all things into various relations in which things are sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. But irrespective of what kind of relation they are undergoing, things are changing. It is thus reasonable to say that the middle way perspective in Buddhism is a precursor of processual thinking despite the conspicuous lack of reference to its ideas and doctrines in today's processual discourses in the human and social sciences. Nagarjuna's *madhyamika* challenges the notion of persistence and permanence and espouses the idea of fundamental flux through his doctrine of *pratitya-samutpada* and *sunyata*. The middle way perspective posits that what we perceive as the world of eternity and stasis is actually the outcome of an incessant dependent arising processes. All entities that fall under the notice of our perception or conception are mentally imputed which are actually in a state of continual flux, even though the verbal designations often find it difficult to describe such movement.

Its Sociological Implication—Social Reality as Social Becoming

In the *Prasanapada*[44], Candrakirti explains that the term *pratitya* is a gerund signifying the phenomenon of "reaching" or "extending over," and the term *samutpada* means origination or manifestation of the momentary event. Thus, in conjunction, *pratitya-samutpada*, refers to the dynamics of momentary experiential events. When the notion of permanent entity is transcended, then, we can say that all that is observed is the flow of momentary becoming. The flow is fundamentally without fixed things, neither social whole nor individual elements. Whenever we perceive social reality we should always bear in mind that it is actually the social becoming that constitutes the so-called "social reality." The becomingness of the social should be stressed on the foundation of all social constitutions as an extensive process of relational origination. The understanding of this relational-processual actuality is the key to realize the depth and breadth of social becoming, from the microscopic to the macroscopic realm of the social world.

Since all sensible entities are empty and in continual flux, then the scientific knowledge concerning the observation of them shouldn't have any fixated proposition either. In other words, instead of insisting on building up a universal and persistent

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[44] See *Prasannapadaa*,   5.1.

theory or category beyond the empirical world, social scientists should realize that the knowledge constitutions in the social sciences are also empty of essence and also in continual flux. Despite his stubborn insistence on logical empiricism and scientific realism, Karl Popper also espouses a view of opposing the idea of perceiving the world as permanent and knowledge of it as stable. Science, he reiterated, is being progressive only if it remains open-ended. And it is by and large open-ended because it is constantly deconstructing itself by what he called "falsification," or "refutation." After establishing a theory or formulating a hypothesis to describe the social phenomena, while some colleagues try hard to verify them, the next step to many reflexive thinkers is to try one's best to transcend it. For Popper, the more we find we are wrong the better off we are, for that way our knowledge stands a better chance of advancing a bit. Although this kind of progressivism is problematic to some extent, we still can be inspired by his view of the process of "scientific discovery." Interpreting it from the middle way perspective we can say that knowledge is in a state of flux. It has no fixed essence. Regarding disciplines like sociology, a certain degree of institutional stability and disciplinary normality is coveted and desired, and instability is avoided at all cost. This is certainly related to the practitioner's extra scientific implication, let us say the will to power immanent in the will to knowledge constitution, or the pursuits of good jobs, prestige and authority. Apart from those, the social scientists' substantialist view of the social world also contributes to the stabilization of its knowledge and discipline. Yet, all pursuits of knowledge are related to many conditions, within and without the discipline, such as the dialogue among different members within the scientific community, the double identity of being a social scientist and lay person at once, the dynamic circle of mutual influences, etc. When conditions change, the knowledge changes too. Science in flux is the normal situation from a long-term perspective. This actually became a subject matter in the sociology of science over the past couple of decades. It is argued that in science there are no objective and absolute standards of rationality, method, technique, language and meanings of terms. Where the scientist stands within his/her community is a matter more of social commitment following the historically specific paradigmatic training than the independent quest for certainty in empirical evidence. In other words, it is *Doxa* (the socially related dialogue, opinion, convincement, conversion and debate), rather than epistemic certainty (objectivism, rationalism, universal law), dialogic process rather than isolated monologue. It is thus significant for social scientists to have a basic understanding that what was thought to be known concerning social facts is impermanent and that what is now known will not withstand the test of time, because all things are impermanent, knowledge is fluctuating as well.

Of course, in case we have a right understanding of the notion of flux, it is not necessary for social scientists to nihilistically deny that there are relatively and tentatively durable percept-objects and academically recognized consensus. Otherwise we will be at risk of being nihilistic. The conceptualization and classification of enduring objects is tenable and, to some extent, unavoidable as long as we do not forget the conditions of continuous radical change. Although we hold firmly on the idea of an ever-changing process of social reality, it doesn't obstruct us from recognizing some degree of relative stability in the social world, such as the process of institutionalization, bureaucratization, normalization, legalization, specialization or standardization. This is important to not to deconstruct nihilistically the explicability of social sciences concerning the phenomena which involve a dependently durable social reality. However, the problem concerning the observation of the durability of social reality is that, a substantialist approaches this durability of social reality as the essential unit of social analysis. The social reality is seen as a real entity, which exists independently of the dynamic activities of ordinary individuals. Social entity consists of a number of underlying sub-sub-systems each serving a primary function of purpose, that is, each sub-system is adaptive in that it serves the needs of society. Thus, the appropriate focus of this kind of social research will be a careful analysis of the structures of sub-systems and the functions that are served by each. The tendency for any entity, in this view, is to be in a state of equilibrium. Stasis is the primal concern whereby process or change is considered secondary and is expected to be gradual. Unwittingly, this approach often incorporates the dominant institutional values of mainstream society into its theoretical framework and thereby makes processual thinking and its critical impetus difficult. One of the consequences of this kind of substantialist social science is its being in service of the status-quo. In this one-sided emphasis on durability, the social practice of various individuals will be viewed as passive products of social structure. The implication is that its conceptualizations of the durable entities more like the nature of entities themselves, in terms of physical and structural boundaries, rather than as the dynamic structuring processes that condition the dependent emergence of social entities. Such a view misses the important influence that agents acting through collective actions (such as social movement) have had on social change. Most importantly, with this emphasis on the substantial properties and functioning of social entities and their subsequent adaptive nature of social change, substantialism of this kind creates a knowledge which focuses almost exclusively on problems of unity, order, stability, cohesion, harmony and equilibrium. It basically interrogates the social phenomenon in terms of a reified scientific approach geared to understanding the world in static senses. The

actual dependent arising of dynamic process, movement, conflict, revolution or negotiation will become incomprehensible. The actuality of knowledge in flux will also be discounted.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to contend, that our theoretical dualistic thinking about self-and-society has been marked by certain type of knowing and thinking which have barred us from embarking upon important subjects such as the co-creative relation and process, as Nagarjuna observes, of phenomena. Various dualistic, non-relational and non-processual thinking, such as self/society, activity/passivity, autonomy/conformity and freedom/constraint, have blocked our conceptualization of, and investigation into, the relational process of co-creativity. Generally speaking, the dichotomization between the individual and "the social," favors the view of seeing the individual as creative and "the social" as orderly. This polarization literally has prevented us from thinking about the social and creativity together. The image of creativity in social sciences in turn tends to be individualistic, that is, most of the research on creativity and innovation has been on creative individuals.[45] This is definitely unacceptable according to the principle of dependent co-arising.

In terms of the middle way perspective, creativity must be conducted relationally and processually rather than independently. By talking of relational-processual co-creativity, I mean, broadly speaking, any and all creative processes leading to creative effects that are depending upon the relatedness of two or more people in temporal process. In other words, the process of creativity is the process of mutual involvement. The musical performances (in fact, almost any performing art), the creative process in scientific laboratories, the working of a doctoral dissertation, the founding of a firm by an entrepreneur, the establishment of a monument, as mentioned above, are but a few examples of what we mean by relational-processual co-creativity. Such creative processes can never be confined to the workings of a single genius in an isolated situation, because nothing social can be creatively established without any form of interaction and mutual influence. Even if someone works in physical isolation, such as writing a research paper alone, isn't he/she part of a larger relational process of discursive formation, constantly in dialogue with, and working with a reference community and tradition? Would the concept of a "genius," "entrepreneurship" or "authorship" adequately exist without others?

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[45] Montuori, A., & Purser, R. 1999. *Social Creativity (Vol.1)*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

If we presuppose an atomistic view of the individual in our theoretical understanding, then even creativity in groups or in dialogic settings will be attributed to an individual, rather than to a relational process. Atomism leads to methodological individualism, from which co-creativity is ignored. However, on the other hand, if we presume a holistic view of social determination, creativity is by definition societal, and the individual is just epiphenomenal, that is, the society as an entity *sui generis*, that is, self-creating without taking into account any particular individual and its action. This kind of methodological collectivism is without a doubt disagreeable. I will articulate the methodological dichotomization in next section.

Using an understanding of co-creative social becoming with a non-dualistic and relational-processual worldview may go some way toward enabling a deeper understanding of the *sunyata* and *pratitya-samutpada* characteristics of social structure and its implications for the study of practical and empirical process of institutionalization/ de-institutionalization/ re-institutionalization, structuring/ de-structuring/ re-structuring, organizing/ de-organizing/ re-organizing and grouping/ de-grouping/ re-grouping. According to the middle way perspective, the phenomenal world must undergo a dynamic process of arising, enduring, changing and ceasing. When existent, say, social realities, are observed one has no choice but to say that they are dependently arisen through these three processual characteristics and are empty of inherent and independent essence. Therefore, social analysis should place their notice on the co-creative relational process of the arising, enduring, changing and ceasing of particular social structures, or entities, which involve the mutual embeddedness of many conditions, specifically the relational interweaving of many acting agencies, and which also condition the arising of some subsequent social consequences. The researcher should be aware that his/her ideas about social phenomena might have to be changed during the research process. Certainly we do not start with a *tabula rasa*, nor can we ever be free of pre-understanding and never have to be. Ideas and concepts however should be open for change if conditions are incongruent with them.

PART TWO: A Middle Way Examination of the Methodology of the Social Sciences

3. Beyond Dualistic Substantialism—Methodological Individualism vs. Methodological Collectivism

For several decades in the history of the social sciences, the quarrel between the advocates of methodological individualism and collectivism has been one of the most prominent paradigmatic wars. It seems that this dichotomous thinking in social theory has essentially built up the fundamental polarities that asserted the incompatibility of two camps in an "either-or" form, either individualism or collectivism. This is an age-old and problematic debate, which finds an analogue in the "lone genius versus the Zeitgeist" argument (Simonton, 1999).[46] This contention also occurs in the discussion of social change, which emerges as the "individual actor versus social movement" argument, which has been viewed in terms of an antagonism between "individual and society" as the foremost ontological division.

Such fundamental polarities also appear to constitute two absolutely different epistemological positions underlying various social theories and research programs. Social change is understood as either the product of a single genius, struggling against a domineering social surroundings, or conversely, as the product of structural and historical forces, with the individual as merely a "vessel" or an expression for those forces. For individualists, social factors are epiphenomenal while for the collectivist camps, the individual is simply expressing the social, political, and economic forces of the times. In this kind of dichotomizing operation, one must take side either for the individual or for the social. That means, if one does not espouse an individualistic/atomistic perspective on social change, whereby social forces are seen as either epiphenomenal or a hindrance to change, then one must, by definition, advocate a collectivist/determinist perspective. In fact, both approaches are conducting a dualistic and disjunctive way of thinking in terms of "either/or."

In addition, instead of this kind of "either-or" antagonism, some theoreticians or researchers try to embrace both individualist and collectivist approaches together in the same research project in order to conflate the two approaches and to establish an integrative scientific synthesis. Consequently, one can find some works about the

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[46] Simonton, D. K. 1999. In A. Montuori & R. Purser (Eds.). *Social creativity*, (Vol. 1). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

integration of individualist and collectivist approaches, which range from rather abstract and general methodological considerations to practical guidelines, for blending methods and models in one research design. However, in fact, neither methodological individualism nor collectivism, nor eclecticism of both is acceptable. Despite the variation of their observing levels, they share a substantialist worldview. By taking the objects they observe (whether at the individual or the social level) as having independent existence, many paradigm defenders actually share a strong consensus for general ontological assumptions about the nature of social reality. According to the middle way perspective, especially the notion of *sunyata*, this is certainly problematic. As we have mentioned, the epistemological position and its related methodological consideration cannot be separated from their ontological presumption. Therefore, our examination of these methodological approaches will take into account the knowledge framework and the nature of social reality.

3.1 Methodological Individualism

The emergence of methodological individualism in the social sciences originated within the Austrian school of economics and then was introduced into the philosophy of social science by Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper. Hayek was the very first scholar to use the term to capture the idea, as stated in his work, "the concepts and views held by individuals […] form the elements from which we must build up, as it were, the more complex [social] phenomena" (1942/44, p. 38)[47]. Hayek perceives social collectivities as the result of human action. In this viewpoint he adopts the "compositive method" of methodological individualism:

> While in (the social sciences) it is the attitudes of individuals which are the
> familiar elements and by combination of which we try to reproduce the complex
> phenomena, the result of individual actions, which are much known procedure
> which often leads to the discovery of principles of structural coherence of the
> complex phenomena which had not (and perhaps could not) be established by
> direct observation…. the method of the social sciences is better described as
> compositive or synthetic. It is the so-called wholes, the groups of elements which
> are structurally connected, which we learn to single out from the totality of
> observed phenomena only as a result of our systematic fitting together of the

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47 Hayek, Friedrich [von] (1942/44), 'Scientism and the Study of Society', *Economica 9*, 267-291 & 10, 34-63 & 11, 27-39. Repr. In The Counter-Revolution of Science, The Free Press, 1952.

> elements with familiar properties, and which we build up or reconstruct from the known properties of the elements.[48]

Immediately, Popper elaborated the idea, for "the quite unassailable doctrine that we must try to understand all collective phenomena as due to the actions, interactions, aims, hopes, and thoughts of individual men, and as due to traditions created and preserved by individual men." (1944/45, pp. 157-158)[49] Furthermore, Popper stated, "all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc. of human individuals … we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called "collectives."[50] The debate between the pros and cons concerning methodological individualism was widely spread in the 1950s, and was led by Popper's student John Watkins. Social scientists have often fought methodological individualism because it implied, in their eyes, an unacceptable reduction of social science to psychology, or the subsumption of social phenomena under psychological theories. Indeed, the individual psychic elements often are analytical units of their economic research.

Take the market economy as an example. Austrian economists seek to attribute the driving force of the market process to entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur is taken as the central organizer of the company, meaning that the isolated actor should be the analytical focus of economics. The instigation of the entrepreneur therefore comes into sight as the agency that kicks off the impending process of production in order to manufacture goods for consumers. As Gunning asserts: "In economics, the distinctly human element involved in causing, by means of choice, the economic functions to be performed is assigned to a particular role, that of the entrepreneur."[51] This statement induces the enthralling picture of entrepreneurs running their companies all by themselves. Therefore, Gunning claims: "To help us identify the characteristics of entrepreneurship, we begin by showing how an independent actor would come to perform the functions of producing, consuming, saving, and supplying factors."[52] In general, analysts must have resort to such individual characteristics as beliefs, aims, desires, expectations, etc., in order to explain economic phenomena.

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48 Hayek, Friedrich [von] (1952) *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, pp.38-39.
49 Popper, Karl. (1944/45), 'The Poverty of Historicism' *Economica 11*, 86-103 & 119-137 &12, 69-89. Repr. *As The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957.
50 Popper, Karl. 1966. The Open Society and its Enemies, vol.2. London: Routledge p. 98.
51 J. Patrick Gunning, "The Goal and Methods of Economic Theory," http://stsvr.showtower.com.tw/~gunning/subjecti/mean_sub/gl_meth.
52 Ibid.

Sociology in general considers Weber as the paradigmatic methodological individualist, due to his view of the interpretation of action. He argues, "For the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action." (Weber [1921] 1968, p.13) Thus, for sociological purposes, according to Weber, collective terms, such as "state," "nation," "corporation," "family," or an "army corps," or similar collectivities, "do not consist necessarily or even primarily of the elements" as a collective personality which acts. When reference is made in a sociological context to those collectivities, what is meant is, on the contrary, "only a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons."

Influenced by the rationalization spirit which contributes to the emergence of modern sciences, of capitalism and to the typification of the rational individual, the Weberian *homo sociologicus* stresses that the actions and decisions of individuals are driven by the subjective meaning he/she adheres to his/her actions and to the actions of others. The social actor, according to Weber, has the capability of revealing empathy and thus to interpretively understand other's action.

> We shall speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective
> meaning to his behavior –be it overt or convert, omission or acquiescence. Action
> is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of
> others and is thereby oriented in its course.[53]

The social actor is therefore, for Weber, endowed with meaningful behavior. The Weberian view of human action is to some extent critical of *homo oeconomicus* for its one-sided exaggeration of the economic interest as the single motive of human action, but it is nevertheless analogous analytically in its individualist approach. For Weber it is the individual who is held responsible before history for his or her acts; individuals endowed with a conscience respond for the consequences of their choices and actions.[54] Weber's view is evidently in opposition to the collectivist approach. In an enthusiastic style reminiscent of Durkheim, Weber was to write:

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[53] Weber, Max. 1978. "Basic Concepts of Sociology." In *Economy and Society*, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich, p.4. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[54] Weber, Max. 1946. "Politics as a Vocation." In: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Gerth and Mills, pp. 77-128. New York: Oxford University Press.

> If I have become a sociologist (according to my letter of accreditation), it is mainly in order to exorcise the specter of collectivist conceptions which still lingers among us. It other words, sociology itself can only proceed from the actions of one or more separate individuals and must therefore adopt strictly individualistic methods.[55]

For Weber, the phantom of collectivity, such as structures and institutions, are not realities in themselves. Rather, they are fashioned and produced by the actions of one or more separate individuals, who attach meanings to them. Collective concepts only become intelligible through individual behaviors. Thus the individual is the foremost key of Weber's methodology. As he stresses: "Interpretative sociology considers the individual and his action as the basic unit." (1946: 55) Nevertheless, it is important to note that, while his sociology starts with the individual motivators of social action, Weber does not stay exclusively focused on the individual level. Weber proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society was to be viewed in terms of the characteristic shift in motivation of action (ex. the increasing dominance of zweckrational action over rational action based on values, or actions motivated by traditions and emotions). He also believed that the shift was conditioned by structural and historical forces. (Aron, 1970; Coser, 1977)[56] However, what we are arguing in this section does not refer to a comprehensive study of Weber's wide-ranged substantative opus, but only to his methodological highlighting of the individualistic assumption. The individualistic approach considers the individual as the subject of knowledge. This solipsistic viewpoint carries the image of the individual being inside a closed container looking at the world of other individuals, each with minds, guessing at what is inside the others' sealed minds.

Generally speaking, the early theorists of methodological individualism have assumed that all social phenomena can be traced back to, and explained by, the actions of individuals. Thus, no explanation of social phenomena could be completed without a comprehensive knowledge of facts about individuals. Therefore, the basic unit of analysis for social sciences is the individual. Even when the individual acts on behalf of a group, or as member of a group, they are acting as independent individuals. Hence, "group behavior" is an illusory concept to them. As Jon Elster states: "A

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[55] Letter from Weber to R. Liefmann, cited in Elisa P. Reis "The Double representation of the Actor in Theoretical Tradition: Durkheim and Weber" In: *Agency and Structure—Reorienting Social Theory* eds. Sztompka, Piotr. 1994. p.70. Gordon and Breach Science Publishers S.A.
[56] Aron, Raymond. 1970. *Main Current in Sociological Though*t II. New York: Anchor Books. And Coser, Lewis A. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, second edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

family may, after some discussion, decides on a way of spending its income, but the decision is not based on 'its' goals and 'its' beliefs, since there are no such things."[57] Even if the final spending is not necessarily to satisfy the desire of any particular family member, members have nonetheless agreed to the reconciliation, since reconciliation is somehow more rewarding than not compromising. This view is contrary to its opposite, methodological holism, which holds that groups, or collectivities, have independent properties (such as group traits, minds, behaviors and outcomes) that cannot be understood by reducing them to their individual parts, which I will elaborate in the next section.

What is more, in neo-classical economics, it is widely presupposed that the study of human behavior must affirm a self-interested individual as an agency who makes decisions according to his or her objective function, either maximizing utility or minimizing cost. According to this approach, an actor, as a consumer in the market, must rationally make his or her buying choices out of his or her own personal preference, which is independent of any relational condition at the moment of decision-making. From the middle way relational thinking, this approach can be called " an under-socialized conception of human action." The individual in this approach assumed to be substantially atomized and his/her behavior is the means by which he achieves his/her goals independently, after a careful cost-and-benefit caculation. This approach to the study of human behavior adopts an even more radicalized methodological individualism than previous thinkers. In other words, it takes the substantially atomized individual as the unit of analysis, while eliminating the social relatedness within which the individual is actually involved and embedded.

The most prominent progeny of neoclassical school of economics is rational-choice theory, of which classical game theory is a variant. It is probably one of the most overriding approaches for theorizing human action in the social sciences. It has been applied over a wide range of disciplines, such as: microeconomic theory, public choice, public policy and politics, social action and exchange models in sociology, group and organizational behavior, and deterrence theory in criminology and international relations. A fundamental premise to all forms of rational-choice theory is the assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed. It is apparently methodologically individualistic, which holds that:

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[57] Jon Elster, introduction, *Rational Choice*, Jon Elster, ed., (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 3. Elster is not an Austrian economist, but his understanding of methodological individualism is similar.

The elementary unit of social life is that individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals. (Elster, 1989: 13)[58]

Such theory highlights the volitional temperament of human action and the aptitude of actors to make decisions and to act on the basis of rational computation of cost and benefit. As it is not possible for individuals to achieve all of the various things that they want, individual actors are assumed to be more or less fully informed about the circumstances of each action and from here decide the best act or means to attain their goals. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction. (Heath 1976:3, Carling 1992:27, Coleman 1973)[59] Such choices are made intentionally in the pursuit of individual objectives that are based on expectations about future consequences in order to maximize an anticipated utility.

Methodologically speaking, rational-choice theory begins from the viewpoint of the individual as a socially atomized agent, rather than from several individuals relating together within a social background. Implicitly, a particular type of social relationship is assumed, namely one between egoists, who concern themselves with only their own individual outcomes. The emphasis on the individual and his/her interests is always a starting point for any theory of rational-choice. From this individualistic assumption, it builds models of social action and interaction that describe and explain the complexities of larger groups, systems, and whole societies. In addition, rational-choice theory may show how sharing, cooperation, or norms emerge, but it disregards the vast evidence for conditions other than self-interest such as socio-cultural values and various mutual embeddedness, which play a vital part in human thinking and choice. The root for individualist approach is always the view of a compartmentalized single actor.

Moreover, actors are understood to take part in social activities programmed *a priori* to perform according to the universal law of rational, utilitarian computation. In other words, rational-choice theory adopts a relatively simple mode of the individual, one that can be applied across time and space, so that it is a universal model. It is also an illustration of a more formally substantialized theoretical perspective in the "scientific" tradition. This theory typically assumes static models, neglecting the

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[58] Elster, J. 1989b. *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[59] Carling, A. 1992. *Social Divisions*. London: Verso. Coleman, J. 1973. *The Mathematics of Collective Action*. London: Heinemann. And, Heath, A. 1976. *Rational Choice and Social Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

creative and relationally dynamic process of human choice and action. It also runs counter to a more multifaceted view of social actors and social co-dependent arising that considers the interweaving process of meaning, interpretation, emotions, occurrence, and a wide variety of aspects of human social existence.

Rational-choice theory can be considered as a way of working out a rationalization of modernity in a Weberian style. For Weber, purposive rationality was a driving force in modernity. Its principal meaning centers on the calculability, intellectualization and impersonal logic of goal-oriented action and takes self-interest as given and focuses instead on the efficient choice of means to reach such goals. In such action, the individual social actor is fully self-conscious and attempts to conduct logically consistent and methodically precise behavior. Weber held this as an attribute of modern society, and tended to regard rationality as an overriding social force that increasingly impinges on all facets of society. Purposive rationality was considered a dominant social force by Weber throughout his immense substantive social historical studies. Therefore, "for the purposes of a typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behaviour as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action." [60] Rational-choice theory adopts this to be its methodological precedence, or *a priori*. Such viewpoint has also extended to other kinds of human actions (education, skill, crime, politics, family relation and social interaction in general, etc.). All come to be examined via the tools of rational-choice theory as the investment of individuals in order to attain their goals, maximize their profits or satisfy their stable preference. In general, the basic assumptions of rational choice theory is listed by Jonathan Turner as follows:

a. Humans are purposive and goal oriented.

b. Humans have sets of hierarchically ordered preferences, or utilities.

c. In choosing lines of behavior, humans make rational calculations with respect to: the utility of alternative lines of conduct with reference to the preference hierarchy; the costs of each alternative in terms of utilities foregone; the best way to maximize utility.

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[60] Max Weber, *Sociological Writings*. Edited by Wolf Heydebrand, published in 1994 by Continuum.

d. Emergent social phenomena—social structures, collective decisions, and collective behavior—are ultimately the result of rational choices made by utility-maximizing individuals.

e. Emergent social phenomena that arise from rational choices constitute a set of parameters for subsequent rational choices of individuals in the sense that they determine: the distribution of resources among individuals; the distribution of opportunities for various lines of behavior; the distribution of nature of norms and obligation in a situation. (Turner, 1991)[61]

Generally speaking, individualistic methodology means simply that the explanation of social causation should not bypass the individual acts through which that causality works. Though "collective" entities exist and operate, they operate through the agency of individual actors and individual actions. This kind of approach is easily confused with substantial individualism, the ontological assertion that individuals are "prior" to society and have properties of their own independently of society. Methodological individualism in the substantialist sense is not able to explain the influence of relational-processual social context in shaping the individual.

3.2 Methodological Collectivism

Methodological individualism's treatment of individual actors as self-sufficient and independent of any relational influences has actually disengaged human beings from institutional and historical context and thereby fails to account for how the social conditions shape individual's schemes of action, perception, feeling and preference. Individualists believe that social phenomena are reducible to the statements about individuals, whereas collectivists advocate that there are societal concepts that are not reducible to psychological manifestations without remainder.

Methodological collectivism is founded on the assertion that the properties of wholes or systems cannot be explained in terms of the properties of their parts. With the purpose of accurately analyzing and explaining complex social phenomena, or systems, it tends to take a reverse turn from under-socialized individualism to embrace an over-socialized collectivism. In order to overcome the extremely individualized concept of man, many contemporary social scientists try to resurrect an idea of "social system" based on Durkheimian themes of rules and values, which are

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[61] Turner, Jonathan. 1991. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*.

taken as the true determinant basis of human behavior. With this shift from utilitarian individualism comes an entire reassessment from social science methodology to discourse within substantive researches. The Durkheimian approach rebuffs methodological individualism's vision of the origin and development of society as the result of the individual's mind and actions. For instance, according to such view, the formation of the family would be the consequence of the individual's economic behavior, that of the desire for wealth and maximization of self-interest, or utility. Methodological collectivism regards such explanations as inadequate to that which needs to be explained –namely, a group of facts external to the individual which exercise a coercive power over them: "It is not from within himself that can come the external pressure which he undergoes; it is therefore not what is happening within himself which can explain it." (1895:128)[62] When a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, or individual behavior, Durkheim would contend that, "we may rest assured that the explanation is false." (1895:129)

Durkheim was significantly inspired by the French intellectual tradition of Rousseau, C. H. Saint-Simon and A. Comte. His work is noticeable because of its disagreement with the utilitarian tradition, which explained social phenomena by reference to the actions and motives of the individual. He adopted a collectivist standpoint throughout his sociological analysis. He denied that the utilitarian account of individualism could provide the foundation on which to construct a stable society. He also asserted that the sociological method was to deal with social facts. In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1984),[63] Durkheim contended against Hebert Spencer in saying that social order in industrial societies could not adequately be explained as an outcome of contractual agreements between individuals motivated by self-interest, because the pursuit of self-interest would lead to social instability, as manifested in various forms of social deviance such as suicide. His analysis of social order in society demanded a prior consensus and moral order. On the other hand, in attempting to distinguish sociology from other forms of science, such as psychology, he drew attention to a special kind of "fact," a "social fact," which he held to be different from the facts, studied in the other sciences. In general, he defined the realm of sociology as the study of social facts, not individuals. He deemed that societies had their own realities, which could not merely be reduced to the actions and intentions of individuals, and

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[62] Durkheim, Emile.1982 [1895] *The Rules of the Sociological Method*. Tr. by W.D. Halls. New York: The Free Press.
[63] Durkheim, Emile.1984 *The Division of Labor in Society*, New York: The Free Press.

their social environments shaped those individuals. In Chapter 1 of *The Rules of Sociological Method*[64] he states two criteria for identifying "social facts." Firstly:

> A social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals, and the presence of this power may be recognized in its turn either by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort to violate it. (1895:10)

At the end of Chapter 1 he restates this as:

> A social fact is every way of acting …capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint. (1895:13)

The second criterion Durkheim gives for the existence of a "social fact" is:

> Every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations. (1895:13)

Evidently, Durkheim's methodology demonstrated that the "general" way of acting was a social fact, embodied in formal, externalized rules and not dependent on individuals. But how does it make sense to identify something "existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations"? To take an example from Durkheim's own work, *Suicide*, as a kind of social fact, exists "in its own right" apart from particular instances of suicide. In *Suicide*[65] (1897/1951), he explained how even apparent decisions to commit suicide could be understood as being affected by the different social forms of solidarity in different social settings. He identified four types of suicide—egoistic, anomic, altruistic and fatalistic—on the basis of his analysis of the suicide statistics of different societies and different groups within them. *Suicide* represents the most typical research that presumes methodological collectivism. *Suicide* indicates that he was fascinated by the study of society and how it exercises control over our behavior, as rules of conduct, as laws, as customs, and as norms and values that we believe in and that shape our conscience and make us part of a collectivity.

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[64] Durkheim, Emile.1982 [1895] *The Rules of the Sociological Method*. Tr. by W.D. Halls. New York: The Free Press.
[65] Durkheim, Emile 1951 *Suicide*, New York: The Free Press

Durkheim's methodological collectivism appears to have adopted a "realist' ontology, according to which universals exist independently and inherently of particular instances of those universals. In other words, the thing-like substance of "the social" exists not in the individual but in society. He basically believed that society is a reality independent of individual minds, and that the methodical elimination of our subjective preconceptions will enable us to know it as it is. Durkheim thus conceived sociology as the scientific study of a reality *sui generis*, a clearly defined group of phenomena different from those studied by all other sciences—biology, psychology included. The social reality *sui generis* is "a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him." (1895:52) Even though these facts consist of actions, thoughts, and feelings, they still should not confuse it with psychology, for they existed outside of individual *conscience*. Since social realities are presented to us only "from the outside," Durkheim asserted his conviction of what Peter Berger aptly called the *choséité* (literally, 'thingness") of social facts. A "thing" is recognizable as such mainly because it is obdurate to all variation by mere acts of will, and it is exactly this property of resistance to the action of individual will which characterizes social facts. Durkheim had evidently hypostatized the concept of "social fact." Therefore, the most basic rule of all sociological method, Durkheim thus contended, is *to treat social facts as things.* According to the middle way perspective, Durkheimian way of treating social facts as things—which can be grasped by scientific concepts—is without a doubt a substantialist approach; substantialism in a collectivistic sense.

Indeed, for Durkheim, society takes causal precedence over the individual. The schemes of action, perception, feeling and preference of the individual as such result from society. Social actors are seen as being moulded exclusively by the whole of which they are only a part. The parts are thus derived from the whole rather than the whole from the parts.[66] Furthermore, the whole, in other words, is something greater than the sum of its parts. It seems that his *homo sociologicus* conforms entirely to the determinations of the social whole. Some interpreters of Durkheim, such as Nisbet objects to the view that Durkheim had no sense of "human agency." For Nisbet: " Those who ascribe to Durkheim a purely passive view of the individual in relation to society have not read him carefully. Always he premises the notion of an active, acting person." (Nisbet 1966:199)[67] However, due to his eagerness to insist on

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[66] This, of course, had been a major source of Durkheim's disagreement with Spencer in *The Division of Labor* (cf. 1893: 200 -229).
[67] Nisbet, Robert, 1966. *The Sociological Tradition*. New York: Basic Books.

distinguishing between psychological and sociological factors in order to safeguard the legitimacy of sociology as an independent discipline, Durkheim asymmetrically put more emphasis on structural dimension than on the individual factor. As Steven Lukes argues, in concentrating exclusively "on the impact of social conditions on individuals rather than the ways individuals perceive, interpret and respond to social conditions, [Durkheim was led] to leave inexplicit and unexamined the social-psychological assumptions on which his theories rested."[68] He did so at least in his early writings as Jeffery Alexander (1982b)[69] perceives. He argues that there is a radical discontinuity between the metatheoretical supposition of the works of young Durkheim and his final works. Lukes, to a lesser extent, also senses an apparent shift in emphasis in Durkheim's work, which initially prefers explanations of determinist-structural character but later moves to a more idealistic approach of studying social phenomena. As Lukes points out, Durkheim's sociological realism had led him to "reify," or "deify," society –to treat it as a god *ex machina*.[70] From here we can detect that Durkheim's objectivistic attempt had actually unconsciously imposed his own subjective interpretation under the guise of external, scientific observation.

Durkheim's sociology creates the basis for transcending the methodological individualism in which the ends of action must be simply taken as independently constant, since he drew attention to the fact that ends as well as means of the individual are the result of certain social facts. Furthermore, such ends (ex. utility) are molded socially and have existence only within a given social reality *sui generis*, not in terms of individual voluntary action. It was Durkheim's illustration of this methodology, which provoked the interest of his contemporaries and successors. Durkheimian assumptions had a great influence upon the mainstream social sciences, especially upon empirical researches with practical application.

Basically, collectivistic methodology tends to define society as a constitution of many social categories and their corresponding social entities. Hence, the research accent should be located on the sociological causes, that is, actors' given socio-structural characteristics in order to precisely identify, or even predict, their subsequent behavior. This is especially true of much empirical research. The survey, for instance, is today a widely used way to collect information about a society at any particular

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[68] Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim*, *His Life and Work*, p.35. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
[69] Alexander, Jeffrey C. 1982b. *Theoretical Logic in Sociology, Vol. 2, The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[70] Lukes, S. 1975. *Emile Durkheim*, His Life and Work, pp. 34-35. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

time. We can see the results of such surveys in the news reports almost everyday. Whenever a newspaper or TV anchor says "today's poll shows…" he/she is relying upon a survey done most likely by these social scientists. These kinds of surveys are done quantitatively to describe what the population in a collective sense is thinking, doing and feeling. For lay people, the supposedly hypothesized and "testable" survey data done by sociologists, economists, political scientists and other social scientists are seen as thing-like, or hard-and-fast truth proven by scientific procedure. Many social scientists are thus involved in 'Quantophrenia," the fetishistic belief that if you can't count it, it does not "count." Take marketing research as an example, criteria for classifying social categories are the main conceptual tool used in identifying market niches in many outstanding studies found scattered in various marketing research journals, such as *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research.* For example, to study the relation between age groups and smoking behaviors, between the class identity and consumption in general, the distinction of buying preference between two societies and so forth, their research assumption implies a over-socialized conception of consuming behavior, that is, they perceive society as a combination of social categories, a multi-dimensional division of class, status, gender, ethnicity, age, residential area, and various other structural factors. And hence, it is believed that the norms and values of the above subgroups make individual behave a certain way in order to fulfill the expectations of his/her social category; consequently, her taste and consumption decisions reflect nothing more than the requirement of the social cage in which he/she is confined. The causal explanation of this approach usually assumes a Durkheimian methodological rule: "The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among the antecedent social facts and not among the states of the individual consciousness." (1895:134-135) A unique characteristic with this approach is that, social categories and their inner divisions are seen as categorically certain and logically consistent, and are deemed identical and correspondent to the social reality they represent. In other words, a person's social-demographical factors are seen as given and fixed, whereby the individuals are located on the receiving end of this causal explanation. Hence, once those factors are "properly" placed, his or her behavior, attitude and opinion can only be rigidly identified. While methodological individualism tends to emphasize on how individuals independently, or rationally make their decisions; methodological collectivism, by contrast, addresses how individual decisions are determined. We can say that while the individualistic approach is all about how people make choices; collectivistic approach is all about how they don't have any choice to make.

If we go back to the 1950s and early 60s we can see how prevalent collectivistic assumptions were in American academia. Books such as W.F. Whyte's (1957) classic *The Organization Man* explored the way in which corporate America was fundamentally turning individuals into gray, faceless workers. Even scientists could not escape from this mood as seen in the chapter in Whyte's book entitled, " The Organization Scientist," with telling subheadings like "The Fight Against Genius," and "The Bureaucratization of the Scientist." These chapters argued that instead of individual talent, scientific creativity was being suppressed in research process in favor of quiet bureaucratic conformity. In an analogous flash, Presthus's book, *The Organizational Society*, argued along similar lines that the logic of large institutes, with their focus on authority, position, and small groups, were holding back individual growth and creativity. Many social scientists emphasized the importance of collectivistic arguments and demonstrated the influence of sociological factors as the determining cause of social phenomena.

In general, methodological collectivism is a position that asserts that individuals are essentially epiphenomenal with respect to social-structural explanations. The individuals are generated by the operation of the whole, or the collective categories, and in their own right they explain nothing.

3.3 Towards a Relational-Processual Methodology

The middle way perspective accepts neither methodological individualism nor methodological collectivism, viewing them as too substantialistic. The insights of *sunyata* and *pratitya-samutpada* do not commit social theorists to either under- or over-socialized view of the individual. The dichotomized methodological assumption of either individualism or collectivism is an imprudent distinction that ignores the dynamic relational process of the formation of individuals and social phenomena. On the one hand, the individualistic view eradicates the interrelated social context within which individual preferences are formed and choices are dependently made, while on the other hand, the collectivistic view eliminates the influence of intersubjective and self-reflective human agency from the dependent co-arising of the social world. Neither perspective is very productive.

Actually, from the middle way perspective, what individualists assume as characteristics of human nature is empty of inherently and independently existent self-nature (*svabhava*). They are instead the historical-specific and dependently arisen

components of humanity that constitute the formation of relatively durable schemes of actions, thoughts, feelings and appreciations. In other words, to put it more sociologically, human interests, values or preferences have no pre-existing essence. We cannot find any form of human essence independent of the particular time and space and the enculturation processes of the specific socio-historical junction. Culture and historicity are the nucleus frame of reference of social analysis. An interpretative understanding of non-substantial human actions, in turn, must be situated in the dynamic cultural and historical practices of the time and place under consideration. Any social research not based on this awareness will be defective and misleading. Therefore, a prime objection to methodological individualism is that it is unable to adequately account for culture, history, tradition and other social habits. Much of human behavior should be understood on these grounds rather than the isolated individual essence.

One the other hand, collectivism also cannot adequately conceptualize the complex nature of the interrelationship and dynamic process of human participation performed by socially embedded actors. Collectivists' account of culture, history, tradition and other social habits seem to be determinist and conservative. Their static nature of analysis that emphasizes the logical precedence of social collectivities to the explanation of human behavior and implicitly implies the contribution of social elements and its conforming act to the maintenance of the state of equilibrium. Methodological collectivism in this sense tends to turn people into "oversocialized individuals." (Bloch, 1991)[71] Sociologists such as Wolff (1994) reject this tendency: "I am that subject which is acculturated, which has absorbed tradition but which is not identical with its culture ...." (p. 288)[72] Thus, methodological collectivism is no better than methodological individualism. In fact, it is this antihistoric stance, which made it unable to examine social processes. Moreover, its rejection of agentic human actions also made it impossible to understand the dependent arising of schemes of acts, thoughts, feelings and appreciations of individuals. We therefore demand a social science in which the individual as a proper unity of life is not submerged in collectivities.

On the whole, according to the middle way perspective, both extremes of exclusivity in the social sciences should be avoided. According to the middle way relational-processual perspective, I suggest, various kinds of social collectivities are

[71] Bloch, M. 1991. Language, anthropology and cognitive science. In *Man*, 26, 183-198.
[72] Wolff, K.H. 1994. Sociology and meaning. in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 19, 287-292.

not static entities, they are rather the interweaving networks, which are concurrent constraints as well as enablers of human behaviors and thus social analysis must be prepared to understand these meaningful complex nexuses. All human actions are mediated through some related complex nexuses working as filters through which the dependent co-arising of situated subjects and patterns of interaction, groups, institutions, etc. become possible. It is in this sense that we cannot accept atomistic individualism, which ignores the relatedness in which individuals are already embedded within. Human action is thus considered by individualism as disembedded, or disconnected. Individualist methodology is committed ignorantly to a reductionist method of analysis which blinds itself from the dependent co-arising of the individual's sociality. This basic shortcoming is often compounded with other errors including subjectivism, anthropocentrism, voluntarism, a bias applied to various versions such as George Homan's exchange theory and Talcott Parsons' theory of social action. Human actions, thoughts, feelings and preference dependently arise in a conventionally designated world. In other words, the relationally-processually mediated dimension of the formation of human value-relevance should be considered to be the constitutive of every actor's "action frame of reference." And, of course, this must be examined in the webs of mutual embeddedness. Take the individual consuming behavior as an example. Sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1899, 1934)[73], for instance, perceived "conspicuous consumptions" of leisure class as involving in great and subtle webs of symbolic meanings. By resorting to their extravagant and styled consuming behavior, the higher status group differentiates themselves from the masses, who cannot afford to do so. In fact, in modern "consumer society," the working of social signification is even more extensive. Therefore, the socially embedded symbolic meaning is pervasive in consumption, in order for consumers to signify a self-identity and to achieve self-fulfillment. Consumption is thus taken to be a historically and culturally specific nexus of symbolic action, by which people communicate and interact with one another, to express and identify their social categories. Utility is thereby no longer a function of instinctual drive, but a function of symbolically designated interactions in a relational context. Hence, a comprehensive research on individual consumption, and other social behaviors, should address both the socio-historical context of mutual involvement and the symbolic designation whereby an individual's consumptions and actions are mediated.

Again, from the middle way perspective, I would argue, a transcending endeavor to overcome reified methodological individualism does not necessarily lead to the

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[73] Veblen, Thorstein. 1961 [1934]. *The Theory of The Leisure Class*. New York: Modern Library.

opposing extreme of substantialism, to methodological collectivism. In other words, the emergence of the social conditions of human action, its tradition and historicity, must not presuppose the existence of some hypostatized social entity, or social categories *sui generis* as seen in Durkheimian collectivism. Moreover, various kinds of social collectivities as interweaving networks should not be considered as a static system in equilibrium "existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations" and are presented to individuals as a coercive force only "from the outside." Rather, social reality is seen as nexuses, or working fields where every actor's subjectivities arise co-dependently, and are mutually enmeshed with one another in continual process. Throughout the dynamic relational process, the individual's self-reflexivity and self-monitoring capacity, its unacknowledged practical and habitual proclivity, and unconscious motivations are certainly inseparable from their social conditions. There is a mutual embeddedness between individual and his/her social context. Since mutuality indicates reciprocated influence, we must not ignore the task of the self as the responsible action of the individual in the social world. It is only by working through the intersubjectively meaningful social nexuses that the individual's "freedom to act" can be conducted. However, without the individuals' relative autonomy to act with critical attitude toward the very nexus upon which he/she depends for the formation of our autonomy, the dynamic interweaving of social relations and continual flux of social changes is not tenable. From the relational-processual approach, I contend, social collectivities in various kinds can be understood as a dependently emergent property of the interweaving network constructed by relevant individuals with the capability of self-reflection and practical performance. Individuals, unwittingly or not, concurrently and interdependently work as architects of the social constructs, or structures, and they are therefore responsible for the intended and unintended consequences of their actions.

The middle way relational-processual perspective argues that the mutual involvements among related individuals significantly influence the actual decision-making processes in which individuals act. Due to the continuous interaction within relational contexts, we get information, cultivate our taste, shape our general tendency of sense-precept and built up our schemes of action, thought, feeling and preference. Because of this intricate involvement, we must constantly modify or examine our temporally and dependently durable schemes. Relationally and processually speaking, our schemes of action, thought, feeling and preference are neither absolutely independent nor fixed. However, as stated, our critical attitude must play a significant role in order to prevent individual from a nihilistic practice of

continual flux—that is a change of the self, or the social world, without any responsibility and commitment. In comparison with a literally nihilistic view of change without dependence, the middle way view of the phenomena might be seen as relatively more or less enduring, or in a way unchanged.

This methodological awareness is important because it is noticeable that both methodological nihilism and substantialism (for example, individualism and collectivism) suffer a certain relational-processual deficiency. Nihilism and substantialism, individualism and collectivism are reduced to a sterile set of propositions and irrelevant mental gymnastics. As Hirschman once stated, our preferences with regard to decision-making is never static, but rather understood as "changes in values" which give direction to "non-wanton" (non-random) changes of preference. In the meantime, according to Hirschman[74], neither can we assert a totally rationalized conception of actors, who make decisions simply out of instrumental rationality to pursue only "goal-utility." (1985, pp. 147-153) Instead, a significant part of human behavior consists of non-instrumental action for "process-utility." "Shifting involvements," Hirschman proposes ((1982), enables an individual to constantly shift their modes of action. Preference is thus not an independent and fixed variable in human action, but the critical-reflective choice of "shifting involvements" that dependently arises and changes in continual flux.[75]

Sociologically speaking, these "shifting involvements" are significantly conditioned and, in some sense, influenced by socio-historical context. Furthermore, patterns of interaction and mutual involvement that would dependently co-arise within one context may not arise in another. In other words, our shifting involvements and patterns of interaction are not invariant to historically specific social contexts. Therefore, preferred action-orientation in one setting may lead to wholesome consequences, whereas action in another setting may produce sufferable effects. Not only our individual actions are dependent on certain acknowledged or unacknowledged social conditions, but the same goes in consequences, both anticipated and unanticipated, of interaction amongst individuals in a social setting.

Again, the middle way reasoning is in the principle of "neither-nor" which requires a

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[74] Hirshman, Albert 1985 "Against Parsimony: Three Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Descourse" Economics and Philosophy 1.
[75] Hirshman, Albert 1982 Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

more flexible form of thought than substantialism in order to transcend the dualistic theorizing in the social sciences, that is, the dichotomization of individualism and collectivism, or nihilism and substantialism. In light of a relational-processual perspective, instead of nihilistically negating any institutional validity in the social world; the field of social sciences should recognize that terms such as "social collectivity" are a matter of nominal convention (*praj-napti*), which is constructed by intersubjective expectations, beliefs and desires, and the corresponding conducts of interrelated individuals. On the other hand, social sciences must understand social collectivities in terms of dynamic networking or a nexus of interweaving human relations, which perform as constraints or catalysts, the conditions of possibility of human actions so to speak.

The concept of social collectivity (such as structure, institution, group etc.) can assist social scientists to make sense of the co-dependent patterning of human actions and simultaneously take into account the intelligibility, critical reflexivity and practicality of human actions, whose shifting involvements construct, or transform the patterning of their embedded social collectivities. Social collectivities as open-ended concepts are abbreviations for very complex constellations of mutually embedded actions and mental states (beliefs, expectations, desires) of people. There is no such a higher level from which we could observe social collectivities as substantial wholes. Nor is the relation between these collectivities and the participating individuals a part-whole relation. Both social collectivity and individuality are empty of essence and dependently co-arise in terms of dynamic networking or a nexus of interweaving processes. There is no independent measuring procedure for the concepts of collectivity and individual. Social sciences do not have a procedure of measurement that can grasp a substantiality of the social whole that is independent of the mutually involved actions, thoughts, feelings and preferences of relevant individuals in a relationally and processually mediated working field, or nexus.

There is no fixity or given nature in humanities. Instead, there is a dynamic complex of human aptitude which includes socially involved conscious, habitual and certain unconscious components that enable the individual to make choices in a world of shifting involvements. The individualist assumption of maximizing behavior has in fact reduced human action to a simple exercise within a given ends-means framework. It seems as if, for the individualist, there is no variation of human choices from given ends-means, and therefore we have no other alternative but to maximize profit. That is, we are "free" to choose but it "must" be done within given ends-means framework.

Isn't it ironic? The problem with insisting only on the dimension of profit-maximizing action is that when counter-examples crop up they are nearly inexplicable to rational-choice assumptions. If seeking to maximize one's personal rewards were true, then soldiers would become conscientious objectors instead of risking death in war. Practices such as charity, alms, asceticism, sacrifice, altruism, loan and volunteer works would not be appreciated. Parents would not sacrifice for their children either. For these and many other stated reasons, rational-choice theories, as well as other individualistic methodologies, are simply unable to take into account or analyze relationally and processually the social conditions of action alternatives, decision principles, preference frameworks and human interaction patterns and human agents' shaping and reshaping of their social conditions. The social conditions of these phenomena are dependently durable relations and patterns of socio-historical realities, such as various kinds of grouping or institutionalization. Indeed, a basic truth of relational-processual perspective in sociology is that human activity does not take place prior to or outside of social conditions. At the same time, within particular social background and material conditions, socially embedded agents may modify or transform social conditions or dependently create relatively new conditions.

Conversely, this social embeddedness of the individual does not adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular complex of social categories that they happen to occupy. Our attempt is to overcome both the problems of under- and over-socialized views of humanity that are evident in standard methodological individualism and collectivism. In other words, individuals are not designed to maximize within an unconditioned vacuum, nor are they ordained to be merely puppets of collective forces beyond their control. It is a way not to deny an individual's self-reflective action as manifested in the decision-making process. We are, in this sense, an agency with *telos*. We do have planned goals and organize skillful means to hopefully attain them, but this cannot be reduced to instrumental rationality in a given mean-end framework. Though teleological, the acting individual is not independent of and is always already involved in a dynamically and socially embedded context. In general, the middle way relational-processual perspective must overcome the problem of ontological antinomies, epistemological dualisms, and methodological dilemmas prevalent in the social sciences.

4. Beyond Positivism, Interpretism, Relativism and Nihilism –A Relational-Processual and Hermeneutical Turn

Since its beginning, modern sociology was so impressed with the success of the natural sciences—originally derived from metaphysics—that sociologists often expressed their admiration and derived their presumptions from those fields. But the worldview of the natural science has its own substantialist presuppositions, which originated in ancient Greece—especially in Aristotlian substantialism, as we have mentioned before. Therefore, when the practitioners of sociology proclaim their project as a debunking of the social myth, they themselves haven't yet freed themselves from their own metaphysical myth completely. Since the beginning of the discipline, a lot of sociological analysis has utilized categories and taxonomic schemes to identify, define and classify their analyzed sociological objects.

The problem of this attitude is that it, on the one hand, essentializes its vantage point as real, and assigns the judgment of social scientists as the only criteria of scientific truth. On the other hand, there is a tendency to assert the existence of the analyzed social phenomena as really existent out there as independent of the observers. Some scientists tend to emphasize the inherent and independent existence of the outside social world, while others stress more the priority of the empirical judgment of their scientific findings. What I would argue is that this distinction of methodological preference does not detriment their latent conspiracy, which is the formation of the "correspondence theory of truth"—the assertion that a statement (or proposition) is true if and only if that which the sentence expresses corresponds to the "facts" or to "reality." A subjectivist will hold that the reality is true as affirmed by mind, while an objectivist will hold that this reality is objective and mind-independent. Despite their differences, either starting from a subjectivist or an objectivist vantage point, they both are substantialists in the last instance.

The notion of self-generating and self-enduring substance sustaining persistent qualities has its modern version in the philosophy of "the will" and in liberal political theory (since Hobbes, Locke, and Kant), while in the social sciences it remains existent in the form of substance. "All the spooks, fairies, essences, and entities that once had inhabited portions of matter now〔take〕flight to new homes, mostly in or at the human body…. The 'mind' as 'actor,' still in use in present-day psychologies and sociologies, is the old self-acting 'soul' with its immortality stripped off." (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p.13)

In order to overcome the substantialism in the forms of objectivism and subjectivism, we need to examine their manifestations as positivism and interpretism in sociology. Thus, I will elaborate a hermeneutic approach together with the relational-processual perspective in order to transcend the inadequacy of both positivism and interpretism. Moreover, based on this I will argue that the relativist and nihilistic alternative in opposition to substantialism are still problematic and thereby unacceptable.

4.1 Positivistic Sociology

Many modern scientists are proud of their scientific advancements and affirm themselves in the spirit of positivism.[76] This means, among other things, that many philosophers believe that we have progressed beyond the abstract speculations of metaphysics and have become more and more self-aware and sophisticated in the way we develop theories and execute observations. But the fact is that, if the old metaphysics are gone, metaphysics in the wider sense are still pervasive and condition our very fundamental recognition of the nature of the world, and such knowledge can always be called upon from our sense experience towards the world we suppose ourselves to be in. Thus, the positivistic assumption has become the dominant *episteme*, or paradigm, within the scientific community, or even become the natural attitude among lay people.

Positivism argued that all the sciences should depend upon the same foundation in the study of facts about the physical world. In this sense, there was no important difference between biology, physics or chemistry – all would use the same methods for discovering positive truths about the real world – the so-called "unity of science project." The most fundamental assumption of positivism is that an orderly external reality exists. The Newtonian view of the universe, which underlies positivism, suggests that reality is decomposable into insolated elements. Newtonian science has a mechanistic, deterministic, and linear view of reality.

Following the path of advances like Newton's theory of gravity which unraveled the mysteries of the natural world, some thinkers figured that the laws of the social world could also be discovered. They figured that once these laws were found, the same

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[76] Auguste Comte (1798-1857) argued that humankind had gone through three great phases of searching for a truer understanding: the *theological* (involving a search for God and spirituality), the *metaphysical* (the search for philosophical truths) and now the *positive* or *scientific* phase (involving the search for facts). This third phase involved scientific exploration and the objective collection and judgements of facts in order that humankind might arrive at 'positive' truth, as distinct from theological or metaphysical truths.

order would be established to society. If psychology and sociology could adopt the method practiced by the natural sciences, it could then be accepted as a science. By overlooking the differences between human behavior and incidences in nature, the positive science of society would entail explanatory schemes of the same logical and methodological form as those recognized in natural science. Two principles characterize those foundations of unified science: the belief in the possibility of discovering universal laws and the use of formal logic—or logical deduction—as the core methodological principle. In fact, during the nineteenth-century social philosophy and social theory, positivism was in ascendence if, as indicated by Giddens, positivism is understood to mean two things. "First, a conviction that all 'knowledge,' or all that is counted as 'knowledge,' is capable of being expressed in terms which refer in an immediate way to some reality, or aspects of reality that can be apprehended through the senses. Second, a faith that the methods and logical form of science, as epitomized in classical physics, can be applied to the study of social phenomena." (1993: 133)[77] In other words, the data of sense experience and logical principle of science are the only object and the utmost criterion of human knowledge. Since the fundamental principle of positivism is that sense experience is the only object of human knowledge as well as its sole and utmost criterion, judgments are thus mere empirical colligation of facts. In addition to that, positivism also implies a nomological assumption that presupposes the existence of a universally valid scientific theory, which provides laws that are analogous to the law of physics. Thus, to positivists, social sciences too can make predictions in the sense in which this ability is attributed to the natural sciences.

In the writings of Comte, and Marx alike, the science of social life was to attain the liberation of human spirit from theological dogmas and metaphysical beliefs. Comte, who coined both the terms "positive philosophy" and "sociology," is therefore considered to be the founder of sociology. Comte's stressed that sociology should be a scientific discipline much like the natural sciences. He felt that sociology should be rooted in positivism, that is, knowledge should be derived from observable facts, rather than from superstition, metaphysics, or some other non-empirical (unverifiable) source. He thought that this was possible because he saw the social world as being governed by a set of laws. The arguments advanced by Comte, in addition to the assertion that sense observations are the only source of human knowledge, is the theory of evolutionism, which was based on his famous "law of the three stages,"

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[77] Giddens, Anthony. 1993. *New Rules of Sociological Method – A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*. Second Edition. Stanford University Press Stanford, California.

according to which the human mind in its progress is supposed to have been successively influenced by theological preoccupations and metaphysical speculation, and to have finally reached at the present time the positive stage, which marks, according to Comte, its full and perfect development. The task of sociology, Comte claimed, is to explain the laws of progress and social order. The method, he asserted, that sociology applies is basically the same as that which has been used in the natural sciences: observation, experimentation, and comparison. Observation, to Comte, can come into its own only when it is subordinated to the static and dynamic laws of phenomena.[78]

> . . that we have abandoned the region of metaphysical idealities, to assume the ground of observed realities by a systematic subordination of imagination to observation; …and, thirdly, that permanent political action is limited by determinate laws, since if social events were always exposed to disturbance by the accidental intervention of the legislator, human or divine, no scientific prevision of them would be possible. Thus, we may concentrate the conditions of the spirit of positive social philosophy on this one great attribute of scientific prevision . . .

Comte's positivism is a theory of history in which progress in knowledge is considered the motor of history itself. He also took the epistemological position that empirical methods are the only adequate sources of knowledge, both in the social and natural realms. According to Comte, what distinguishes scientific from non-scientific is empirical testability. He also formulated an instrumentalist view of science: The basis of positive knowledge is its practical applicability, and science is an instrument of control over physical and social conditions.

Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* was perhaps the foremost writing that explicitly advocates positivist sociology. Durkheim believed that the objective of sociology was to create theories about human behavior inductively founded on the preceding observations in relation to that behavior. "These observations which are made about externally 'visible' characteristics of behaviour, are necessarily 'pre-theoretical,' since it is out of them that theories are born."[79] As discussed before, the most basic rule of all sociological method, Durkheim proclaimed, is to treat social facts as things. From such primary ruling, three supplementary rules for the observation of social facts automatically follow. The first, implied in much of the

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[78] From Auguste Comte, The Positive Philosophy (translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau), Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854). 68-74 and 95-110.
[79] Giddens, 1993.

discussion above, is that one ought to scientifically cast off all prejudgments and pre-theories. Durkheim therefore added that the sociologist must deny himself the use of those concepts formed outside of science and for extra-scientific needs: "He must free himself from those fallacious notions which hold sway over the mind of the ordinary person, shaking off, once and for all the yoke of those empirical categories that long habit often makes tyrannical."[80] Meanwhile, the theme of social research thus must focus on only a group of phenomena defined in advance by certain general external characteristics, and all phenomena that correspond to this definition must be incorporated. By doing scientific investigation, Durkheim argued, we are obliged to first set up a definition of that specific group of phenomena with which it is concerned. In order to be objective, this definition must refer not to some ideal type of these phenomena, but to those properties which are both *inherent* in the phenomena themselves and externally visible by investigators. For Durkheim, unlike for Weber, in order to "precisely" identify the social fact which has existence "out there," our scientific concepts must be an *average type* in order to refer to the most frequently occurring characteristics of the species in their most frequently occurring forms. A social fact would be "normal" as much as it approximates that type, and "pathological" if it deviates from that. Durkheimian positivism asserts that the normality of the phenomenon would be grappled and also observable if it could be shown that its external sign (generality) was not merely an appearance, but grounded in the nature of things. Therefore, scientific investigation, Durkheim insisted, must begin by defining precisely the specific group of phenomena with which it is concerned and science must dismiss those *praenotions*, fashioned throughout ordinary, extra-scientific understanding, and generate its concepts anew through scientifically observable data. Social scientists must, in turn, formulate their own concepts and classificatory schemes at the beginning of the research in order to subdue the subjective and chaotic streams of experience in everyday life. For Durkheim, everyday life activity "merely express the confused impression of the mob" and "if we follow common use," he continues, "we risk distinguishing what should be combined, or combining what should be distinguished, thus mistaking the real affinities of things, and accordingly misapprehending their nature."[81] In other words, Durkheim's image of scientific observation must disconnect itself from ideas ordinary actors may have about their own actions and those of others. "It is incumbent upon the

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[80] Durkehim, 1895: 73.
[81] Giddens, 1993:138.

observer to make every possible effort to keep them separate from common-sense notions held by actors themselves, because these frequently have no basis in fact."[82]

Durkheim's positivistic sociology is without a doubt a kind of substantialism in the objectivistic sense, which assumes that there are distinguishable "natural affinities" of objects (physical or social) that pre-exist externally out there and determine whatever an observer does in conceptualizing and classifying those objects. The objectivistic substantialism of this kind dismisses commonsense notions of social practice as irrelevant to the study of society. Since social facts are seen as those properties which are both *inherent* in the phenomena themselves and externally visible by investigators and independent of the subjective consciousness of social actors, the interrelationship amongst social observers, actors and facts are thereby considered non-existent or at least irrelevant. Besides, the inherent existence of social properties and its extra-theoretical and pre-existing externality also discounts our ability to explain the dynamic processuality of social phenomena. Generally speaking, Durkheim's positivistic sociology is insufficient for relational and processual thinking, which would take into account the mutual embeddedness and dynamic changing process of social phenomena in which scientific investigations and ordinary social practices are mutually involved. From the middle way relational-porcessual perspective, the sociological conceptualization that might be employed in social analysis must be constructed out of in-depth descriptions of commonsensical concepts used by interrelated actors themselves. The issue of adequacy in the social studies should take into consideration the relational process—a circulation of mutually involved interpretations, between everyday language and social scientific metalanguages.

Due to the pre-eminence of scientism in twentieth century, positivism became the dominant stream of thought in all knowledge. Particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, logical positivism cropped up as a more thorough justification of the privileged position of scientific knowledge than ever before. What Feigl called the "orthodox" view of natural science, as formulated by those influenced by logical positivism became another advocate of a positivistic worldview.[83] It was with the emergence of the group of philosophers known as the Vienna Circle in the 1920s that positivism became the guideline for the social sciences. Scientific theories renamed as "logical positivism" inherited most of the assumptions and assertions of the ideas and

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Feigl, Herbert. "The 'orthodox' view of theories: some remarks in defence as well as critique", in Radner, M., and Winokur, S., *Minnesota Studies I: the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 4, Minneapolis, 1970.

scientific practices of earlier positivism. They adopted the notions that an external and orderly reality exists, that a universal methodology for all sciences can be found, and that this universal methodology must be based on the applications of formal logic and mathematics. They espoused the unity of science and the historical progression of knowledge. According to the logical positivist view, universal laws are generalizations that can be tested through observation and their truth can be established with a great degree of certainty. Science is conceived as hypothetico-deductive systems, which places emphasis on theories and the logical deduction of hypotheses to test those hypotheses as well as the collection of facts. Besides, the positivists of the Vienna Circle presupposed the usual distinction between "*a priori*," and "*a posteriori*." Propositions a priori are true exclusively owing to the rules of language. An a posteriori proposition was valid only if it could be "verified" by empirical test. "The creation of theories involves several levels of conceptual differentiation – at the highest level, abstract postulates which cannot be given a precise definition in terms of their empirical content, but only in terms of their logical relation with other postulates. The concepts contained in theoretical generalizations are distinct from the terms of the observation language, which are referred to as the sensory 'soil' of observation and the language of theory. Hence there have to be correspondence rules which specify the relations that pertain between the language of observation and the language of theory."[84]

The "correspondence theory of truth" became their basic premise, which asserts that whether what is said about the world is true depends on how the world is. Based on this premise we can say that the central theme of logical positivism is that a statement can only be true only if the statement matches reality precisely. In other words, statements must be verifiable to be meaningful. Sociologically speaking, the meaning of a statement concerning the truth of social phenomena is simply the conditions under which it could be verified. Thus, if a scientific statement concerning social phenomena did not explain an "experiential proposition," such as a sense-experience or an objective sensory event reflecting some attribute of social reality, then it may hold no worth. The positivists of this kind insisted that "science" be "empirical" and their extreme brand of empiricism was verificationism. Attempted verifications of a proposition were to be "objective" procedures, fully explicit and external. No element of interpretation was tolerated to distort them. Meanings, according to positivists, could not be observed nor verified. The logical positivists offered science without subjective dimension.

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[84] Giddens, 1993:140.

In harmony with Comtean and early Durkheimian view of positivistic sociology, logical positivists also tried to negate all philosophical and religious speculations as false beliefs since none of either realms have propositions that could be verified by experience.

According to such view, propositions are true if and only if they correspond with the facts. In this case they must view truth as a correspondence to which one would need to assume the existence of entities serving some role in accounting for the truth of sentences and/or propositions. Such views, as well as earlier-established variants of positivism, or the "data" of social scientists' empirical statements force upon us a precise type of explanation and classification of the world of external social reality. This implies two claims, as Giddens states: "it is feasible and necessary to search for some sort of ultimate foundations of scientific knowledge which are 'certain'; and that these foundations have to be located in some area of experience which can be described or categorized in a language which is theoretically neutral."[85] In other words, the scientific statement must be verifiable and a science can be built on that basis. Actually, logical positivism has become the foundational assumption of empirical social research. It is assumed by logical positivists that a literal language should make it possible to convey the objective meanings that are embedded in reality—meanings that are verifiable by checking against reality. Durkheim's famous study of "suicide" conveys the overall sense of how scientific statements, concerning suicide for instance, would be generated and their truth verified as logical positivism pursues. Logical positivists argued that science should seek to describe the regularities of cause and effect, or explanans and explanandum, in order to explain the social world. For example, we can explain Durkheim's study of suicide as a logical positivist attempt to seek to describe the regularities of cause and effect by formulating a causal explanation of social attributes and the rates of suicide.

Immediately after the logical consideration, the collection of observable incidents called suicide was in turn undergoing. The collected data were then classified and measured according to the appropriate scales and the procedures would be summarized in the form of rates, averages, totals, maps, tables, graphs, and the like. At this instant, the data collected might be formed into a logical-empirical generalization: "suicide varies with Catholic and Protestant religious affiliation." And then, for making a more theorized form of causal explanation, four definitional steps would be conducted in order to form a proposition: (1) forming a concept (explanans)

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85 Ibid.

that identified some attributes that the observed religious affiliation populations, jointly with other populations still unexamined, may have in different level, and that may logically or causally account for their having different suicide rates; (2) forming a concept (explanandum) that identifies some attributes that suicide rates have in common with other conceivable rates, by virtue of which they might all be logical or causal consequences of the explanans; (3) forming a proposition in which the explanans and explanandum are related in a logically consistent way with the relationship stated in the originating empirical generalization; and (4) forming several such propositions, all sharing a common explanandum or a common explanans, and arranging them in such a way that further hypotheses can be deduced and tested.[86] This is typically the way how logical positivists conduct their research.

All that is required of theory by logical positivism is to be expressed as a set of propositions with rules to link them systematically to objective measurements of the social reality. New observations and new observed generalities to assess the accuracy of this novel proposition could be produced as before, by construing the proposition into directly observable terms, scaling, instrumentation, and sampling, and by measurement, summarization, and parameter estimation. Then the new empirical generalizations could be compared with the propositions, and thereby verify and describe the regularities of cause and effect in order to explain the real social world. This kind of verificationist argument has its *a priori* presumption, that is, in the form of: "If A, then B." The antecedent, A, is the explainant, or independent variable, that is seen as the statement's *a priori*. The subsequent, B, is the explanandum, or dependent variable, that is the statement's *a posteriori*. Propositions *a priori* are true exclusively owing to the rules of language. An *a posteriori* proposition was valid only if it could be "verified" by empirical test. But according to the middle way perspective, all things are empty of inherent and independent substance and arise co-dependently in a relational-processual flux. This perspective is even more applicable to science. Any *a priori* presumption and verificationist argument in science is non-relational and non-processual and thereby inadequate. There is no scientific statement that is inviolable or immune from a criticizing and thus changing process. Popper was right at least in this sense to claim that science progresses by conjectures and refutations. Therefore, the presumed "*a priori*" element in our proposition may change dependently over time. In other words, it is not essentially an independent variable and antecedent that can exist inherently.

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[86] See Wallace, Water L. *The Logic of Science in Sociology* (1971:27). Aldine Publishing Company: Chicago.

The positivistic sociology's quest for foundations of empirical knowledge is definitely a substantialist assumption whereby the belief in correspondence and truth itself came to appear more and more "metaphysical," and its claim of theoretical neutrality is actually prejudicial and self-contradictory. Basically positivistic sociology argued that sociology should focus only on that which could be observed because only phenomenon that could be observed could be measured objectively and reliably. Objectivity and reliability enabled different observers to verify or check each other's findings and thus laid the foundation for a science of sociology. It is important to note that logical positivists had little to say about how logical conceptualization and classification, which is supposed to correspond with the verifiable and observable facts, can take into account the inexhaustible and intricate dimensions of meaningful action conducted by self-reflective (and partly unconscious motives of) individuals within the intersubjective relations and changing processes of socio-historical contexts.

The tradition and ordinary consciousness in everyday life practices are something full of meanings that cannot be fully conceptualized or quantitatively defined by any scientific statements. Neither can they all be completely observed and verified, due to the complex relational-processual human actions and interactions, that involves numerous circle of mutual interpretations and an endless fusion of our action framework of references. Besides, social actions are not always rational in the rationalistic sense. It could be non-rational, emotional or socially/traditionally acceptable but logically irrational. Therefore, the principle of logical consistency assumed by the positivists could hardly match the complexities of actual social practices. Moreover, the clear and distinct constructs of sociological concepts and typifications also misconstrue the thick, dense and nontransparent dependent co-arising of meaningful social constructs in society. Worst of all, positivists stipulate a detached and value-free vantage point that is distinct and distanced from the relatedness and processuality of actual social practice by trying to lay down a theoretically neutral proposition, with which social scientists operate their measurement and observation over the exterior dimension (that is external to and coercive of the individuals) of social phenomena. Such presupposition of positivistic sociology cannot, on the one hand, reflect upon the actual conditionality and the contextual involvement of the social scientists and the value relevance of their research project and to some extent their viewpoints. They also cannot address the ongoing and mutual involvement and mutual-hermeneutics between researchers and lay people. On the other hand, their emphases on the observable and quantifiable

exteriority of social reality *sui generis* have blocked them off from the prospect of an interpretive understanding of the subjective and intersubjective (interior) process within social actions.

Positivists in the aforementioned sense are simply interested in specifying what should be permitted as scientific without trying to contemplate which of the meaning-adequate dimension of social practices should be understood. In that sense, positivism is conservative and more interested in distinguishing between the correct and incorrect, true or false, forms of science regarding the given reality, rather than understanding, or in a way criticizing, the meaningfulness, adequacy, goodness, beauty, history, plausibility, acceptability and justness of human societies. However, social sciences are actually connected to modes of experience that lie outside of the pure logic and the scientific fact. The modes of experience of meaningfulness, adequacy, goodness, beauty, history, plausibility, acceptability and justness are dependently co-arisen and therefore cannot be verified and observed completely by the logical-positivistic means proper to science.

In general, positivistic sociology's dealing of the "externality," or "exteriority," of social facts, and the "coercion," or "constraint," which are seen as the force exerting over actors' behavior, without taking into account the inner and intersubjective modes of experience, and the broader social-cultural context was an attempt to provide a realist theory of the causal relation between action and the substances of social collectivities. This approach is irreconcilable with the middle way insights of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal convention. In other words, it is dualistic, non-relational and non-processual.

4.2 Interpretist Sociology

Social facts are perceived by positivists as inherent and independent objects *sui generis* in the natural world to be observed and explained. The observation of social facts quantitatively leads on to statistics and mathematics, which then leads on to the prepositional statements or causal explanations between one observable fact and another. When we are certain about the causal relationship between independent variables (explanans) and dependent variables (explanandums), positivists applied this rule to establish the laws of human society.

As we mentioned earlier, this approach ignores the relational-processual context in various modes of human experience. In other words, it is insufficient of the insight for interpretive meaning. Positivists, inspired by the natural science, might consider that since there are external laws that determine individual behavior there is no need for social actors, and thereby none for researchers to interpret. However, for interpretive sociologists, social actors are very different from natural objects of scientific observation because they are self-conscious beings with various modes of experience. Analytical and quantitative data cannot decipher the inner meanings of an actor's action and experience. The tools of the natural sciences are simply incapable of representing the key concepts in such discussions, namely motivation, belief, and intention, and the complexity of their interactions.

At the end of the nineteenth century, interpretivism became influential on the development of the sciences when Neo-Kantian philosophers Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband emphasized the difference between sciences concerned with "nature" and the "mind." Dilthey also attempted to lay foundation to so-called "*Geisteswissenschaften*." Hermeneutics and *Verstehen* are perceived as its basic methods. Dilthey distinguished the cultural and the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) from the natural sciences on the basis of their subject matter. The natural sciences were concerned with phenomena which, opaque to thinking, could merely be studied from the "outside" through observation of uniformities in their conduct and the edifice of causal laws to explain those uniformities. In contrast, the human sciences had objects such as texts, verbal expressions and actions which could be investigated from the "inside" through an understanding of their authors' experiences and intentions. An interpretist methodology would therefore have a more comprehensible explanation of these objects by re-enacting the interior cognitive processes which motivated and gave meaning to each of them. The final aim of Dilthey's interpretive method is to "understand the author better than he understood himself." In other words, the quest for certainty in terms of interpretive understanding of the subject's inner experience is his ultimate goal. In order to specify its unique cognitive interest, he suggested two types of psychology: "explaining psychology" based on concepts of the natural sciences and a "descriptive and analytic psychology" based on *Erleben* and *Verstehen*. The idea of *Verstehen* became prevalent in the human sciences during a phase while the philosophy of life was in trend. Dilthey's arguments were espoused in the early 20th century by many social scientists, including the sociologist Max Weber, whose exemplary studies of social action interpreted human behavior as intentional action, structured by the agents' goals and

beliefs. Weber's "*Verstehende Soziologie*" became the most influential one in the social sciences. Inspired by Dilthey, Weber accepted the split of *Verstehen* and *Erklären* for sociology and proposed the method of the "ideal type" for combining the two—that is, interpretive understanding and causal explanation.

A correct causal interpretation of a concrete course of action, according to Weber, "is arrived at when the overt action and the motive have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their relation has become meaningfully comprehensible."[87] That means that, to Weber, a causal interpretation of human action must be both adequately grasped on the level of meaning and simultaneously the interpretation is causally adequate. Even though an empirical scientific statement might have the accuracy of a high degree of causal uniformity whereby its probability can be numerically determined, if the meaning-adequacy concerning particular social actions were not accounted for, it remains an incomprehensible statistical probability. Scientific statements and causal explanations espoused by positivists without interpretively understanding the subjective meaning of human actions might become arbitrary and prejudicial when we impose them from the transcendent position if the meanings are interpreted and constructed by individuals and social collectivities in a interwoven context and a continual changing flux.

In addition to the subjective meaning of human actions engaged by lay people, the conceptualization and theorization of social phenomena by social scientists are loaded with their value relevance. "Without the investigator's value-ideas, there would be no principle of selection of subject-matter and no meaningful knowledge of the concrete reality." (1949:82)[88] Therefore, every selection of social facts must be inevitably influenced by the researcher's value-loaded cognitive interest. The assumption of social facts as such existing independently is seen as self-deception: "If the notion that those standpoints [cultural values] can be derived from the facts themselves continually recurs, it is due to the naïve self-deception of the specialist who is unaware that it is due to the value-ideas." (1949:82)[89] This is without a doubt against Durkheim's presupposition that there are "social facts as things," which hold " an independent existence outside the individual consciousness" (Durkheim, 1938: 30)[90] For Weber, there is no absolutely "objective" scientific analysis of social phenomena

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[87] Max Weber, *Sociological Writings*. Edited by Wolf Heydebrand, published in 1994 by Continuum.
[88] Weber, Max. 1949. "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.
[89] Ibid.
[90] 1938. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Translated. By Sarah Solvey and John Muellet. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press

independent of a particular and "one-sided" perspective. According to which - consciously or unconsciously – their subject matters are selected, analyzed and ordered for expository reasons.

Weberian sociology comprehends the sociological knowledge as "the thought (*denkende*) ordering," which means the subjective conceptual constructs of empirical reality. The thought ordering is constructed according to the category of meaning and its empirical manifestation ("*Evidenz*") (Weber1968: 5). Weber contends:

> The objective validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively upon the ordering of the given reality according to categories which are subjective. (1949, 110)

Therefore, the ordering of a given reality is only feasible from positioned subjective value-ideas, by which the researcher is cognitively interested. Subsequently, Weber discusses the relationships between value-ideas and empirical reality:

> These *value-ideas* are for their part empirically discoverable and analyzable as elements of meaningful human conduct, but their validity cannot be deduced from empirical *facts* as such (1949,11).

Weber explained that interpretive sociology uses value-ideas, or "ideal types," to understand human actions and social events. Weber's ideal-type methodology apparently requires the analyst to refer to the "meaning" as an action has to the actor, as well as the culturally and subjectively meaningful significance the research implies. In contrast to the positivists' firmness on the objective observation of the independent existence of reality the Weberian objectivity of sociological knowledge rests on the adequacy of the relationships between value-ideas and reality. Such knowledge, however, is only meaningful to those who hold the value. Weber becomes aware of the peculiarity of sociological knowledge:

> The means available to our science offer nothing to those persons to whom this truth is of no value (1949: 110).

Associated with the writing of Max Weber, interpretive understanding is then seen as a concept and a method as part of getting back to studying causal relationships on a large scale. Weber defines sociology as that science which aims at "the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences." (1968: 4) It poses a rejection of positivistic social sciences in terms of a hermeneutic turn. In Weberian terminology, understanding comes from the thought ordering of empirical reality according to the categories of meaning. According to Weber, "Statistical uniformities constitute understandable types of action in the sense of this discussion, and thus constitute 'sociological generalisations,' only when they can be regarded as manifestations of the understandable subjective meaning of a course of social action." (Weber, 1897) Therefore, understanding the subjective meaning is crucial to the study of social phenomena.

The subjective meaning "exists only as the action of one or more individual human beings." (Weber, 1968:13) Sociological understanding is always an understanding from specific subjective viewpoints of meaning. (Weber, 1982:181) Indeed, the central notion in interpretive approach is *verstehen*, which refers to understanding the meaning of action from the actor's point of view. It is entering into the shoes of the other with empathic attitude and treating the actor as a subject, rather than an object of our observations. Moreover, it also implies that, unlike objects in the natural world, human subjects are not merely the end products of the pulls and pushes of external forces. According to interpretive sociology, individuals are seen as active subjects who create the world by classifying and putting in practice their own understanding of it and giving it meaning. To do research on subjects without taking into account the meanings they attach to their actions and situations is to treat them like objects. This is exactly what positivistic sociology has been accused of. This is, to some extent, a thoroughgoing subjectivism as contrasting to objectivism of positivistic sociology. For Weber, the interpretation of meanings, *verstehen*, addresses historically specific events and not universally equivalent units, because the meaning of an act is specific to time and place. It required a special empathy to grasp meanings—an empathy that apprehends the particulars of the situation. In other words, the interpretive sociology tends to argue that our empathetic understanding of meaning is particular and historical, not general and ahistorical.

To interpretive sociology, what is significant is to understand the actor's definition of situation, and what social scientists can do is soak up themselves into that definition of situation and develop empathy and understanding in order to give an account of the

meanings of the situations. For phenomenologists, for instance, there is no social reality *sui generis* to be discovered. They argue that the only "phenomena" that we can be sure of is that we are "conscious" thinking beings. Therefore we should study any phenomena around us in terms of the way we consciously experience them. This kind of study must not involve any preconceptions and causal ideas. This kind of phenomenological perspective is a twentieth-century philosophical way of thinking about the nature of reality, which has influenced sociology. Inspired by phenomenology, some interpretive sociologists have adopted its methods to promote an understanding of the relationship between states of individual consciousness and social life. As a perspective within interpretive sociology, phenomenology attempts to reveal how human awareness is implicated in the production of social action and social worlds.

The German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who was closely linked with phenomenology, felt that scientific positivism and objectivism ruled out an adequate understanding of the world. (Husserl, [1911] 1965)[91] He proposed various philosophical conceptualizations and techniques designed to locate the sources or essences of reality in the human consciousness. His basic ideas influenced sociologists such as Alfred Schutz (1899-1859), who came upon some issues in Weber's theory of action, thought that sociology should look at the way in which individuals consciously construct the social world. Like Husserl, Schutz emphasized the subjective processes of meaning formation and interpretation. Phenomenology, in turn, entered the domains of sociology. (Schutz, [1932a]1967)[92] He tried to combine the works of Weber with those of Husserl in his writings in order to describe how subjective meanings give rise to a noticeably objective social world.

Schutz tried to reinterpret Weber's ideal type methodology in order to make it more clear and adequate. Schutz was not satisfied with Weber's formulation that the actor merely "attaches" meaning to his/her act. (Schutz, 1932a: xxxi) He wanted to reformulate Weber's interpretive sociology by further analysis of basic concepts, especially "meaning." When ideal types have reserved by Weber as scientific constructs, Schutz's analysis of meaning led him to the conclusion that all consciousness requires ideal types. Hence, for Schutz, not only does the scientific

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[91]Husserl, Edmund. [1911] 1965. "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," in Husserl, Edmund, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, translated and edited by Quentin Lauer, New York: Harper Torchbooks.
[92] Schutz, Alfred. [1932a] 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, translated by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

world employ ideal types, but also the everyday lifeworld—that is, the common-sense interpretations of the social world. Our own experiences are "meaningful" only when we are thinking in conceptual constructs and classificatory types. In other words, we, as lay people, are using ideal types for our experiences. We also employ them for the interpretation of others. Schutz utilized the concept of "typification" to describe how we set some of our ideas to interpret the meaning of another's action. Therefore, unlike the empiricists, for Schutz, there is no crude experience that can exist independently without applying any conceptual categories and typifications to them. To think about one's direct experience, one must pull back from it and apply a retrospective glance to it (1932a, pp. 51-53). "Hence, the experience of a fellow-man in a We-relation is, strictly speaking, also 'mediate': I apprehend his conscious life by interpreting his bodily expressions as indications of subjectively meaningful processes." (Schutz, 1932b: 26)[93] Schutz, thus, was skeptical of the idea that we can intuitively empathize into the other's immediate experience.

Sociologically speaking, scientific statements entail even more clarified concepts and classifications to the interpretations of social action. The *versthen* experience upon which it relies is always mediated rather than being direct. Therefore, science "nowhere refers back to the face-to-face experience." (1932: 223) Social science is never based on "prepredicative acts of laying hold on." (1932:223) Thus, "the very postulate of the comprehension of the intended meaning of the other person's lived experiences becomes unfulfillable." (p. 107)

Whether we are lay people in the practical realm or social scientists in the discursive realm, whenever we try to interpret the meaning of another's action, we impute some meaning to it by classifying the action according to some set of ideal types, or typifications. However, this view of interpretation must be cautious of the implicit dualistic thinking implying within. We say we can never emphatically capture the immediate experience of another's. Instead, we can only apply some conceptual categories and typifications to them. It doesn't mean that there is an absolute differentiation between the actor's inner experience that exists independently of the outer world and interpreter's outer experience that is imposed by researcher's scientific typification from outside of the actor's experience. That is the difference between the subjective and the objective meaning of an act. However, as a phenomenologist, Schutz espoused a rationalism that was highly Cartesian in

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[93] Schutz, Alfred. [1932b] 1976. "The Dimensions of the Social World," in Schutz, Alfred, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, edited by Arvid Brodersen, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

important respects. On the one hand, some of Schutz's statement might seem to imply more immediacy of understanding that he actually allowed. He claimed that, for instance, "… I can observe yours as they actually take place." (Schutz, 1967:102) It seems close to the sort of intuitive empathy that can enter into the experience of the actor directly. In that case, we might interpret an action in a way that makes direct reference to the inner meanings of the actor. This is a kind of subjectivism that phenomenology tends to commit. Nevertheless, in order to catch a more objective outer meaning, Schutzian phenomenology's attempt to offer theoretical techniques and qualitative methods (such as typification) that illuminate the human meanings of social life and still tries to stress a detached "objectifying" attitude to the context in question. (Schutz, 1932) This is similar to the externalist point of view proposed by the positivists. This ambiguous attitude that implies dualistic inclusion of both subjectivism and objectivism can be seen, for example, in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* and later *Collected Papers*. In these writings Schutz contends that social scientists should interpret social life from the point of view of participants by recovering the "subjectively intended meanings" that actors attach to their actions in daily life, while themselves maintain a detached, "objectifying" attitude to the contexts in question. (Schutz, [1932] 1967, 1962a, 1962b, 1962c, 1966)[94] On the one hand, the inner meaning is what went on in the actor's mind to produce the action. How can we presuppose an inner world of the individuals that is independent of the influence of his/her relational context, while on the other hand, the objective meaning is the product of the scientific meaning-context existing independently of the thought processes of the actor? As Schutz stated: " Objective meaning, on the contrary, we can predicate only of the product as such, that is, of the already constituted meaning-context of the thing produced, whose actual production we meanwhile disregard." (Schutz, 1932, pp. 133-134) Therefore, objective meaning "consists only in a meaning-context within the mind of the interpreter, whereas subjective meaning refers beyond it to a meaning-context in the mind of the producer." (Schutz, 1932:134)

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[94] Schutz, A. 1967 [1932]. The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. G. Walsh/E Lehnert. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1962. 'Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action, pp. 3ff. in Collected Papers, Vol. I: The Problem of Social Reality, ed. M. Natanson. The Hague: Nijhoff. 1962b. 'Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences; pp. 48ff. in Collected Papers, Vol. I: The Problem of Social Reality, ed. M. Natanson. The Hague: Nijhoff. 1962c. 'On Multiple Realities', pp. 209ff. in Collected Papers, Vol. I: The Problem of Social Reality, ed. M. Natanson. The Hague: Nijhoff. 1966. 'The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl,' pp. 51ff. in Collected Papers, Vol. III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy, ed. I. Schutz. The Hague: Nijhoff 1966.

However, there is something unsatisfactory. That is, the objectifying attitude espoused by Schutz contradicts the view of intersubjectivity pursued by phenomenologists and, besides, it is also goes against the principle of interpretive participation from which Schutz sets out. Furthermore, examining it from the middle way perspective, the Schutzian phenomenology's ambiguous dualism is against the principle of a relational-processual approach. It ignores the continual dynamic flux of mutual embeddedness and interweaving between lay people's everyday life practice and researcher's discursive world. It remains difficult to reflect how the lay people can be regarded as anything more than just another independent and solitary project of consciousness. The ignorance of the continual dynamic flux of mutual embeddedness and interweaving between the lay people's everyday life practice and the researcher's discursive world make Schutz's phenomenological project merely a "single hermeneutic" rather than a "double hermeneutics." Despite its interpretative approach, basing the second-order-construct of the scientific observation on the first-order-construct of the daily life practice, the approach, still not too divergent from positivistic sociology, assumes the researcher's construct of objective meaning as an active but limited to meta-discourse within the mind of the interpreter. In that case, however active the lay people's subjective experience is, they are still passive in the sense that they can only be interpreted or observed by social scientists. Schutz's project pays no heed to the actuality that the everyday life practitioners also are able to make their meta-discourse or second-order-construct in relation to social scientists and subsequently appropriate or adopt what they have learned with regard to the scientific interpretation of their daily practice and in turn refers back to their continual daily practice. There is a hermeneutical circle and double hermeneutic between social scientists and lay people in the relational-processual sense, but Schutzian phenomenology is ignorant of this dimension. As he wrote (1962a:37):

> Of course, in his daily life the social scientist remains a human being, a man [sic] living among his fellowmen, with whom he is interrelated in many ways. And, surely, scientific activity itself occurs within the tradition of socially derived knowledge, is based upon mutual corroboration and criticism and can only be communicated by social interaction. But... dealing with science and scientific matters within the social world is one thing; the specific scientific attitude which the scientist has to adopt toward his object is another.

Therefore, for Schutz, when seeking to carry out the postulate of adequacy to social life as experienced by the lay people, social scientists must withdraw from mutuality

and relatedness with their subjects, and suspend (*epoche*) all practical implications and intentions. This is definitely non-relational and non-processual, and thereby against the actual occurring of "double hermeneutics" between the lay people and social scientists. In actuality, the relatedness and mutuality between lay people and social scientists makes the interpretation endeavor a process of the fusion of horizons. Both parties must engage in the process. In other words, the detachment of social scientists from this mutual involvement is hermeneutically impossible. Indeed, through the process of a fusion of horizons each party (both the lay people and social scientists) undergoes many changes, and it would be impossible to retreat back into the language and attitude as it existed prior to the fusion. Hence, a scientific language and attitude in the social sciences must change within the changing horizon throughout the process of fusion, that is, the process of double hermeneutic. Therefore, a horizon is something we move into and which moves with us. This applies both to the conceptual repertoire of science as well as lifeworld practices.

Moreover, besides the objectifying attitude, the rationalist impetus implicated in phenomenology led Schutz, perhaps implicitly, to some degree, toward apriorism. As he indicated, the knowledge of social science is based "on conclusions of thought." Thus, "the original and fundamental scheme of science, the expressive scheme of its propositions, and the interpretive scheme of its explanations is, therefore, essentially that of formal logic." (1932:223) The cognitive interest of Schutzian phenomenology based on the scientific formal logic attempts "to explain human actions" and asking "what model of an individual mind can be constructed" to "explain the observed facts" (Schutz, 1953:43),[95] and, furthermore, to attain the nomological level of science. Schutz, thus, considers the "obvious objection" that "the existence of the so-called law-constructing (or nomothetic) social sciences contradicts our earlier assertion that all social sciences are type-constructing in nature." (1932:242)

Generally speaking, as Giddens points out, "Schutz continued throughout his life to maintain a thoroughly rationalist position, according to which phenomenology could and must provide the basis for a fully fledged science of social conduct." (Giddens, 1993:32) Phenomenology of this kind "is very deeply embedded in Western philosophy, since it broke away from hierocratic domination, that the quest for certainty is both a necessary task and one which can only be fulfilled through the examination of personal consciousness." (Giddens, 1993:31) The seeking for certainty

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[95] Schutz, Alfred. [1953] 1962. in Schutz, Alfred, *Collected Papers 1: The Problem of Social Reality*, edited by Maurice Natanson, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

as the ultimate goal of scientific knowledge has occupied Western thinkers since Descartes, and has been the doing of positivists as well as phenomenologists. The two camps investigate from different approaches but come up with something in common, that is, the conclusion that takes for granted an essentially static and reified relation between subject and object, and between social scientists and lay people. In other words, their approaches are actually non-relational and non-processual and in turn, according to the middle way perspective, lack the insight to *sunyata* and *pratytia-samutpada* of the phenomenal world. Both espoused some kind of substantialism, which locates the foundation of reality in something essential and certain. The problem for positivism is that their certainty of truth is located in sensory experience, but it "finds difficulty in explaining the nature of theoretical categories, which do not stand in any discernible relation of isomorphy with sense-data, and hence it becomes necessary to introduce correspondence rules which connect the content of one to the content of the other." (Giddens, 1993:141) But this, as we have discussed earlier, has never been realized, "for the nature of correspondence rules has proved elusive." (Giddens, 1993:141) On the other hand, the phenomenological view, having located their certainty of truth in the mental construct, that is, the ideal concepts and typifications that are immediately at hand of the conscious subject, also finds its reversed difficulty – "that of reconstituting the world of sensory experience itself." (Giddens, 1993:141) In addition, according to the middle way perspective, neither consciousness nor sense experience can have its own self-nature (*atman*) on which knowledge can be founded upon. Furthermore, they are both related to each other within specific socio-historical context. In other words, none of them is fixated or as given, rather, they are relationally dependent on related conditions and processually evolve in continual flux.

Indeed, our practical social life is full of a variety of meaningful activities that cannot be reduced to mere scientific rationalism. The scientific quest for certainty by either positivistic or interpretive sociology, whether in an objectivistic or subjectivistic form, or an ambiguous assemblage of both, is not only a deluded attitude towards more sophisticated and dynamic social life and human modes of experience. They might also distort, or do violence to it. By using an orderly mind-set, that is scientific discursive consciousness, to study the social world and human experiences, which are not so orderly, this quest is actually motivated by what Richard Berstein calls the "Cartesian Anxiety," a kind of intellectual fear of madness and chaos that could, if not corrected, ruin the world of rationality. Berstein interprets Descartes's meditations as:

> The quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us. The specter that hovers in the background of this journey is not just radical epistemological scepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface. (Bernstein, 1983:18)[96]

Put in more sociological terms, the methodological presumptions of both traditions which have dominated the mainstream of sociology, are founded on a false dualism inspired by Descartes. We can search for absolute certainty either in positivistic verifications or in empathetic *Versthe*n. But the adoption of an interpretive approach has often simply further confused the very process that it was meant to clarify, namely, how human practices are mutually embedded in, and yet transformed, both living fields and meaningful frames of reference.

According to the middle way perspective, these "either-or" dilemmas are unjustified and thereby unacceptable. In actuality, from the history of science we know that most forms of scientific paradigm are not grounded in certainty, but in reality dependently arises in continual flux. Yet this does not undermine their claims to truth. In fact, so-called "certainty" is empty of inherent existence and thus not to be an attainable goal. The epistemological quest for true ultimate reality serves only to distort the true nature of scientific knowledge. The circular process of mutual understanding is not an obstacle to be overcome. It is rather the condition of possibility of mutual understanding and thereby of knowledge constitution.

The overcoming of the epistemologism is important for us to recognize the relational and processual world. Gadamer's hermeneutics demonstrates a good attitude for doing so. Therefore, I attempt to embrace his insight into our discussion.

4.3 From Lived Experience (*Erlebnis*) to Life Experience (*Erfarung*) and From Dualism to the Fusion of Horizons —Gadamer's Hermeneutics

In order to transcend positivistic sociology's lack of subjective dimension through which actors attach meaning to their actions, interpretive sociology, particularly the Schutzian, puts its emphasis on the phenomenological description of the subjective experience of the social actors. Interpretive sociologists adopt the idea of *Versthen* in

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[96] Berstein, R. 1983. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*. University of Philadelphia Press: Philadelphia.

order to emphatically understand the inner experience of the social actors. However, not being able to truly transcend the shortcoming of scientific rationalism committed also by positivists, the objectifying attitude of interpretive sociology, such as Schutz's phenomenological *epoche* (the suspension of the observer's cultural preconception while doing research), misunderstood the dynamic relational process of *Versthen*. Understanding does not depend merely on the subjective experience of an individual (either an author or an actor) with which he/she intends to communicate. Understanding is actually a circular process of double hermeneutic, or an imaginary dialogue between interpreters and their subjects across a socio-historical distinction, with a view to "agreement" (*Verstanigung*) over the "matter at hand" (Gadamer, 1975:258ff).[97]

In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer follows his teacher Heidegger's recognition that the ties to one's present horizons, one's knowledge and experience, are the productive grounds of *Versthen*, or understanding. Furthermore, Gadamer argues that these cultural preconceptions or limit cannot be suspended as Schutz or positivists assumes. But it can be transcended and expanded through exposure to the other's discourse and linguistically encoded cultural traditions because their horizons convey views and values that place one's own horizons in relief. In other words, we see a relational process of *Versthen* in Gadamerian hermeneutics that overcomes individualism, collectivism, positivism and interpretism, and espouses the notion that understanding is a concrete fusing of horizons.

One of the primary attempts for the objectification of subjective consciousness by phenomenological interpretation is to provide a final, complete interpretation that captures the whole meaning of the social actors. However, given that new biographical information about the actors might evolve any time throughout the complex dialogical process with others, and that the occurrence of future events will also give a particular phenomenon new significance. Therefore, according to the relational-processual perspective, a complete interpretation can never be attained as interpretists proclaimed.

Far from being a fetter on interpretation, tradition and prejudice are precondition of understanding through interpretation. Fore-understanding, or pre-understanding, is more than an objective method; it is the very manner in which understanding takes place. This is where Gadamer chooses to begin the construction of his philosophical

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[97] Gadamer, H-G. 1975. *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel. London; Sheed and Ward.

hermeneutics in order to liberate the human sciences from the shroud of scientific objectivity and the cloak of substantialist romanticism.

In order to adequately understand the idea of *Versthen* in terms of *Verstanigung*, it is necessary to reflect upon our understanding of the human mode of experience. Let's start with the German word "*Erlebnis*." *Erlebnis* is a term which has the connotation of event, occurrence, adventure, experience; i.e. something memorable which happens to someone. For Dilthey and others in the nineteenth century, this *Erlebnis* became a principal focus of the human sciences as against the objectivism of the natural sciences. Since then *Erlebnis* became a prosperous and influential notion that founded thought on the vast meaning of experience of the social actor. An *Erlebnis*, as a constitutive of life, remains connected with the infinity of life that manifests itself in it. An *Erlebnis*, like a piece of art or a symbol, is "something unforgettable and irreplaceable, something whose meaning cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination." (Gadamer, [1960] 1994:67)

However, once it has been conceptualized by empiricist or positivist intent its fertility and richness will be significantly restricted and thereby decreased. As Gadamer pointed out, Dilthey's concept of *Erlebnis* contains the pantheistic element that is, the experience (*Erlebnis*), but also the positivistic element, the result of experience (*Ergebnis*). In order to pursue an intermediate position between speculation and empiricism, Dilthey tended to limit this infinite life experience to something finite and given. As Gadamer stated:

> Since he is concerned to legitimate the work of the human sciences epistemologically, he is dominated throughout by the question of what is truly given. Thus his concepts are motivated by this epistemological purpose or rather by the needs of epistemology itself.[98]

Thus the quest for epistemological certainty was implicated in Dilthey's formulation of the concept of *Erlebnis*. Dilthey's conceptualization of human experience is to grasp the special nature of the given in the human sciences, which is also again motivated by what Berstein called the "Cartesian Anxiety." As Gadamer pointed out: "Following Descartes' formulation of the *res cogitans*, he defines the concept of experience by reflexivity, by interiority, and on the basis of this special mode of being he tries to construct an epistemological justification for knowledge of the this

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[98] Gadamer, [1960] 1994:64.

historical world." (Gadamer, [1960] 1994:65) For Dilthey, the objects of human sciences, to which the interpretation focuses upon, are not data of experiment and measurement but the structures of meaning, which can be traced back to ultimate units of what is given in consciousness. Therefore, the ultimate unit of what is given in consciousness is called "*Erlebnis*", which "is the epistemological basis for knowledge of the objective." (p. 66) Thus, Dilthey attempted to attain the epistemological certainty by developing a method for an interpretive understanding of individual experience but simultaneously canceling out the influence of an interpreter's mode of experience, which for him is a kind of unscientific bias.

Since the human sciences' quest for certainty proposed by Dilthey still follows the Cartesian epistemologism, then what concerns Gadamer here is that the human sciences in this sense does not furnish us with truths because they are overly methodological. To Gadamer, human experience is more dynamic and indeterminate, which cannot be identified by the Cartesian quest, whether objectively or subjectively. Gadamer's fundamental argument is that there is no such thing as a reliable method for the human sciences to study human experience and eventually provide a complete description of an individual's subjective consciousness or intention.

Moreover, Dilthey's conception of the human *Erlebnis* is also overly individualistic, through which he contends that we understand a historical event by relating it to our own individual experience of life. According to him, "it is life itself that unfolds and forms itself in intelligible unities, and it is in terms of the single individual that these are understood." (Gadamer, p.223) Being unsatisfied with this, Gadamer argues for the displacement of *Erlebnis* (a personal life experience) by *Erfahrung* (the experience of social interaction), as the basis for hermeneutic understanding. The hermeneutic understanding in turn transcends individualistic solitude and embraces a historical-communal ontology.

The human mode of experience in social interactions is thus akin to the Gadamerian sense of *Erfahrung* as opposed to *Erlebnis*. *Erlebnis* (Dilthey's preference) is used to discuss the idea of experience as isolated and categorical. It is something one has in solitude—something which is fixed with a subject/object dichotomy. *Erfahrung*, in contrast, is used to indicate the experience that evolves processually and cumulates relationally. It is something that one submits oneself to the other; the subjectivity of the subject/object dichotomy is overcome by an event of mutual understanding. In this context it implies an integrative event in which social researchers and the subjects

participate in coming to a mutual understanding of specific social phenomena and human actions together.[99] Conversely, singular, categorical nature of *Erlebnis* makes the subject of the experience something that can itself be categorized, analyzed, and objectified.

For Gadamer, understanding involves the interchange of our *Erfahrung* that is bound and embedded in social history and tradition because understanding deploys the knower's effective-history, interpersonal experience and cultural traditions, to absorb new experience. In order to reformulate the actual social-historical dynamics of human mode of experience, Gadamer disparaged the individualistic connotation of *Erlebnis*, articulated specifically by Dilthey, and substituted it with *Erfahrung*, which provides the basis in our actual lives whereby we are interrelated with other people and to our background. This kind of "experience" is not the outer layers of the isolated flashes, but an ongoing integrative relation and process in which what we encounter expands our horizon, but only by emptying (or opening) an existing space. Therefore, *Erfahrung*, though translated as "experience" in English, differs from the experiences of the individual subject (*Erlebnis*)—it connotes the manifestation of the relatedness of experience among human beings that is, the *sensus communis* or communal experience. This kind of communal experience is brought into being not in the inner consciousness of the individual mind but in the establishments of tradition and the life of the mutual embeddedness, an eminently relational-processual experience in lifeworld practices.

The initial structure of a communal experience, or an effective-history, nonetheless, limits the range of possible interpretations, by excluding some possibilities and including others. This means that our initial structure of a communal experience, or an effective-history constitutes the prejudices conveyed to abide in understanding; it immediately and structurally limits any Diltheyian self-conscious attempts to suspend those prejudices. For Gadamer, this is untenable. He thus explicitly opposes the scientific ideal of prejudice-free objectivity in interpretation, as proposed by Schutz and Dilthey. Hence, Dilthey's canceling out of the interpreter's "biases" in order to objectively make available a reliable method for the human sciences to study human experience and to eventually provide a complete description of an individual's subjective consciousness or intention, is actually a bias of scientism, which believes a

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[99] see the overview of the distinctions between Erlebnis and Erfahrung in the translators' preface of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, Second Revised Edition, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1993) xiii-xiv.

prejudiceless research position that can completely detach from the researchers' lifeworld experience and their mutual involvement and embeddedness with the subjects. Dilthey took it as a methodological necessity that we "adapt the [Cartesian] standpoint of reflection and doubt, and that this is what happens in all forms of scientific reflection." (Gadamer, p.238)

The "prejudice" of instituting a clear and distinct standpoint beyond practical social engagement makes Dilthey's hermeneutic non-relational and non-processual. Gadamer considered Dilthey's adoption of the detached method as rendering us unable of engaging in the hermeneutic circle; for it bars us from making a dialogical projection from the part to a broader whole unless we are epistemologically certain of our claim, but such projections are processual and circular by their very nature. In this case, how can we thereby institute an independent and fixated position? By this path, the endeavor to overcome the ascendancy of scientific methodologism and epistemologism also attempts to overthrow the primacy of the subjective consciousness in the ontological character of understanding. Gadamer's communalism surges from this ontological advantage.

Dilthey's problem, in a way, is in common with aforementioned methodological individualism and interpretism for they remain trapped in a methodological solipsism, which cannot incorporate dialogic communication with other people and cultures into their own description of the daily practice. Also, for their concept of action is elucidated through a solipsistic concept of experience, they didn't conceive of experience as a mutual and cooperative understanding within a mutually embedded social context. The interior experience and act of the single individual is supposedly intuitive and thereby independent of any relatedness and mutuality.

In Gadamer's endeavor to oppose the dominance of methodologism, epistemologism and its reification of human experience lead him to look for an alternative to scientific methodologism. Therefore, his hermeneutics will be fashioned out of a dissatisfaction with the concept of *Erlebnis* and substitute it with *Erfahrung*. Interpretation can never be divorced from the relational-processual dialectic of *Erfahrung* and thereby be objectified. The concept of *Erfahrung* is a dialectical encounter with truth which is the constitutive of human relations. Interpretation thus can never be prejudice-free and step outside of *Erfahrung*. In other words, interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless grasping of something given in advance by our isolated experience, or *Erlebnis*. Understanding (*Verstehen*) through interpretation is always dependent on the arising

of the fore-structure of understanding in our horizon. When we approach a social event or a text, and attempt to decipher their meaning, we do so only after conceiving of some larger whole of which it is part.

Neither can we look at human experience as mere individual intention and observe it from some transcendental standpoint rather than conceiving it as a part of some larger whole. Therefore, the approach to the understanding of human experience is a theory of interpretation which acknowledges that every meaningful act comes to us with a social history or tradition, but it is nevertheless a socially involved act that must be encountered again and again in continual flux as it interconnects with the community life. Therefore, to be meaningful, to be understood, to be experienced as *Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis*, each socio-historical background and tradition-bound act must be relational and processual; it must occur in communication within the community one belongs to.

This hermeneutical approach thus calls forth a fundamental shift in the role of the researcher. Since in human science, the subject of research and its researcher can communicate with each other, this mutuality suggests a proper interrelation bearing a resemblance to discussions in which members in a community can justify their actions. In this approach, the researcher is first an interpreter and a listener. Not only does he encounter the written sources as they come to him in tradition, but also to the ways in which written traditions intersect with the practical lives of the community. In this approach, the researcher is not a transcendental arbitrator whose function is to dispense methodologically acquired truths.

The researcher is an attuned participant mutually embedded in the dialogue whose research incorporates interwoven modes of interpretation and praxis together in a continual flux. The process moves us beyond the initial structure of our experience and historical context and gives it a certain "ideality" of meaning, which is elaborated in a dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted. The dialogical process is grounded in the concern in which the interpreter and the interpreted share towards a common question and subject matter.

This kind of dialogue in research praxis is communal, heuristic, and reciprocal—which is always on the way to becoming, always already on the way to being worked out in a mutually embedded life. By encountering a viewpoint in the dialogical process of reflection on different sets of horizons, the interpreter can find

his own horizon highlighted and extend towards critical self-reflection. The interpretive understanding in social research enables the interpreter repeatedly transcending his or her own horizon while pulling the meaning structure of the interpreted beyond their original horizon until a fusion of the two occurs.

Therefore, truth is not fixed but changes over time and exits co-dependently in the continual flow of the fusion of horizons in the here and now. For Gadamer, to understand is to understand differently than one's own earlier interpretations, simply because the process involves creating new horizons by bootstrapping from the old horizons which they replace. Hermeneutical experience thus is not a copy, or reproduction, of the preceding structure. Understanding in turn cannot be a technical grasp of something given. The "whole value of the hermeneutical experience…seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding, then, does not consist in a technical virtuosity of 'understanding' everything written. Rather, it is genuine experience (*Erfahrung*)—i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth." (Gadamer, 1994: 489)

Again, Gadamerian truth is not the truth of our subjective experiences or an secluded individual story, a truth that will only be known in some transcendental ways (such as the Cartesian thinking subject or Husserlian transcendental ego), nor is it the truth of certainty that is allegedly accomplished through the exploitation of scientific method. Gadamerian truth is facilitated when dialogical partners are being played by the game. It is manifested from being subject to a tradition and community rather than being the subject of one's own experience of one's own acts. As Gadamer stated, "What we mean by truth here can best be defined again in terms of our concept of *play*." Moreover, "what we said about the nature of play, namely that the player's actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is, rather, the game itself that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of the playing." (Gadamer, 1994:490) Indeed, Gadamer elaborated an idea of play that is not under any individual's control, but rather a play that arises co-dependently when something addresses us and we are drawn into it. He argued that, "What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth play about it. In understanding, we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, …, we want to know what we are supposed to believe." (Gadamer, 1994:490)

Unlike individualistic views of playing, whereby an playing actor is seen as fully autonomous, or the *subject of* and center of the playful interaction, Gadamer argued that it is only when historically effected beings are *subject to* the meaning of the text as it comes in and through tradition that we are up to be embraced into an occurrence of truth. As players, we are *subject to* rather than *subjects of* the game. We are not deliberately command our understanding nor are we a plot as subjects over against objects. In this sense, the self is empty of any inherent essence or isolated autonomy. In other words, we are relational and processual—playing and being played with each other within the playing field which is itself, in opposition to the substantialization of its boundary and terrain, opening to the process of fusion of horizons here and now. In order to be authentic and vivid, the *Erfahrung* experience of play must recurrently concretize in practical life, because humans exist practically, continually and co-dependently in relational processes.

Human intentional acts are embedded in groups of varying levels, and are enabled and constrained by (re-) created rules and norms –socio-cultural traditions. Because of these processes of mutually embedded and interwoven webs of relationships, scientific access to them can never be certain and finalized, whether these involve the difficulties of isolating the object of study from its relatedness or fixating the movement of communication from its process. The implications of Gadamer's project for the social sciences are sweepingly influential. Researchers who are well versed with Gadamerian hermeneutics would move to acknowledge the significance of mutual understanding and intersubjectivity. The inquiry becomes a dialogue through which the inquirer comes to understand the tradition in which the agent is embedded within. Their first move is not to rely upon the individual's sense experience or intentional experience that leads to either positivism or interpretism, but rather the sensus communis, tradition and historicality. The research process can therefore be a communicating act, a verb, an ongoing mutual understanding or influencing that interconnects with and emerges from their actual practice of studying. Even then, its observance, utterance, interpretation and explanation are always already an indicating, a pointing to something social that outdoes their own horizon of understanding. It will never receive or enunciate the final word, i.e., the Cartesian certitude. We must therefore be mindful of the "open space" that surrounds every researcher's utterance—the space that broadens the horizon, the authentic dialogue, questioning and answering, the to-and-fro, the give-and-take of genuine mutual understanding and influencing.

Inspired by Gadamerian hermeneutics, recent movements in social sciences have attempted to shift the disciplines away from a scientific epistemologism and instead base them on an interpretive dialogical foundation. A great bulk of this work stresses the intersubjective communication inbuilt in social scientific writing by approaching it more as a dialogue than as a scientific experiment. They suggest that the process of studying and writing about other cultures or historical periods is instructive in understanding not only others but ourselves as well. Gadamer's work is insightful to the meaningful questions that lie at the root of interpretation and the social sciences.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics contributes significantly to social sciences, through which it introduces a way thinking about doing research that is a process of ongoing dialogue rather than a method of verification and/or empathetic retrieval or representation of social phenomena and human actions. As Stanley Deetz says:

> The genuine conversation [that Gadamer has in mind] does not require the baring of one's feelings, nor the hearing out or accepting of another's opinions through these may accompany it. The genuine conversation is characterized more by giving in to the subject matter and allowing it to develop in the interchange. As Gadamer showed: "To understand what a person says is…to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences." This kind of conversation develops less from the will of the participants than from the power of the subject material… The ideal is not, then, of "self-expression and the successful assertion of one's point of view, but a transformation into communion, in which we do not remain what we were."[100]

Furthermore, Gadamer's ontological mode of understanding signifies a dynamic communal experience, an experience (*Erfahrung*) that occurs in the relatedness and mutuality of authentic dialogue in communicating, rather than an experience (*Erlebnis*) that comes about in solitude. When a researcher participates in the process of mutually interpretive dialogue with subjects, in circular speaking and listening, he/she should acknowledge that interpretive understanding is always already on the move in relational process and never really finished. Gadamer clearly illustrates that the scientific quest for certainty relying upon *Erlebnis* is problematic. Hence, we should instead pursue a more interactive, integrative *Erfahrung*.

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[100] Stanley Deetz, "Conceptualizing Human Understanding: Gadamer's Hermeneutics and American Communication Studies," Communication Quarterly 26 (1978): 19-20.

Interpreting Gadamer's notion of understanding in terms of a fusion of horizons in light of Nagarjuna's middle way perspective, we realize that this conception of understanding does not entail experience, horizons, tradition and consensus as substantive. Human experience, horizons, tradition and consensus are always dependently arisen and therefore are limited and unfinished. The notion of horizon, for instance, can never be a closed, bounded entity for the present or consequently, for the past. Gadamer maintains that horizons are in flux; they are ever changing for a situated person who is moving. The horizon is more like a medium into which we move in and which in turn moves with us. The dependent arising of the horizon of the past exists in the form of tradition, and embraces the present, the past and the future within it. We project historical horizons different from our own and realize that this projection is just a moment in the relational process of understanding.

Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics, thus, contributes to the social sciences by introducing a way of thinking that is more of a non-dualistic, relational and processual understanding than a method of verification or empathetic retrieval or reliving. Social scientists who attempt to understand is in dialogue with a particular social occurrence, with the agency of that occurrence, and with the tradition that bears a specific occurrence. This kind of understanding in dialogical process does not view social occurrences as objects or things-in-themselves, but as communicative and mutual influencing that are still occurring in continual flux. Therefore the research works, the researcher's observations and interpretations are engaged in their talk, dialogue, in which they don't copy or represent any given reality, but contribute to the constitution of reality and become part of it.

According to the attitude of the middle way perspective, doing social research is relational-processual and therefore limited and unfinished. Thus it cannot be taken as an independently fixated product. Social research is an engaging and encountering approach (rather than a disengaged monologue) that supposedly will lead to more relational and processual encounters. The first interaction between researcher and subject, might appear to be alien, strange, novel, different or shocking to researchers. However, this pre-understanding, and to some extent prejudice, from the researchers' side is usually the vantage point for pursuing a mutual understanding. Without relative difference between the two parties, no endeavor for a mutual understanding is necessary. In other words, it is impossible to conduct a fusion of horizons if the two parties are absolutely identical. According to the middle way perspective, as we have articulated previously, identity between two things is untenable. As Nagarjuna points

out that all things are dependently arisen and hence, devoid of any substance, he thus negates all possible propositions regarding the characteristic of existence and non-existence. One of his form of double-negation addresses that there is neither identity nor difference in the absolute sense. However, conventionally speaking, only in having relative difference (rather than substantial difference) between two parts we can then conduct interaction and thereby attain intersubjectivity or mutual understanding. Relative distinctions come into rise dependently in a dialogue. Distinctions are bridged in communication; distinctions are conditionally transcended in communication. On the other hand, unless we have something conventionally in common as the precondition for further understanding, we can hardly find the basis for the fusion of horizons. It is the actual praxis of communication or dialogue, grounded in relatively common humanity dependently arisen in specific socio-historical context that facilitates further mutual understanding. Hermeneutics in the social world, whether discursively or practically, must be based on the relational-processual human modes of experience, which is a pervasive *Erfahrung*, rather than mere *Erlebnis*. This view of hermeneutics puts forth meaningful communication and dialogue, and contributes more to understanding than solipsistic scientific analysis or representation.

In *Erfahrung*, the individualized subjective consciousness of the researcher's is transcended and he/she participates in an "event of meaning," an event in which he/she involves his/her own horizon, or *lebenswelt*, and all that it embraces, and throughout this relational process his/her horizon is broadened. In this sense, the experience of mutual involvement in lifeworld becomes constitutive of the kind of knowledge, which results in the widening of one's horizon. The true *Erfahrung* of a social occurrence involves the fusion of horizons in a hermeneutically circular process.

Therefore, we may conclude that doing social research hermeneutically would be more like a participation in a relatively and mutually embedded context and an ongoing process of conversation and dialogue than a Cartesian truth giver or fact finder. He or she would be more of a messenger than a commander, one who receives, broadcasts and shares his or her experience of the world, but one who, nevertheless, realizes that the "free space" (open emptiness, or *sunyata*) that surrounds his or her understanding thereby one instantly portrays the inevitability for further reflection and mutual understanding. The process also in some way alters our previous horizon (which was conditioned by preunderstanding), expands it into new directions, which,

in turn, allows us to embrace new experiences. In general, social sciences should first question the possibility of a judgment-free tone of investigation. There is no interpretation outside of the pre-judgment of the present and those pre-judgment cannot remain immune to dialogues with the past, or other people. Hence, we have to reconsider the place of pre-judgment in the relational process of dialogical understanding. The fundamental fault of scientific epistemologism is the essential divorce of prejudice/tradition and reason due to the Cartesian rejection of any prejudice and authority. On the other hand, while questioning the enlightenment position of subjecting tradition to the demands of prejudice-free reason, social sciences should not leap into another extreme, that is, as Gadamer argues, the romantic and historicist positions that attempts to substantialize tradition, or historical events, by viewing them from the perspective of their original historical moments. Thus the substantiality of the past, specific traditions, myths, texts, customs, and rituals are seen as original truths of the past or the other. According to the middle way perspective, tradition and reason have become dichotomized in both the enlightenment and romantic movements, thus bring forth a dualistic thinking. Authority is either rejected as a hindrance to the free supremacy of reason or it is romanticized as a truth from a distant and closed past or other. In harmony with the middle way perspective, Gadamer suggests that tradition and reason are not an "either-or" antinomy but are rather interrelated elements of understanding in the process of the fusion of horizons. Social sciences should find a true home of hermeneutics in light of the middle way perspective that opens up an intermediate space between these two extremes. It is the point at which reason and tradition intersect.

Moreover, the dependent co-arising of the fore-structure of the understanding is empty of any inherent essence but it is not non-existent either. It underlines the importance of the fore-structure, or pre-understanding, and presupposition implicit in the process of forming questions about the social world. Understanding, hence, is relational-processual, which involves a circular process of moving from a pre-supposed meaning of an event, to an interpretation of that event based on the pre-understanding, and then with evidence gained in interpretation back to a revision of the pre-understanding. This kind of hermeneutic circle is a relational process in which we revise the projected whole to conform to evidence gained in the interpretation of the individual part. A new whole of meaning is then projected and the parts are interpreted in light of it. This circular exercise is an ongoing process, moving from the whole to the part and then back to the whole again. There is, again,

no portion of them that can exist inherently and independently. In other words, the hermeneutic circle cannot work out without the *madhyamika* insight of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada*, that is, the non-dualistic, relational and processual way of thinking the world so to speak.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics lays the keystone for a transcendence in the social sciences beyond the subject/object dualism demonstrated in interpretism and positivism toward a more relational-processual approach to sociology, one where we both affect and are affected by the event under study. Understanding is a moment, an occurrence in the mutuality and relatedness of an event and an interpreter. We cannot thereby assert a method in whatever sense, which can transcend, separate from or external to the object of study.

4.4 Beyond Relativism and Nihilism—A Relational-Processual and Hermeneutic Examination

It is without a doubt that in everyday life practice, social scientists live among their fellowmen, with whom they are mutually involved with in many ways. And certainly, scientific activity itself arises co-dependently within the tradition of socially derived knowledge, based upon the interaction of *Erfahrung*, which is the experience of mutual corroboration and communication. Through an examination of human experience through Gadamerian hermeneutics, we can easily comprehend the insufficiency of the epistemological twins, objectivism and subjectivism, existing in various forms of methodological assumptions, such as positivism and interpretism. In other words, there has been a distinct hermeneutical transcendence away from these various kinds of epistemologism that would insist that there are some facts that are intrinsic in the constitution of reason. This insistence would afford grounds for a confidence that might institute some exact account of the way things are—the truth, in short. The epistemological quest for certainty in social sciences of any sort is a vain impossibility for their lacking of relational and processual imagination. Actually, from the middle way relational-processual perspective, or from the approach of the sociology of science, our mode of experience, as well as our claims of scientific "certainty" in various forms, are simply a part of an interrelated, contingent historical process.

In parallel with the middle way perspective, Gadamer argues that all truth in the sense of what we can learn or discover (and not limited to epistemological truth) is

relationally and processually discovered and warranted co-dependently in particular traditions. But these traditions are not substantialized as unchanged entities. They are constantly transformed by the ongoing process of the discovery of truth throughout the process of the openness to the other. In the first place, all meaning and understanding are, for Gadamer, a hermeneutic event involving projection against a horizon conditioned by one's background "prejudices." The projection from one's original perspective toward that of other human beings inevitably requires some, as he argues, fusion of our relative horizons, a relational process that inevitably changes our own perspective. Gadamer's arguments are important to illuminate our relational-processual perspective in many respects. The Gadamerian description of understanding as a "fusion of horizons" reminds us of an interrelation and dynamic process between social interpreters and the subjects of investigation or the social occurring. By doing social research, we are involved in looking for the place where the horizons of the social researchers and the subjects of research or the social occurrence intersect or fuse.

Drawing into this search for fusion of horizons then enables a new sensitivity and admiration to human cultures—sometimes comparable, sometimes relatively difficult. By and large, every human culture is empty of essence and there is no any one cultural form which is inherently and independently existent. In other words, no horizon is substantial and eternal; it is rather dependently co-arisen in the historically contingent process and at the same time mutually embedded with other horizons. Without this understanding, the viewpoint and judgment of social scientists' will be a distorted one. In the actual practice of social research, the researcher brings his or her built-in limitations or pre-understanding to the process of understanding. The meaning-adequate and cultural significance are grounded in the cognitive interest, and perhaps implicitly in a methodological presupposition of the particular social scientists. As Gadamer points out, prejudgments or pre-understandings are a constitutive part of the hermeneutical understanding. Of course, through the process of fusion of horizons and the hermeneutical circle, we also open and enrich the horizons of each other's and in turn attain a better, but not completed or finalized, understanding of each other.

By doing interpretive understanding in the process of social research, we not only realize the limitation of objectivism and subjectivism, but become aware of the menace of relativism or nihilism. Indeed, in order to overthrow problems of the epistemological quest for certainty in the social sciences, recent interests in

postmodernist theories have refurbished the methodological emphasis towards relativism or nihilism. Actually, the challenge to scientific universalism from such writers as Kuhn (1962) and then Feyerabend (1975) was acknowledged with much eagerness within the field of social science, which had co-arisen with it's growing fanaticism and keenness to recognizing multiplicity in theoretical positions in the 1960s and 1970s. The theoretical multiplicity as "anything goes" began to launch itself. Since then, all facts were held to be relative to particular theoretical points of view. The choice between viewpoints was seen as a matter of random interests and values and not a matter of intersubjectivity, communication, traditions or horizons anymore.

Actually, I agree that by relating the realities to our value-relevant ideas, we do construct culturally specific realities. Words, concepts, categories, interests, values, traditions and horizons together comprise the field of culture, a significant part of a socially constructed reality, that is, in a relative sense, distinct from other fields of culture. As Weber said, culture is "a finite segment of the meaningless infinity." (1904:81)[101] Since the artificiality of culture formation is socio-historically specific to its context, within which different contexts of human agencies, in their endeavors to make sense of their own cultural field, might co-dependently create particular and bounded aspects of infinity and then impute them with words, concepts, categories, interests, values, and subsequently co-figurate traditions and horizons. In this sense, the emptiness of reality is conducive to the dependent co-arising of cultural traditions and horizons, and thus people within particular traditions and horizons do things by employing particular and bounded words, concepts, categories, interests and values that are relative to their specific background traditions and horizons. "Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas." (Weber, 1904:76)

However, while acknowledging the relativity and specificity of each tradition and horizon, we cannot leap to the conclusion that all points of view are equally valid and therefore that between different traditions and horizons there is no comparison at all, that is, they are incommensurable. In epistemology, this amounts to saying that all knowledge or worldviews are equally true; while in ethics this implies that all value systems are equally right. According to the principle of *reductio ad absurdum* of *Prasangika madhyamika* such kind of relativism is incoherent since their assumption

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[101] Weber, M. 1904. '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy'. In The Methodology of the Social Sciences. Edited by M. Weber. New York: Free Press, 1949.

will also imply the validity of the viewpoint that "relativism is wrong." In other words, "relativism is right" and "relativism is wrong" should be equally valid and each exists independently from the other. This is contradictory. Although, it might be true that each viewpoint has its own adherent, but it does not mean that we are left with no more relation or interaction between different viewpoints. Moreover, how can we ignore the temporal process which enables them into some kind of dialogue or even a fusion of horizons? Actually, relativism in this sense would also be eventually trapped into nihilism due to their fundamental refutation of the endeavor of trying to attain the fusion of horizons among different traditions and the possibility of improving our ways of mutual understanding and consensus.

On the other hand, when we say that human agencies construct their own culture fields out of the emptiness or infinity of reality, we cannot assume this process as created out of our random actions or of nothingness as a vacuum. Emptiness is not nothingness in the nihilistic sense. We as human agencies are born into (to put it in a Heideggerian way, "thrown into") a particular cultural field or tradition that has already been dependently co-arisen and signified by others. And, we, as beings-in-the-world, are brought up with the tradition and thereby are driven by an effective history. In our subsequential actions, we more or less imbue to the ongoing dependent co-arising, or renovation of these hereditary cultural fields. In other words, ever since we were born into a particular cultural field, we have already been relational and processual. Our actions and existences can never be substantial or essential; neither relativistic nor nihilistic, rather, they involve the mutual interpenetration and imputation of meaning in relation to other participants' actions and existences. In so doing, none of our actions and existences is inherently and independently existent, but mutually embedded or culturally bounded.

While acknowledging the mutual embeddedenss and cultural boundedness of our actions and existences, some might move forward to assume the solidity of a socio-cultural particularity and specificity. In this sense, our embeddedness and boundedness become substantialized as something in common within our socio-cultural boundary, and simultaneously in distinction from other socio-cultural boundaries. On the one hand, we are identical absolutely as long as we are mutually embedded and culturally bounded within the enclosure of our own particular and specific socio-cultural boundary. On the other hand, we are absolutely different from people who belong to other particular and specific socio-cultural boundary and thereby not related to us in any sense. In a way there is a unitary socio-cultural

boundary existing essentially within, while at the same time there is a multiplicity of socio-cultural boundaries beyond from which cultural meanings can be constructed and remain distinct from one another.

The cultural relativists in the social sciences therefore advocate the recognition of the multiplicity of socio-cultural boundaries and employ different words, concepts, categories, interests, values to refer to different, "pre-existing" cultural entities. Each scientific frame of reference, to relativists, must stand in a unique relationship to its object of study. Peter Winch, for instance, in *The Idea of Social Science* (1958) expresses the view that social science should not adopt a methodology from the natural sciences, but should instead extend their research sensitivities to the ways in which words, concepts, categories are used among various cultures and traditions thereby, to keep researchers away from misunderstanding. Additionally, he also proposes the idea of incommensurability, which proclaims that some concepts are inexpressible among various cultures or languages. Therefore, to him there cannot be any "overall," absolute, or "objective" meaning for culture as a whole. While particular cultural items have meaning for those who construct them, the cultural realm in these social scientific knowledges in the light of relativism is seen like the kaleidoscope of these particularly and specifically meaningful items. The possibility of establishing a pattern or structure in order to capture the reality of one particular cultural unit from without, that is, independently of the subjective viewpoint of the in-group individuals who constitute the reality, is therefore untenable.

This trend of diversification made possible the voices of previously forgotten traditions and cultures. It seems that a democratic multiculturalism in the social sciences was well reflected and thus established. As stated by Weber, that there is a specific "focus of attention on reality under the guidance of values which lend it significance." (1904:77) Thus, "all knowledge of cultural reality … is always knowledge from particular points of view." (1904:81) Indeed, while recognizing the relativity of our standpoints, social scientists should be more humble concerning the objectivity and universality of their research "findings."

Differences in our cognitive interest incurs various theories or methods in the social sciences to form different points of view from which we select, analyze and organize an aspect of social reality in terms of its particular "cultural significance" for us. In other words, each theory or research can only adopt a "one-sided" point of view. Furthermore, according to the sociology of knowledge, proposed by Karl Mannheim,

all ideas, thoughts and knowledges, including that of scientists', are "ideological" in the fundamental sense. The multiplicity of values and worldviews is, to Mannheim, the effects of people's diversified and historically situated existences and actions. Thus, there is no privileged intellectual position and thereby no independent standpoints. However, while admitting the limitedness of our scientific point of view and the importance of respect for cultural particularity and specificity, a total refutation of the basis for the fusion of horizons and the comparability among various socio-historical traditions is problematic. It would be unacceptable to claim that the sociology of knowledge must end up in relativism in which all standpoints and intellectual positions are equally right, or on the contrary illusory. In other words, a theoretical defense of relativism and "incommensurability" that have reverberated a nihilistic extreme of thought is unjustifiable according to the middle way relational-processual perspective.

Sunyata and *pratityasamutpada* disclose the risk of relativism and nihilism by insisting that all things are dependent co-arisen, and that all things are equally relative but mutually embedded. The middle way examination of cultural relativism and nihilism by means of *reductio ad absurdum* can help us clearly detect this risk. Let's suppose that cultural relativism is absolutely right to say every tradition or value system has its own substantial element that cannot be comparable to others. It appears like that we can finally dissolve ethnocentrism and hold onto multiculturalism to get along with each other. However, what do we do in the case of a tradition whose specific cultural substance involve notions of superiority over other cultures? Especially when culture stands for "human" or "people," meaning that others are not. In adopting this radical cultural relativism we will encounter a logical fallacy of respecting other cultures despite their supporting of ethnocentrism in certain ways (sometimes in violent way). Take the subculture of Aryan nations in the US as an example, if we espouse the attitude of cultural relativism and the incommensurability, and thereby respective of their specific belief and practice (in this case, racism), we will then have to adopt/uphold the correctness of their violent and discriminatory behaviors against other groups. By means of *reductio ad absurdum*, we can easily detect their fundamental absurdity and contradiction. Practically speaking, this kind of absurdity will probably cause immense human tragedy and disaster. From the middle way perspective and Gadamerian hermeneutics, this is definitely unacceptable.

If relativism means an absolute toleration of anything, then it paralyzes a hermeneutical fusion of horizons and the changeability of the basis of each tradition.

Thereby we abandon the opportunity for a mutual learning process that might disclose the negative component of some particular aspects of a culture. Relativism has little concern for the emptiness (openness) of each cultural value and boundaries, and the dependent co-arising and interrelatedness of different cultural traditions. The middle way relational-processual perspective, on the other hand, sees that values and boundaries arise co-dependently as inseparable conditions in the broader relational context whereby the practitioners live with and within. It will also recognize the mutual influence involving with other traditions and cultures between and beyond the boundaries.

Relativism is indefensible because, parallel to objectivism, it ignores the prospect of the communicative process that makes possible the attainment of intersubjectivity and mutual understanding. Moreover, throughout the dialogical process, no traditional or cultural form can remain unchanged and independent of the influence of the other. Being no different from objectivism in the ignorance of this dialogue, relativism is still trapped in a fixated and hence a non-relational and non-processual viewpoint. The "middle way" way of relational-processual and hermeneutic perspective is a plausible approach by which we can transcend the dilemma of absolutism versus relativism. The middle way relational-processual perspective is a very different approach from relativism. The distinction between these two is a delicate but significant one. Whereas relativism holds that all knowledge is arbitrary, the middle way relational-processual perspective holds that all knowledge is fundamentally empty and yet conventionally true in the sense of dependent co-arising. All truths are relationally conditioned and relatively durable, but still changeable and impermanent in a continual flux. In other words, knowledge has a relational and processual truth rather than a split between an absolute truth and no-truth. Hermeneutics can be a relational-processual perspective that Richard Bernstein looks for as a middle way between objectivism and relativism.[102] While acknowledging the dependently limited and situational aspects of human knowledge, hermeneutics does not reify it as barriers to the critical exchange of views. Just because there is no universal and absolute criterion covering the construction and employment of our knowledge does not follow that there is no standard. In other words, knowledge and truth are relative to something like a perspective or horizon without inherent and independent essence. By the same token, the perspective and horizon are not enclosed but open even if

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[102] See the concluding chapter of Beyond Objectivism and Relativism. Here Bernstein argues for a new kind of phronesis that opens up differences between and questions the disposition of power both within and without human communities.

bounded and limited. Their dependent arising represents as much a point of departure for human understanding as it does to pose a limiting condition.

Some debates within postmodernism also have reinforced the same trajectory like earlier relativists. The enlightenment fashion of absolutist and objective science was rejected by the postmodernist standpoint, which was built around an explicit awareness of the heterogeneity of all social occurrences and human actions. For postmodernists, science as a human activity also is influenced by heterogeneity and hence becomes aspectual.

In opposition to the positivism and interpretism we have discussed previously, postmodernists do not presuppose any impartial or neutral standpoint, but only a valued or powered standpoints. Inspired by Wittgenstein's idea that there is a close connection of a language with a "form of life" and thereby allowing the coexistences of there quite different languages and forms of life, postmodernists presume that human activities in the specific context bring forth different experiences and concerns. Each context is seen as absolutely different from those of others and is the basis of their distinctive standpoint or perspective on the world. Moreover, to put it negatively, they see that there is no one superior form of life or language beyond other forms of life. Since they don't think there's any common basis among different forms of life and traditions, they also cannot accept a universally applicable theoretical framework and truth-claim.

Some postmodernists' and poststructuralists' urging on the subject of the end of the grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979)[103] have toughened the notion that scientific "objectivity," along with "truth-claim" is supposed to be thrown away into the dustbin of history. Furthermore, they also audaciously advocate, in a far more radical way than Kuhn had done before, that the idea such as "progress" or "growth" in scientific knowledge could no longer persist. Postmodernism in social sciences, however, demolished eventually not only the attempt to privilege a contextualized viewpoint but also the very idea that there could be a true standpoint. Humanity, it was argued,

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[103] Lyotard, J.-F. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

for example, does not form a universal, essential category. It is rather constituted as "human being" through specific power/knowledge practices. This also occurs in the context of the practices of many social categories, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality and so forth. In addition to exposing the practice-related social categorizations, some postmodernist even radicalize the process of categorizations by addressing further division of each category. For example, gender can be divided by and intersect with class, ethnicity and nationality, and therefore there are diverse women's view that can be implemented on the world, each of which is fitting to the interests and concerns of a particular group. (Harding, 1986)[104]

This kind of radicalizing of the social categorization could be relational and processual and thereby insightful, which, according to the middle way perspective, empties the inherent and independent existence of each social category and simultaneously acknowledges the dependent co-arising of the intersection and mutual embeddedness of various social categories. However, if we infinitely divide each category as well as each reality according to the same method, a nihilistic relativism would be the result. If this position is acknowledged, our knowledge of reality will be doomed to be impossible to describe. The world of knowledge and reality will be merely chaotic or seen as an absolute infinitude, an infinitely manifold stream of consciousness and events. It is, in brief, an inexhaustibly chaotic source of experiences and a vast chaotic stream of events.

Apprehending social reality by infinite division will definitely empty any attempts for a substantial unit. As Weber points out: "Now, as soon as we attempt to reflect about the way in which life confronts us in immediate concrete situations, it presents an infinite multiplicity of successively and co-existently emerging and disappearing events, both 'within' and 'outside' ourselves." (Weber, 1904: 72)[105] However, by dividing reality and our categories of reality, we will completely refute the existence of any sort of reality, meaning, culture, tradition and horizon. But this is nihilism and therefore is not acceptable to the middle way perspective. For the middle way perspective, emptiness must be empty of "itself" rather than attach to it as something, called emptiness. In the meantime, emptiness must recognize the relative durability of the dependent co-arising of conventionally constructed reality. Otherwise, as in the nihilistic case, no social category and subsequently no social reality in the

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[104] Harding, S. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
[105] Weber, M. 1904. '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy'. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edited by M. Weber. New York: Free Press, 1949.

conventional sense would be possible. Furthermore, neither a strategically and practically significant social identity in any sort nor knowledge regarding socially constructed reality in the sense of dependent co-arising would be tenable.

According to the method of *reductio ad absurdum*, relativism of this kind will eventually destroy its own position and become self-contradictory. That is because that the basic assumption of relativism must hold something substantial, which is irreducible by, and independent of, other things.

There must be something existing in the first place substantially different from others, and then can we talk about the incommensurability between things. The principle of incommensurability must dissolve the essence of unity into the essence of plurality and then recognize the essential uniqueness of each particularity. But the principle of infinite division will eventually refute any kind of essentialist view. Therefore, relativism of this sort will be destroyed by its own nihilistic tendency.

On the other hand, some postmodernists try to maintain the essence of each particularity and negate the dialogical relation between different cultural units. Within each cultural unit one is presumed to have the self-enclosure of its rules and values and in turn loses any influence and dialogical relation with other cultural units. A self-enclosed system of rules and value structure all our perceptions, conceptions and appreciation. It constitutes a self-sufficient world that is essentially different from other self-enclosed systems. According to the middle way perspective, this kind of mutual exclusiveness between different cultural units or systems is still substantialist in the pluralist sense. In other words, they essentialize the heterogeneity of relatively different cultural units or systems and ignore the interrelationship and interaction between them. Therefore, the relativists' insistence on incommensurability and fundamental heterogeneity between cultural units and systems is non-relational and non-processual, and hence unacceptable.

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, we acquire our knowledge of the world only through the employment of verbal designations and socially constructed categories or concepts that are dependently arisen to our mind and therefore are the constitutive part of that reality. For the hermeneutical and relational-processual perspective, these verbal designations, categories and concepts are derived from our modes of experience in the process of communication and mutual influencing. In other words, human beings acquire the knowledge of the world by dependently relating it to their *Erfahrung* that

is full of meaningful value orientations relative to their horizon and tradition. Our cognitive interest towards the world inevitably involves a prejudgment and preunderstanding through which we give a cultural significance to the reality we apprehend. Sociologically speaking, something "is significant because it reveals relationships which are important to us due to their connection with our values." (Weber, 1904:76)[106] The realities that involve our knowledge of the world are thus "value relevant."

Therefore, while acknowledging that our personal and social experience, physical body and surrounding backgrounds are dependently embedded in an infinite flux of occurrences, we don't have to negate the relative durability of the dependent co-arising within our conventionality. Social science is also a kind of social activity that has its own relatively durable scientific frame of reference, which apprehends social reality by and through value-relevant concepts. On the other hand, everyday life practice also evolves various kinds of relatively durable frames of reference and meaning systems. They are dependently co-arisen and thereby empty of inherent and independent essence. The relevance structure of science and everyday life practice are in many ways relatively different but in a way common, that is, they both are relatively durable but still changeable dependently in the relational-processual world. Nevertheless, though the two are in common in a relational-processual sense, it is not sensible to ask whether the findings of science properly reflect or correspond to the structure of reality.

Hermeneutically speaking, the relationally and processually established frames of knowledge do not grasp the whole truth of a historically specific culture. Historical traditions and horizons are the conditions and consequences of human actions that are based on the mode of experience (*Erfahrung*) possessed by communicating participants, and this mode of experience is rooted in their relatively varying value-relevant perspectives conditioned by their historicality and situatedness. Their relatively varying modes of experience come into the constitution of the very historical fields that they attempt to describe. Since, as Nagarjuna points out, all reality was *sunya* or empty, no thing, including "nothing" itself, had *svabhava*, or own-being, traditions and horizons are thus empty. But emptiness or *sunyata* is no different from dependent co-arising, meaning that all traditions and horizons were mutually dependent. Hence, no conviction in epistemologism as a transcendent reality

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[106] Weber, M. 1904. '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy'. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edited by M. Weber. New York: Free Press, 1949.

could be sustained, nor can relativism and nihilism, as independent from mutuality, be embraced.

PART THREE: A Middle Way Examination of the Theory of Society

5. Beyond Theoretical Dichotomization and Substantialization

From the methodological examination of the constitution of sociological approaches, we can sense a deeply ingrained substantialist and dualistic thinking in various sociological theories. They are presented, for instance, in the form of methodological individualism vs. methodological collectivism, or positivism vs. intepretism (objectivism vs. subjectivism). This section will begin by examining this dualistic reification in sociological theory and try to examine the theoretical or intellectual dependent arising of this dualistic obsession. And then identifying the hidden connection between the two, using the middle way non-dualistic and relational-processual perspective towards the co-dependent arising of this connection.

Many sociologists have been haunted by a variety of conceptual dichotomies in social theories, such as action/structure, micro/macro, *homo economicus/homo sociologicus*, individualism/collectivism, and so on. Up until now, many have dichotomized the social phenomena into two kinds and meanwhile conceptualized and categorized it into two theoretical worlds. Practitioners either favor one side of the pairs and downplay the other, or try to bridge, link or integrate these opposites. Since we have discussed the methodological dualism in previous section, our focus will locate more on the theoretical pairs like action/structure and subject/object and the theories that intend to bridge or transcend these differentiations.

Just as we rarely question our ability to breathe, so we rarely question the habit of dividing the world into two categories: good and evil; right and wrong; beautiful and ugly. Likewise, the unquestioned dichotomy also has prevailed in sociological theories, as mentioned above. However, much of our mode of experience (*Erfahrung*) does not fit neatly into binary categories, but is better described as a continuum of dialogical process with the constant opening of our own framework and, to a lesser or greater extent, fusing with others'. The practical boundaries therefore remain indistinct and changeable. Although many dualistic concepts in sociology are essentially categorical, in the practical world of experience these boundaries are to some extent vague and flexible. Social scientific language tends to be discrete and affirmative regarding the dichotomies and the clearly divided boundaries. In that case, the relatedness, mutuality, processuality and change of social reality are thus

systematically obscured by these "clear and distinct" categories and thereby difficult to recognize.

However, inspired by the insights of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominality of the world, we must continually remind ourselves that both social reality and sociological categories are not fixed or substantial. The actual social and individual dynamics and continua obscured by categories suggest a few questions: is our automatic division of social theories into two distinct parts as justifiable as we think? Are the boundaries between them as clear as the paired words agency/structure, subject/object suggests?

Actually, a profusion of consideration has been committed in recent times in European social theory to the issue of agency and structure connection, while in America this has been coordinated by a comparable but somewhat different altitude of concern in the linkage between the micro and macro. There has been considerable movement on both sides of the Atlantic to bridge, link, integrate or synthesize these categories in order to overcome the theoretical extremism and move towards more integrative orientations.

In Europe, many have strived to move away from the "either-or" dilemma, that is, to choose between, for instance, a structural or phenomenological-existentialist theory. On the other hand, the American focus on micro-macro linkage, as Dawe contends: "Here, then, is the problematic around which the entire history of sociological analysis could be written: the problematic of human agency." (1978, 379)[107] This concern indicated by Dawe of course also encompassed an interest in social structure as well as the tension between them. Later on, Archer also argued that in Europe "The problem of structure and agency has rightly come to be seen as the basic issue in modern social theory." (1988, x)[108] Indeed, the endeavor to transcend the dualism of structure/agency and thereby to link both has become "central problem" in social theory in Europe.

Likewise, American theorists have been thinking of a way out of the necessity of choosing between macro-theories like structural functionalism and micro-theory like symbolic interactionism. Even though the agency-structure linkage implies the

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[107] Dawe, Alan. 1978. Theories of Social Action. In *A History of SociologicalAnalysis*, edited by Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet, 362-417.

[108] Archer, Marget S. (1988). *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambirdge University Press.

transcendence of micro-macro dualism, the micro-macro connotation in American context is somewhat different from the agency-structure dualism in European context. It is not necessary to assume that the "micro" and "agency" are alike and the "macro" and the "structure" are identical. For example, "agency" does not have to imply micro-level individual human actors. In some cases it also refers to macro agencies, such as organizations, classes, nations and other active collectivities. On the other hand, the connotation of the "structure" is not limited to the large-scale social structures; it can also refer to micro-structures at the individual or interpersonal levels. In general, both agency and structure can refer to either or both the micro- and macro-level social phenomena. Moreover, "micro" does not mean merely the conscious, intentional action of actors. It can also refer to a more unconscious, unintentional "behavior" as proposed by behaviorists, exchange-theorists, and rational-choice theorists. On the other hand, the "macro" can imply not only the material social structures but also the large-scale idealistic or cultural dimension of social phenomena.

Nevertheless, the attempts at a structure-agency, or micro-macro, linkage surged from different sub-fields of sociology and in different parts of the world. Unfortunately, most of the linking or bridging endeavors still try to make an explicit or implicit distinction between agents and structures in order to make these concepts coherent and useful. They seek to give us a theoretical vocabulary that tries to capture the relationship between social structures and the agency. Some explicitly remain within their dualistic thinking, such as Margret Archer, in terms of dealing separately with agency and structure. Some substitute "dualism" with "duality," such as Giddens, which assumes the relation between agency and structure as inseparable and mutually constituting. Despite the disagreement between practitioners who adopt dualistic thinking and those who implement the concept of "duality," they still have one thing in common, that is an inclusive attitude in terms of "both-and." However, according to the middle way "neither-nor" perspective, the substitution of the fallacy of "self-nature" and "other-nature" views for a blending of both "self-nature" and "other-nature" is even more absurd than the former two. This attempt to construct a linking bridge between the two sides of the river presupposes the substantial existence of the two sides, in this case the side of "self-nature" and the side of "other nature." In other words, the bridging attempt is endangered if it presupposes the inherent existences of both "structure" and "agency." The relation between two substances is unthinkable due to the unchangeability and autonomy or self-sufficiency of each substance. Since the existence of both two are pre-given and fixated, how can they

have any dynamic interrelationships that require the intermingling and interpenetrating between two changing dimensions of social phenomena, from within and without? We can never imagine of the linkage between things if these things are not empty of their inherent and independent existence. The dependent co-arising of the relationship between structure and agency, or micro- and macro-level, must be understood under the condition of the relational and processual existence of these two. If both are relational and processual, then how can we think of them dualistically?

In the following sections, I will attempt to be more appreciative and try to elaborate the non-dualistic, relational and processual way of thinking the social, demonstrated by Mead, Elias and Bourdieu.

5.1 A Relational-Processual View of The Constitution of The Self—George Hebert Mead

According to the middle way perspective, the self does not have an "own-being" that exists inherently and independently. In other words, the arising of the self is a process in the relational context. In sociology, Mead also refutes the substantiality of the self and proposes a relational-processual notion of the self. In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934)[109], Mead describes how the individual mind and self arises co-dependently out of the relational process. Instead of approaching human experience in terms of individual psychology, Mead analyzes experience from the "standpoint of communication as essential to the social order." Individual psychology, for Mead, is intelligible only in terms of relational social processes. The "development of the individual's self, and of his self- consciousness within the field of his experience" is preeminently social. For Mead, the social process is the condition to the structures and processes of individual experience.

For Mead, the human self is relational and processual that arises co-dependently in the social context. Self is thus neither a substantial nor an absolute entity but an intersubjectively constituted category through its relationships to others in a community. There is no meaning independent of the interactive participation of two or more individuals in the act of communication. In this sense, the Cartesian idea of a substantial ego, which requires nothing other than its inherent and independent self-nature, is thereby rejected. Mead criticizes the Cartesian notion of the self in its

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[109] *Mind, Self, and Society*, ed. C.W. Morris (University of Chicago 1934)

dualistic sense, which differentiates the subjective self from its object, including other people, and contends that the self is socially constituted by its relations to others in the community to which it belongs: "Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others ... The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group." (MSS 164)

Mind, according to Mead, also arises co-dependently within the social process of communication and cannot be understood apart from that process. Like the self, the mind is a field or locus of relationships which cannot be localized in the physical substance of the body but extend across time and space and the whole field: "If mind is socially constituted, the field or locus of any given individual mind must extend as far as the social activity or apparatus of social relations which constitutes it extends." (MSS: 223n.) Therefore, in contrast to an introspective approach, which comprehends the nature of meaning as a function of private language and minds, Mead, with echoes of Wittgenstein, formulates a view of public language and mind, which deconstructs phenomenology, phenomenalism, sense data theory, foundationalist epistemology, solipsism or skepticism's views about the existence of so-called private mental objects, and intentionality. Hence, the self, mind and language, for Mead, are a function of sociality, and thus have a relational-processual stretch across time and space. In other words, because the human self, mind and language are a function of sociality its locus or field must arise co-dependently with the broader background field of social relationship by which it has been constituted. Therefore, there cannot be any isolated self, private mental objects, neither a language in which private mental objects are intelligibly designated.

In Mead's view, the mind is an emergent that emerges dependently out of the interaction of organic individuals in a social matrix. Mind is empty of any sense of substance located in some transcendent realm, nor is it merely a series of events that takes place within the human physiological structure. Mead therefore rejects the dualistic view of the mind either as a substance separated from the body or as the behaviorists attempt to account it solely in terms of physiology or neurology. Mead agrees with the behaviorists that we can explain mind behaviorally if we deny its existence as a substantial entity and view it instead as a natural function of human organisms. But it is neither possible nor desirable to deny the relative existence of mind altogether. The physiological organism is a necessary but not sufficient condition of mental behavior. (MSS: 139) Without the social process of

communicational behavior, there would be no internalization and formation of mind at all. Furthermore, Mead's relational-processual theory of self also rejects the notion that there is any substantialistic idea of "instincts" that determines human nature as assumed by Freud. In opposition to Freudian psychology, which highlights the autocentric narcissism of unconscious infantile instincts, Mead instead highlights the other-oriented features of interpersonal communication embedded in the primary nature of the human as a social self.

In general, the dependent co-arising of mind is contingent upon dynamic interactions between the human organism and its social environment, which are both dependently co-arisen and thereby empty of inherent and independent substance. For Mead, it is through participation in the social act of communication that the individual realizes his/her (physiological and neurological) potential for significantly symbolic behavior (i.e., thought). He thus rejects the idea of behaviorism whereby human behavior is as a simple and determined sequence of stimuluses and responses. Mead also discards Freud's concept of human psyche which assumes a fixed content or essence that determines his/her behavior. Mind, in Mead's terms, is an individualized locus of the communication process. Thus, mind is not reducible to the substance, mentally or physically, of the isolated individual, but is an emergent in "the dynamic, ongoing social process" that constitutes human experience. (MSS, 7)

Social acts

For Mead, mind arises co-dependently out of the social act of communication. His concept of the social act is relevant, not only to his theory of mind, but also to all aspects of his social philosophy. His theory of "mind, self, and society" is, in effect, a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of a social process that involves the interaction of many individuals, just as his theory of knowledge and value is a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of the experiencing individual in interaction with his/her environment. Hence, the constitution of the self is not only social in its foundation but in its process of development: "And hence the origin and foundations of the self, like those of thinking, are social." (MSS, 173) He rebuts any view that sees the self as existing prior to or apart from its relatedness and processuality by arguing: "It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience." (MSS, 142)

Mead characterizes the social act with respect to the social object. The social act is a

communal act relating the mutual involvement of two or more individuals; and the social object is, viewed by Mead, a communal object having a common meaning for each partaker in the act. There are many kinds of social acts—some very simple, some very complex. These vary from the relatively uncomplicated communication of two individuals (e.g., in dancing, in love-making, or in a game of handball), to somewhat more intricate acts involving more than two individuals (e.g., a play, a religious ritual, a hunting expedition), and to a still more multifarious act carried out in the context of the social institutions (e.g., law- enforcement, education, economic exchange).

The dependent co-arising of a society emerges in the cumulative or collective process of such social acts. The self is thus not something that exists first with its "own-being" and then acts into a relationship with others, but is constituted by social relations and processes. In opposition to the assumption of Cartesian subjectivism, which asserts that individuation precedes sociation, Mead's view of the social self is a dialectic of the I and the me that illuminates how individuation and sociation arise co-dependently and yet neither one of them is substantial. Mead thus contrasts his social theory of the self with individualistic theories of the self. The social self is thereby not something given or fixated at birth, but is instead a relational-processual realization, which requires a continual sequence of socialization. "The self," he states, "is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process." (MSS:135) Accordingly, the self cannot presuppose a permanent substance with a fixed essence, rather, it is a flux of dependent co-arising which continually arises and ceases in an evolving temporal process towards novelty.   In general, we can say that Mead locates the human self within temporal process of dependent arising at every level of socialization.

However, the intersubjective constitution of the social self by no means entails the loss of the agentic personality, that is, the individual is not merely a passive recipient of external, objective and environmental influences, but is capable of taking action with reference to such influences. Although the self is a product of social interaction, it is not merely a passive reflection of the generalized other. The individual's response to the social world is active; he/she decides what will be done in the context of the attitude of others; but his/her conduct is not mechanically determined by such attitudinal structures. Hence, Mead's agenda is in due course heading for the goal of becoming a person or relatively distinctive individuality as an ideal social self through

communicative interaction with others in a community. The individual is relatively active and capable of taking action pertaining to such influences.

According to Mead, it is by means of the social act that people in society construct their reality. The objects of the social world (ordinary objects such as flags, monuments, as well as scientific objects such as atoms and electrons) are what they are as a dependent consequence of being defined and utilized within the matrix of specific social acts. Thus, a standing concrete becomes a monument in the experience of people engaged in the act of ritual practice; and the electron is introduced (as a hypothetical object) in the scientific community's project of investigating the nature of physical reality.

While embedded in the broader background field, through communicative process with others, the individual reconstructs his/her relation to it by socially significant and thereby bounded and selective cognitive frameworks and value relevances. Therefore, the objects in the background field are conceptualized and reconstructed as symbolically meaningful objects. In other words, reality is not simply an entity "out there," independent of the acting social self, but the meaningful outcome of the dynamic interrelation of varying conditions. (The Philosophy of the Act, 81)

Since the self is relational-processual through communicative action with others in a community, society to Mead must not be seen as a collection of preexisting atomic individuals (as suggested, for example, by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau), but rather a relational-processual complex within which individuals dependently identify themselves through participation in communicative acts. The individual acts are actually, according to Mead, trans-individual and socially situated. The self, therefore, is a social emergent. This social conception of the self, Mead argues, entails that individual selves are the products of social interaction within and without and not the (logical or biological) preconditions. In other words, the individual acts are social acts, which involve the participation of two or more dialogical counterparts. Actually, even within the individual mind the self is still relational and processual in terms of the dialectic relation and process between I and me.

Social Self as a Dialogical Process of "I" and "Me"

The self only exists when we are examining our "self." This is a sort of reflective process, in which one examines their "self" as a dialogical counterpart and

dependently changes, evolves, or confirms their "self." This is an internal development of the "self" as a relational process of "I" and "Me,"which depends upon the conditions of change, evolution or confirmation. This relational process can be viewed as an inner dialogue.

According to Mead, the self is not an isolated I or Cartesian subject but a processual relationship of "I" and "Me." The notion of the "Me" represents the sociality and "I" represents the individuality. There are, it would appear, two phases (or poles) of the self: (1) that phase which reflects the attitude of the generalized other and (2) that phase which responds to the attitude of the generalized other. The "me" is the social self, and the "I" is a response to the "me." (MSS: 178) By conceptualizing such a bipolar model of selfhood, Mead clearly presents the social self as relationally and processually constituted through a "conversation of the 'I' and the 'me.'" (MSS, 179) Mead defines the "me" as "a conventional, habitual individual," and the "I" as the "novel reply" of the individual to the generalized other. (Mind, Self and Society 197) There is a dialectical relationship between society and the individual; and this dialectic is enacted on the intra-psychic level in terms of the polarity of the "me" and the "I." The "me" is the internalization of roles, which derive from such symbolic processes as linguistic interaction, playing, and gaming. The "I" is a "creative response" to the symbolized structures of the "me" (i.e., to the generalized other).

The basic theme of Mead's philosophy is the social construction of mind and self in society. Yet, while his social scientific research project is an effort to elaborate that "minds and selves are essentially social products," his I-Me dialogical model of social self prevents it from the problem of social determinism. (MSS: 1) The self arises dependently from its social situation as a "me" and then responds with relatively more creativity, spontaneity, and novelty as an "I." One is in this sense constantly changing, evolving and confirming their perception of their "self" in a dialectic process.

According to the middle way relational-processual perspective, Mead perceives the creativity, spontaneity and novelty of an "I" as dependently co-arisen and empty of any pre-existing being. Although the "I" is not an object of immediate experience, it is, in a way, imaginable as the dialectical counterpart of the "Me." Moreover, the "I" is held in retrospection in memory. However, in the memory imagery, the "I" becomes the old "I" in relation to the assumed new "I." In other words, the "I" in the past becomes a new "Me" being observed by the new "I," the "I" is no longer a pure subject, but "a subject that is now an object of observation." (Selected Writings

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142)[110]

This process of introspection is infinite theoretically speaking. However, in actuality this infinite regression is unattainable as far as we are conditioned in the current moment. Nonetheless, the imaginable infinite regression reminds us that a pursuit of an "I" as a starting point, or as an original self is a fruitless effort. The "I" is ultimately empty of any kind of asserted substance; it is rather only a conventionally designated self in relation to still another conventionally designated self, the "Me." Therefore, the true, original "I" is untenable. It appears only *ex post facto*. In retrospection, one remembers the responses of the "I" to the "Me,"and this is no longer the identical "I" in temporal sequence. The objectification of the "I" in retrospection is possible only through an alertness of the past; but the objectified "I" is never the subject of present experience. "If you ask, then, where directly in your own experience the 'I' comes in, the answer is that is comes in as a historical figure." (MSS, 174) Moreover, in practical sense, the "I" comes into view as a signified object within our awareness of our precedent dealings, but in that case it has turned out to be part of the "Me." Then, from the standpoint of the "Me," there is a fusion of two poles of the self, that is, the pole of the old "Me" (i.e., the already-established generalized other) and the pole of the old "I" (i.e., the significant other, or the organic self). Part of the new "Me" in relation to new "I" is, in a sense, that phase of the self that represents the past dialectical synthesis of "I" and "Me." Likewise, the current "I," which is a dialectical counterpart to the current "Me," represents action in the present (i.e., "that which is actually going on, taking place") and implies the dependent co-arising of the new "Me" in a future. After the "I" has acted, "we can catch it in our memory and place it in terms of that which we have done." Of course, it is now (in the newly emerged present) a co-arising aspect of the restructured "Me," or self. (MSS, 203-4) Because of the temporal-historical dimension and aforementioned social-communal dimension of the self, the character of the self must be relational-processual, in which the "I" is identifiable only after it has occurred in its dialogue with the "Me" in a continual flux of time. The "I" is not, thus, subject to predetermination, while in chorus the "Me" is not objectively determined by its environment, socially or physically.

From the middle way notion of emptiness, the "I" dimension of the self, in Mead's thought, manifests the fundamental openness of the self in the relational-processual sense. The self, either the "I" or the "Me," is not at all a substance as a relational

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[110] Selected Writings, ed. A.J. Reck (Bobbs-Merrill, Liberal Arts Press, 1964).

process in which the communicative action has been internalized within an individual. The social dimension of the social act has been imported into the self and becomes then the "Me" feature of the self. A significant part of the "Me" represents the attitudes of others, which is highly, but still not absolutely, generalized and structured, so that they become what we call social attitudes rather than view of separate individuals. This process of relating one's own self to the others in the communicative actions constitutes the self. The benefit of this importation of the communicative actions into the conduct of the individual lie in the greater co-ordination gained for social integration and in the augmented competence of the individual as a member of the community. "The social process with it various implications is actually taken up into the experience of the individual so that which is going on takes place more effectively, because in a certain sense it has been rehearsed in the individual. He not only plays his part better under these conditions but he also reacts back on the organization of which he is a part."[111]

Of course, the "Me" also embraces the quality of the past "I" in the sense that they are identified through retrospection. However, the "I" as such is not being confined in the "Me." While this inner process does not exist for itself but is simply a phase of the broader social field in which the individuals are embedded, the individual responds to that field with a certain range of alternative courses of action. In other words, the "I" is always to some extent capable of saying "no" to society. The person has to opt for a course of action (and even a resolution to do "nothing" is a response to the field) and act accordingly. This course of action he/she opts for is not completely prescribed by that field. It is this openness, or indeterminacy, of response that "gives the sense of freedom, of initiative." (MSS, 177) In other words, the emptiness of the social acts of the self is revealed in the actual social praxis, in this sense, a rationalist calculation of the action of the "I," as proposed by methodological individualists, and a deterministic prediction of action of the "Me," as suggested by methodological collectivism, are flawed.

Of course, according to the view of dependent arising, human action is not free of any condition; it depends upon and in turn is conditioned by its social field, or the generalized other. Human action thus is constrained to respond to their influences, but the exact alternative the individual choose to respond remain undetermined by the field in which he/she acts. (MSS, 210-211)

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[111] From George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Human freedom is a manifestation of fundamental emptiness, but it doesn't mean that he/she can act randomly or initiate out of nothing in the nihilistic sense. In other words, human freedom is always already related to social conditions and thereby is dependently co-arisen, and is a conditioned freedom so to speak. The self is embedded in a social setting. This setting structures the "Me" in terms of inter-subjective symbolic processes (language, gestures, play, games, etc.), and the reflective "I" must respond to its setting and to its "Me" freely within a range of conditions and limits. Because of this dynamic interrelation, the "I" and the "Me" do not exist inherently and independently, but they are rather dependently co-arisen in a dynamic relation and process to one another. The "me" represents a symbolic structure without which the "I" won't be able to activate. As Mead states, "without this structure of things, the life of the self would become impossible." (MSS, 214) On the other hand, the "I" is the process that makes de-structuring and restructuring of the self possible. For Mead, "both aspects of the 'I' and the 'me' are essential to the self in its full expression." (MSS, 199) The dialectical relation of the "I" and the "me" involves mutual adjustment, which also makes society a constantly changing phenomenon. Therefore, the de-structuring and restructuring of the self will entail the de-structuring and restructuring of society, and vice versa. "Thus the relations between social reconstruction and self or personality reconstruction are reciprocal and internal or organic; social reconstruction by the individual members of any organized human society entails self or personality reconstruction in some degree or other by each of these individuals, and vice versa, for, since their selves or personalities are constituted by their organized social relations to one another, they cannot reconstruct those selves or personalities without also reconstructing, to some extent, the given social order, which is, of course, likewise constituted by their organized social relations to one another." Actually, "social reconstruction and self or personality reconstruction are the two sides of a single process—the process of human social evolution." (MSS, 309)

This aspect of the social dynamic is particularly clear in terms of the emptying capacity of the self that takes form in the "I", which can operate in two ways: (1) explicit self-emptying in implicit societal emptying; and (2) explicit societal-emptying in implicit self-emptying. For instance, the dependent arising/ceasing of one's own moral principles also entails the dependent arising/ceasing of the morality of one's social field, for individual morality is embedded in social morality. On the other hand, the dependent arising/ceasing of the morality of one's social field raises questions concerning one's own moral responsibility in the social world.

The Dialogical Process Between Self and Other

The inner dialogue between the "I" and the "me" makes the constitution of the self a relational process without any pre-given substance. The self dependently arises mostly due to the individual's internalization of the attitude of the generalized other through the individual's participation in the process of communication mediated through significant symbols (verbally and non-verbally) and other socialization processes (such as play and games). Here, Mead's idea of generalized other, mediated by significant symbols and other symbolic structures, becomes a bridging means to connect the self and the other (or society). The generalized other represents a relatively more organized normative and cognitive structure that, through the importation of the "me," makes possible "the superior co-ordination" of "society as a whole," and for the "increased efficiency of the individual as a member of the group." (MSS, 179) In this sense, the generalized other is seen as a mechanism for social control through the formation of the "me". As Mead states: " Social control is the expression of the 'me' over against the expression of the 'I.'"(MSS, 210) The constitution of the "me" in the socialization process is thus a condition of possibility for the "normalization" of the self and thereby for social control.

The internalization of socially defined norms and values, conceived as the generalized others, are seen as a necessary condition for attaining social solidarity. Also, the internalization of the attitudes of others "toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged" is important for the self to be able to perform its social acts. (MSS, 154-155) However, since Mead is not a social determinist, this process of internalization can never be understood as the complete realization of social control, mainly due to the fundamental openness and indeterminacy of the self-constitution. Another limit that makes social control limited is articulated in Mead's portrayal of the social relations. This account has significant consequences concerning the way in which the idea of the generalized other is to be applied in social analysis.

Even though the generalized other is a concept referring to a relatively more abstract social project rather than concrete individuals, we still cannot internalize this abstract generalized other without situating or relating ourselves in a relatively more concrete communication process, in which we are involved with specific people in our social activities through situated symbol, language, play and the game. In this sense, we

cannot transcendentalize the generalized other as something existing essentially external to and independent of concrete situation where the self is embedded in a dialogical process. In other words, the generalized other has no given substance or fixed essence, it arises dependently in a historically specific context.

The self that internalizes the generalized other arises co-dependently out of "a special set of social relations with all the other individuals" and thus involves in a specific set of social projects. (MSS, 156-157) The generalized other is therefore a specific idea of society that reflects the specific relations and processes where the self is situated. When society is composed of different social groups and thereby various norms and values, then the generalized other will be plural and contingent upon our specific context. We, concurrently or consecutively involve with different social groups, which might represent different abstract ideas of norms and values. We thus might relate ourselves to different generalized others simultaneously or serially. Of course, it is still possible that we somehow still relate ourselves to a greater imagined community than the one in which we have hitherto been involved directly. For example, our national identity might sometimes override our local identity. However, as long as our concrete daily practices are multiple our selves must contain a multiplicity of generalized others. Mead thus recognizes the fundamental multiplicity of the generalized other as a pluralistic field of selves. The self is therefore not restricted within the limits of any one generalized attitude of others. Therefore, when we acknowledge that the self arises dependently through the internalization of the generalized others, we must not reify this category and ignores the individual's capacity to encompass a variety of others within the relational-processual structure of the self. This makes stringent and full amount social control or social determination unattainable in Mead's theory.

Indeed, for Mead, the social self is seen as an emptied and decentered self, which arises dependently in a multiple world. As he states, "We are all persons of multiple selves." (1964,71)[112] Mead also describes the social selves relationally interwoven in complex ways when he writes: "We divide ourselves up in all sorts different selves with reference to our acquaintances…. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions." (MSS, 142) In opposition to the Cartesian unified ego, Mead considers that the social self is dependently co-arisen by a manifestation of all the selves in the community as the primary social group from

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[112] *George Herbert Mead: Selected Writings* [SW]. (1964) Edited by A.J. Reck. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

which it has its genesis. Differ from Cartesianists, Mead affirms the relative normality of our multiple selves: "A multiple personality is in a certain sense normal." (MSS, 142) Moreover, again, different from Cartesianism, Mead's idea of multiple social selfhood is not a priori, it is rather an empirically based account of how the plurality of selves dependently arises through the socialization process of "taking the attitude of others." Therefore, we can say that the unitary self of Cartesian subjectivism is fundamentally substituted by a relational-processual self which is multiple, emptied, decentered, open, fluid, and ever-changing. In his work *Invitation to Sociology*, (1963.106-7)[113] Peter Berger also affirms that Mead's social theory of multiple selfhood as a kaleidoscope of roles and identities clarifies how the self is not an unchanging substantial entity with a fixed essence, but a temporal process whereby a person is re-created in each new social situation.

Towards a Communicative Discourse Ethics

Mead clearly articulates the relational-processual constitution of the human mind and self in society through social acts of symbolically mediated communicative interaction, which has exerted a major influence upon Habermas and other theories of communicative competence. One of Mead's greatest contributions to the social sciences has been thus his eloquent articulation of a subtle social psychological theory which provides an empirically based account of the relatedness and processuality of the social self through communicative interaction with others in the community. It is important to stress that Mead's communicative notion of the social self made possible through the use of significant symbols, especially language. We can say that Mead's theory represents a linguistic turn of social sciences. Of course, his idea of language is still relational and processual, that is, socially related. Mead stresses that "Language is a social process and grows out of gesture." (Mead, 1982: 36)[114]

Language to Mead, similar to the later Wittgenstein, has no independently existent substance (like private language), due to the social context of the use of language. In other words, language is always a social affair involving communication by using symbols with a shared meaning. For Mead, the constitution of the social self is made possible only if it is socially constructed by the intersubjective medium of language. By steering clear of linguistic idealism, Mead characterizes language in behaviorist

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[113] *Invitation to Sociology*, Peter L. Berger. (1963-7)

[114] Mead, George H. 1982, *The Individual and the Social Self: Unpublished work of George Herbert Mead*. Edited with   an Introduction by David L. Miller. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

terms as gestural language or conversation of gestures functioning as significant symbols which call out the same meaning in oneself as to others: "Language as set of significant symbols is simply the set of gestures which the organism employ in calling out the response of others." (MSS,355) Hence, "the language process is essential for the development of the self." (MSS,135) Language is actually the intersubjective medium through which socialization occurs: "Such is the process by which a personality arises. I have spoken of this as a process in which a child takes the role of the other, and said that it takes place essentially through the use of language." (MSS 160) Besides, like the constitution of the self, the mind is also socially constructed by language: "Out of language emerges the field of mind." (MSS, 133) Furthermore, in addition to the human self and mind, the objects of human perception are also seen as socially constructed through the intersubjective medium of language. He states: "Language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created." (MSS 78) Therefore, through symbolic communication with language, Mead clearly indicates the relational-processual characteristics of the constitution of the human self, mind, consciousness, and field of perception.

According to Mead, the social act of linguistically mediated communicative interaction is made possible only if we as human beings have the capacity to communicate with significant symbols or significant gestures. Thus, like Ernst Cassirer's notion of mankind as an *animal symbolicum*, or symbolic animal. (Cassirer, 1944, 26)[115] Mead claims that the human self is distinguished by virtue of the reality that it arises dependently through a communicative process of symbolic interrelation using significant symbols. Mead's idea of linguistically mediated communicative interaction also extend to the basis of his moral philosophy, wherein he endeavors to reformulate Kant's subjectivist-universalist ethics in the context of an intersubjectivist communication paradigm of the social self. Mead clearly indicates the individualism underlying Kant's version of the universalization principle. He states: "Kant approached that universality from the assumption of the rationality of the individual, and said that if his ends, or the form of his acts, were universal, then society could arise. He conceived of the individual first of all as rational and as a condition for society." (MSS 379) Apparently, Mead cannot accept this kind of methodological individualism and contends that rationality is a social and thus the universalization

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[115] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. Yale University Press, 1944.

principle must therefore be realized in terms of an intersubjective communication ethic. The moral agent is therefore not an isolated, atomic, rational individual who de-emphasizes mutuality and relatedness with others. For Mead, as for Habermas, it is only by the capacity of the self to take on the perspective of others and to see things from their point of view which can provide with the foundation for a universally oriented but contextually situated moral conduct. Mead specifically gave the Kantian consideration of moral agent a linguistic turn in order to concretize it, embedding it in language and interaction, and thereby situating it in a relational-processual context.

In this approach, Mead accounts for both the activity and the evolution of the individual through an intricate social field that both interactive communication and reflection are mutually empowered. In addition to the rejection of Kant's subjective and formalist universalism, Mead's communicative ethics based upon the capacity of the self to enter into the objective perspective of others also rejects the idea of an "absolute perspective" proposed by Hegel due to its ignorance of the dependent arising of finite temporal perspective in the creative, self-emptying advance toward novelty. As he states: "The grandiose undertaking of Absolute Idealism to bring the whole of reality within experience failed. If failed because it left the perspective of the finite ego hopelessly infected with subjectivity and consequently unreal. From its point of view the theoretical and practical life of the individual had no part in the creative advance of nature." (MSS, 161) Furthermore, Mead also cannot accept relativism which negates the possibility of interaction and mutual understanding. In contrast to ethical relativism, which refutes the process of growing and mutual learning tendency, Mead states that: "The self is something which has a development, it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process."(MSS, 135) In this theory, moral behavior is a process of growing and learning through linguistically mediated communicative interaction. It is what is practiced from within the mutually embedded social situation. Richard Bernstein (1988) has claimed that the current philosophical era is to be understood as an effort to advance beyond relativism and objectivism. Mead's communicative ethics based on the semiotic dimension of social existence and the objectivity of mutual understanding symbolizes one of the major efforts beyond the dualistic extremes of relativism and objectivism.

Morality is therefore understood by Mead to be a function of the social self as an individual-society interaction. The root of morality is considered fundamentally social.

He states: "As human nature is essentially social in character, moral ends must be also social in their nature."[116] The social nature of the self is also therefore the social nature of ethics. He thus stresses: " The essentially social character of the ethical end."[117]

According to Mead, the social character of morality is to be understood as grounding moral norms in the dialogical process of intersubejctive practice in which "the self under these circumstances is the action of 'I' in harmony with taking the role of others in the 'me.'" (MSS, 277) In other words, by ideal role-taking or perspective-taking the self can develop the capacity of making objective, impartial moral judgment, which is universally implicated but practically situated in the actual dialogical process. Mead's insight of "ideal role-taking" or "perspective-taking" plays a great influence for the formulation of Habermas's communicative or discursive ethics. In the communicative discourse ethics, the universal moral conduct cannot be a monological act conducted by a solitary transcendental subject, but must instead be accomplished as an act in a dialogical process through communication and public discourse by a mutually embedded and intersubjective community.

One of the contributions Mead's ethical theory provides is his attempt to reformulate Kantian universalist ethics grounded in the categorical imperative by way of his intersubjectivist communication theory based on the relational-processual character of the self. In other words, the universality of ethical code in the society must be socially situated. As he states:

> It is possible to build up an ethical theory on a social basis, in terms of our social
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> theory of the origin, development, nature, and structure of the self. Thus, for
>
> example, Kant's categorical imperative may be socially stated or formulated or
>
> interpreted in these terms, that is, give its social equivalent. (MSS, 379)

Therefore, the Kantian universality of ethical criterion is actually empty of any transcendental, independent essence, and is thereby dependently arisen out of a social process of communication using significant symbols, taking the role, attitude, or perspective of the generalized other. Sociality is thus the condition of possibility of universality.

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[116] Mead, George H. 1938. *The Philosophy of the Act*. P. 385. Edited by C. D.Morris, in collaboration with J. M. Brewster, A.M. Dunham, and D.L. Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[117] Mead, George H. 1964. *George Hebert Mead: Selected Writings*. Edited by A. J. Reck. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

> The universality of our judgment, upon which Kant places so much stress, is a universality that arises from the fact that we take the attitude of the entire community, of all rational beings. We are what we are through our relationship to others…. Sociality gives the universality of our ethical judgment. (MSS 379)

Mead's communicative discourse ethics based on the relational-processual make-up of sociality is made possible when the basic capacity of moral agent for role-taking, or perspective-taking, is emerged in the dialogical process. In other words, the generalizability and universality of the categorical imperative is not an a priori that makes up a private thought conducted by an isolated rational agent or transcendental subject, but rather a contingency dependently arisen from our communicative mode of the social existence. Therefore, whether or not an ethical code can be universalized is highly dependent on whether or not it is acceptable to those who are involved with, and thereby affected by, that code in practical social life. This sort of communicative ethics is tightly related to the participation of community members as articulated by Seyla Benhabib:

> Discourse ethics… requires that controversies over the validity of contexted norms be settled through an argumentative process in which the consensus of all concerned decides upon the legitimacy the controversial norm. Participation precedes universalizability. The old adage, 'no taxation without representation', is now reformulated as 'no universalizability without participation.' (1986,315)[118]

Habermas is inspired by Mead to formulate his own discourse theory:

> The principle of universalization is intended to compel the universal exchange of roles that G. H. Mead called "ideal role taking" or "universal discourse." Thus every valid norm has to fulfill the following condition: (U) All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests…. (D) Only those norms can be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse. (1990, 65-66)

Although adopting Kant's idea of universal implication of the moral principle which is constituted as a criterion to distinguish valid or invalid norms for ethical conduct, Habemas, as with Mead, substitutes the monological formula of Kant's categorical

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[118] Benhabib, Seyla. 1986. *Critique, Norm and Utop*ia. New York: Columbia University Press.

imperative for a dialogical procedure of justification whereby mutually recognized valid norms are negotiated through practical discourse among participants. As seen in the statements of Habermas:

> [D]iscourse ethics rejects the monological approach of Kant, who assumed an individual test his maxims of action *foro interno* or, as Husserl put it, in the loneliness of his soul…. Discourse ethics prefers to view shared understanding about the generalizability of interests as the *result* of an intersubjectively mounted *public discourse*. (1990, 203)

In The Theory of Communicative Action (1989), Habermas clearly appropriates Mead''s relational-processual view of the self and his notion of universal discourse, and thereby develops his so-called "universal pragmatics" and the "ideal speech situation." Indeed, Mead's notion of universal discourse is pretty much similar to Habermas universal pragmatics, which portrays a utopian imaginary as pure intersubejctivity or unrestrained communication, as the condition for mutual understanding and for defending all normative validity claims initiated by communication. Mead's contends as following:

> If that system of communication could be made theoretically perfect, the individual would affect himself as he affects others in every way. That would be the ideal of communication, an ideal attained in logical discourse wherever it is understood. The meaning of that which is said in here the same to one as it is to everybody else. Universal discourse is then the formal ideal of communication. (MSS 327)

John C. Baldwin's work *George Herbert Mead: A Unifying Theory for Sociology* (1986) has indicated that Mead's basic thought is non-dualistic that unifies information on mind and body, subject and object, micro and macro society, along with other related factors. The notion of the social self for Mead thus symbolizes the solely most adequate unifying theory for sociology and the other social sciences.[119]

In addition to Mead's notion of "social self," other seminal notions like the "I-Me dialectic, " the "generalized other," the "significant symbol," and "role-taking" (or "perspective-taking"), all formed in terms of a non-dualistic thinking. In this sense,

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[119] Baldwin, John D. 1986. *George Herbert Mead: A Unifying Theory for Sociology*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

individual and society fused into a unitary social self. By this means, the social self represents a non-dual synthesis of a communicative process of symbolic interaction between the "I" or individual pole and the "me" or internalized social pole, therefore the individual and society are actually considered as undivided. This concept of the self is seen as an individual-society dialectic that is based on a fundamentally non-dualistic way of thinking which thus challenges radically the traditional dualism of self/society and other related pairing concepts. The middle way perspective would agree Mead regarding both "individual" and "society" as empty of any substance and in the meantime dependently co-arisen as two sides of the same coin.

5.2 A Figurational, or Process Sociology—Norbert Elias

> The task of sociological research is to make these blind, uncontrolled processes
> more accessible to human understanding by explaining them, and to enable people
> to orient themselves within the interwoven social web – which, though created by
> their own needs and actions, is still opaque to them – and so better to control it.[120]

Elias's notion of Figurational Sociology, or as he later came to call the Process Sociology is highly relevant to our discussion of the middle way relational-processual perspective. The basic theme of his relational-processial thought is that: "Reciprocity between peoples creates the figurations of social interaction." Hence, his figurational sociology emphasizes that humans form chains of reciprocal relationships through which individuals and society cannot be separated - individuals are mutually embedded together on many levels and in many ways. Human individuals thus can only be understood in their interdependencies with each other, as part of a network of social relations. That is, how people relate to each other creates the kind of groups and societies they live in and the kind of manners that govern their lives. Instead of considering individuals as possessing an inherent and independent identity, with which they then contact with each other and relate to some other substantial thing we call a "society," Elias contends that we are relational, or social, to our very foundation, and only arises in and through our relations with others, developing a socially constructed "habitus" or "second nature." From his figurational insight, we can unambiguously observe the relatedness and mutuality of the constitution of human selves and society.

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[120] Elias, Norbert. 1978, *What is Sociology*? London, Hutchinson, pp. 153-4.

Bearing the relatedness and mutuality of human selves and society in mind, Elias' study of the progression of social development and transformation – what he called *sociogenesis* – must be co-dependently connected to the analysis of *psychogenis* – a process of psychological development and transformation, the changes in individual disposition or habitus which goes along with and somehow brings about social changes. Even so, although he does try hard to illustrate a sociological perspective as structured in the notion of "figuration," he gradually inclined to favor "process sociology" as a marker of his thought. Obviously, without dumping his relational insight, he felt more eager to stress the fundamental processuality of social constitution in historical progression in order to ward off any static or non-process sociology, which he despised as "process-reduction." For Elias, all sociological research must have a processual imaginary of social reality. It would be impossible to pursue a non-processual sociology. Human societies can therefore be understood as a dependent arising of long-term processes of movement and change, rather than as fixated states or forms. Elias' social analysis is thus undertaken historically. With this processual thinking concerning the historicity of social formation, Elias contended that sociologists cannot logically evade pertaining themselves with the diachrony of long-term social processes with the purpose of understanding current social relations and structures.

In order to prevent himself from reifying, or essentializing any theoretical system, Elias refrained from making the claim that he was developing any prescriptive theory. Because of Elias' fundamental insight on the relational-processual constitution of the self and society, he always chooses to simply build up his conceptual framework in relation to the process of research practice, and thereby his thought was able to transcend the dualism between theory and research which still distresses many parts of the social sciences. Therefore, his sociological perspective is not only relational and processual, but also non-dualistic.

As for the relation between a position of social and emotional *involvement* in the topics of study, and one of *detachment* from them, Elias also contemplated it relationally and processually. Contrary to natural sciences, sociologists are not independent of the relatedness and mutuality of their object of scientific study. They rather are part of it. They cannot in turn disregard a consideration of the depth of involvement in their own research and theory. In other words, as long as it is done within the society, social scientific study is the related part of it, not independent of it. However, this possible emotion-laden involvement is to some extent a potential

hindrance to the practice of social research, which is supposed to be self-reflective, and in a way detached from the daily life practice. Therefore, for Elias, an undeniable involvement of social scientists in the social world should not impede their endeavor to transcend the ordinarily reified, or essentialized, conceptualization and categorization of the social world. In contrast to that, sociologists should build up a "way of seeing" that could move away from existing dogmas and mythologies. He thus often referred to sociologists as engaged in the "destruction of myths."

Elias believed that there were many problems and obstacles in contemporary social sciences, due to their fixated categories and concepts about society and human behavior. With the purpose of overcoming it, he therefore endeavored to articulate in large measure of an argument for a particular sociological term and conceptual framework, which in turn has entrenched within it a mode of social sensitivity he believed that would get closer to the relational-processual and non-dualistic reality of human social life. Several terms are significant to him, such as habitus, civilization, relation, network/web, power-ratio, interdependence, established/outsiders, involvement/detachment, in addition to figuration and process. With such a broad-scale reformulation of social concepts, Elias is thereby able to pose a challenge to the customary concepts used by most sociologists of his time. The concepts he disputed are: society, system, structure, role, action, interaction, individual, reproduction and so on. However, on the other hand, instead of securing or finalizing his brilliant concepts, his radical reflection of relatedness and processuality is also self-reflexive. He was, in turn, always alert to the temporality and partiality of his own reflection of the social reality he studied. In other words, his findings are indebted to be problematic in the future or in other concerns. That is the reason why he is always reluctant to decree his work as *the* theoretical position around which we all had to rally. Therefore, because of his awareness of the fundamentally provisional and partial makeup of all of his concepts, the validity of his research would always humbly consider itself to be dependently contingent on the process they make to understand any specific and particular figure and background of empirical evidence.[121]

Interdependence, Figurations and Habitus

For Elias, social life can be understood in their interdependencies with each other, as part of a network of social relations, or what he often referred to as "figurations."

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[121] Elias, Norbert. *The Society of Individuals* (SI), Oxford, Blackwell (1991) [1987], p. 32.

Human beings live within dynamically interdependent figurations, rather than isolated, solipsistic individuals vs. social systems or structures, and are constituted by socially and historically specific forms of habitus, or personality-structure.[122] Elias develops his concept of figuration in order to transcend the problem of what he called the homo clauses, or the "closed personality," and substitutes it with the notion of seeing human beings as having "open personality" in relation to one another in the network of interdependencies, which are the nexus of what he calls the "figurations."

> The image of man as an 'open personaltiy' who possesses a greater or lesser degree of relative (but never absolute and total) autonomy vis-à-vis other people and who is, in fact, fundamentally oriented toward and dependent on other people throughout his life. The network of interdependencies among human beings is what binds them together. Such interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called the figuration, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people. Since people are more or less dependent on each other first by nature and then through social learning, through education, socialization, and socially generated reciprocal needs, they exist, one might venture to say, only as pluralities, only in figurations.

Elias' notion of figuration allows us to see human beings in the relational terms as part of collectivities, of groups and networks. Figuration implies that people's very existences of being unique individuals can only make sense within and through those networks of interdependency. He hopes that the notion would eliminate the dichotomization of individual and society. He could hardly accept either an abstraction of attributes of individuals existing without a society, or a "system" or "totality" beyond individuals. He perceives the social as the network of interdependencies formed by trans-acting individuals. Societies to him are a mere "process and structures of interweaving, the figurations formed by the actions of interdependent people."[123] Here, Elias implies that the agency in relational context plays an active role in forming figurations with other people.

The notion of figuration also implies power dimension of social life which is ignored by the concept of "system" that tends to presume a picture of harmony, integration, equilibrium and stability. That is why the structural functionalism of Parsons' is not plausible to Elias. We will discuss Elias' notion of power relations later on.

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[122] Krieken, Robert van. 1998. *Nobert Elias*. London and New York: Routledge.
[123] See *What Is Socology*? P. 103.

The notion of figuration is a relational term that is "one of the central questions, perhaps even the central question, of sociology." (Elias, 1983: 208) For better understanding what figuration really meant, Elias uses the analogy of dance to exemplify its connotation. He says that "the image of the mobile figurations of interdependent people on a dance floor perhaps easier to imagine state, cities, families, and also capitalists, communist, and feudal systems a figuration." (Elias, 1994a: 214) Even if the idea of dance is a generalization but "no one will imagine a dance as a structure outside the individual." Dances might be danced by various individuals, "but without a plurality of reciprocally oriented and dependent individuals, there is no dance." Dances are therefore dependently co-arisen that can only exist in and through the mutually oriented and interdependent participants. The activity of interdependent participants is the condition of possibility of figuration, when that activity ends, the figuration ends too. Therefore, the continual co-existence of the figuration and the dynamic participation of interdependent individuals is what Elias' sociological analysis tries to capture.

The dependent co-arising of figurations and interdependent individuals also indicates that the formation of a shared social habitus or personality make-up is a related condition for the constitution of figuration. By "social habitus," Elias means that the level of personality characteristics which individuals share in common with fellow members of their social groups but also remains their relative uniqueness. He states:

> This make-up, the social habitus of individuals forms, as it were, the soil from
> which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from
> other members of his society. In this way something grows out of the common
> language which the individual shares with others and which is certainly a
> component of his social habitus – a more or less individual style, what might be
> called an unmistakable individual handwriting that grows out of the social script
> (Elias, 1991: 182).[124]

Elias' idea of habitus is not only relational but also processual, which began at birth and continued throughout an individual's lifetime. It refers to the long-lasting and generalized temperament that saturates a person's deed all over an entire domain of life. As he writes:

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[124] Elias, Norbert. 1991. *The Society of Individuals.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

....the web of social relations in which the individual lives during his more impressionable phase, during childhood and youth, which imprints itself upon his unfolding personality where it has its counterpart in the relationship between his controlling agencies, super-ego and ego, and his libidinal impulses. The resulting balance between controlling agencies and drives on a variety of levels determines how an individual person steers himself in his relations with others; it determines that which we call, according to taste, habits, complexes or personality structure (Elias 1994a: 454-5).

This relational-processual view of the formation of a person's habitus implies that "it never ceases entirely to be affected by his changing relations with others throughout his life." (Elias, 1994a: 445) Besides, the formation of habitus in continual flux, also called psychogenesis by Elias, must occur interdependently in connection with changes in the surrounding social conditions, or sociogenesis.

Relational Thinking and Power Relations

In was important for sociologists to remain thinking relationally toward dynamic social relationships rather than seeing social life in terms of states, objects or things, in other words, as substance. As Elias points out, sociology must "give up thinking in terms of single, isolated substances and to start thinking in terms of relationships and functions." (Elias, 1991: 19) [125] A "person" or "individual" is thus not a self-contained entity or unit. She or he does not exist "in themselves," but they are related and mutually embedded with other individuals. The same attitude also applies to different social groups, such as families, communities, organizations, nations, economic systems, and all other dimensions of the world. Therefore, the primary goal of sociology should focus on the relatedness and mutuality between people in the processual sense. Elias contends:

What changes is the way in which people are bonded to each other. This is why their behaviour changes, and why their consciousness and their drive-economy, and, in fact, their personality structure as a whole, change. The "circumstances" which change are not something which comes upon men from "outside": they are the relationships between people themselves (Elias, 1994a: 480).

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[125] Elias, N. 1991. *The Society of Individuals.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

If sociologists ignore the relational reality between people, and study them in isolation and try to explain their grouping as if they were separate things, the research will be bound to great distortion. (Elias and Scotson, 1994: 167)[126] Therefore, the study of sociological question must focus on the social relations, rather than any of its elements in isolation. A relational thinking of social phenomena must stress actual interchanges and the space of interrelated positions that are occupied by various groups and individuals interwoven within the figurations. Any analysis detached from actual inter-dependent units (i.e. practices or utterances of individuals), and presented them as "states" or "things" as if they exist inherently and independently outside of dynamic relationships and transactions is not acceptable by Elias. For him, human social life should be understood in terms of *relations* rather than *states* or *things*.

The same principle also applies to our study of individual experience. As he states: "Even the nature and form of his solitude, even what he feels to be his 'inner life,' is stamped by the history of his relationships – by the structure of the human network in which, as one of its nodal points, he develops and lives as an individual." (Elias, 1991: 33) We thus have to start "from the structure of the relations between individuals in order to understand the 'psyche' of the individual person." (Elias, 1991: 37)

The most important dimension of relationships between people for Elias is the way in which they constituted power relations. This means that figurations are always organize around the dynamic operation of *power*:

> At the core of changing figurations – indeed the very hub of the figuration
> process – is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, balance of power moving to and fro,
> inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of
> power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration.[127]

In order to understand the relational character of power, he articulates his argument to overcome the tendency of reifying power as a possession. For Elias, treating power as a thing, which can be possessed, to a greater or lesser extent, is to substantialize power in sociological and political discussions. "The whole sociological and political discussion on power," he criticizes, "is marred by the fact that the dialogue is not consistently focused on power balances and power ratios, that is, on aspects of relationships, but rather on power as if it were a thing." (Elias, 1984b: 251)[128] Instead

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[126] Elias, Norbert and Scotson. 1994 [1965]. *The Established and the Outsiders*. London: Sage
[127] Elias, Norbert. *What Is Sociology?* P. 131.
[128] Elias, N. 1984a. "On the sociogenesis of sociology." *Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 11(1): 14-52.

of seeing power substantially, Elias suggests to see it more as a relation in order to recognize the pervasiveness of relations of power among all human relationships.

Elias' figurational sociology emphasizes that human form of relationships always already involve aspects of conflict and co-operation with a balance of power which may change contingently in specific situations. The power relationships may manifest in many different forms – coercive, economic or charismatic depending on specific chains of interdependency. Instead of power being a "thing" which persons, groups or institutions possess to a greater or lesser degree, Elias argues that we should think in terms of power relations, with ever-changing "balances" or "ratios" of power between individuals and social units. He therefore refers to power in his study in terms of *power-ratios* or "shifting balances of tensions." (Elias 1983: 145)[129] and regards these concepts as the best successors to debates about freedom and determinism. This also made it possible to acknowledge that questions of power are different from questions of "freedom" and "domination," and that all human relationships are fundamentally relations of power.

Despite the unequal distribution of certain resource that contributes to the hierarchical asymmetry of power relations, it must be reciprocal rather than one-sided. Elias contends:

> The master has power over his slave, but the slave also has power over his master, in proportion to his function for the master – his master's dependence on him…. In this respect, simply to use the word 'power' is likely to mislead. We say that a person possesses great power, as if power were a thing he carried about in his pocket. This use of the word is a relic of magico-mythical ideas. Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – of all human relationships (Elias, 1978: 74).[130]

Seeing Elias' notion of power from the middle way perspective, we can say that power is empty of its own essence, it must be relational and arises dependently. Therefore, there is no absolute freedom or absolute domination in the phenomenal social world. Elias contends that it is important to transcend the dichotomous, or "either-or", thinking in terms of an essential antithesis between "freedom" and "determinism" and shift to thinking in terms of power-balances.

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[129] Elias, N. 1983 [1969]. *The Court Society.* Oxford: Basil Blakwell.
[130] Elias, N. 1978 [1970]. *What is Sociology?* London: Hutchinson.

Since power is relational, the monopoly of power on one side is therefore untenable. Elias stressed the reciprocal workings of power, that is, the interdependence between the more and less powerful. Their mutuality makes the powerful dependent upon the less powerful in order to be more powerful, and it is in this sense that the less powerful also exercises a "boomerang effect" back on those with greater power-chances. As he argues: "in one form or another the constraints that more powerful groups exert on less powerful ones recoil on the former as constraints of the less powerful on the more powerful and also as compulsions to self-constraint."[131] The one-sided view of power as demonstrated by the concept like "rule" or "authority" is therefore flawed by their up-down approach. They "usually make visible only the pressures exerted from above to below, but not those from below to above." (Elias, 1983: 265) The relation between parents and children is a good illustration: parents clearly have greater power-resources than their children, but because children's relatively subordinate position somewhat fulfills particular functions and needs for their parents. Parents must somehow rely upon their children, who therefore also have power over their parents, such as calling them to their aid by crying, requiring them to reorganize their lives. (1997b: [5])[132]

The Processual Thinking and Civilizing Process

The preceding discussion of the relational character of figuration as the network of interdependency between individuals and groups cannot make sense unless we also think of it processually, that is, to properly understand its dependent co-arising over a long-term temporal process, in a continual flux of dynamic change and a greater or lesser transformation. Elias' sociological imagination not only opposes non-relational dualism in the social sciences, he also against process-reduction. By breaking away from the reification of social life in social sciences he thus proposes an approach to see social life as having a fundamentally processual character in addition to its relational character. Through "figurations of interdependent individuals and groups can only be properly understood as existing over time, in a constant process of dynamic flux and greater or lesser transformation," (Krieken, 1998: 65)[133] we will realize that individual intentional actions will for most of the time result in unplanned outcomes. Therefore, the analysis of the interrelationships between intentional action and unintended social consequences is crucial to be undertaken over periods of time.

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[131] Elias, N. 1983. *The Civilizing Process*. P. 265.
[132] Elias, N. 1997b. "The civilizing of parents." in *The Norbert Elias Reader,*edited by Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
[133] Krieken, Robert van. 1998, *Norbert Elias*, p. 65, London: Routledge

As John Gooudsblom has put it: "yesterday's unintended social consequences are today's unintended social conditions of intentional human actions." (Elias, 1977:149) Therefore, he states: "Our whole outlook on life continues to be psychologically tied to yesterday's social reality, although today's and tomorrow's reality already differs greatly from yesterday's." (Norbert Elias, 1995)[134] Such a view sees the constant process of transformation and reorganisation, the formation of new structures and the functioning of such structures in the further synthesis of even newer forms. Elias observes the "transformation impetus (*Wandlungsimpetus*) of every human society," and considers "the immanent impetus towards change as an integral moment of every social structure and their temporary stability as the expression of an impediment to social change." (Elias 1997a: [14])[135]

Processual dimension being self-evident to Elias, there is no need to argue for a "historical sociology," for historical imagination is the core of sociological perspective, although he cannot accept a teleological view of history as illustrated by the concept of "progress" and "evolution." These would include the approach of Social Darwinism, which attempts to utilize the evolutionary theory of Darwinism to give descriptions of society or prescriptions for its best constitution. According to this theory, civilizing process is not neutral. It entails "development," which may by regarded as "progress." The implied in "progress" was the cue for some thinkers to argue that evolutionary change should be deliberately nurtured by the more intense prosecution of the struggle for existence which would encourage the "best" out of individuals and societies.

However, instead of turning to the notion of examining long-term processes of change, many sociologists while rejecting the normative and teleological elements of evolutionary theories have lost their interest and capability of thinking historically, or processually, to their research altogether.   Elias points out:

> ...it is not simply the ideological elements in the nineteenth century sociological
> concept that have been called into question, but the concept of development itself,
> the very consideration of problems of long-term social development, of
> sociogenesis and psychogenesis. In a word, the baby has been thrown out with the
> bathwater (Elias 1994a: 200).

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[134] Elias, N. 1995. "Technization and civilization." *Theory, Culture & Society* 12(3): 7-42 [1986].
[135] Elias, N. 1997a. "Towards a theory of social processes." *British Journal of Sociology*. See also Krieken, 1998: 65.

The notion that "present social conditions represent an instant of a continuous process which, coming from the past, moves on through present times towards a future as yet unknown, appears to have vanished." (Elias 1987: xvi) For Elias, the interest and ability to adopt a long-term, processual perspective in sociology has declined and the twentieth century has witnessed the narrowing of the focus of interest among sociologists.

Avoiding *Zustandsreduction* or process reduction, that is, reducing processes to states and seeing the social world as timeless and immutable, relates to the need to think about and express one's research approach processually. Elias thus argues against sociologists' turning away from historical analysis as exemplified by both functionalism and structuralism on a synchronic rather than diachronic analysis.

For Elias, in order to understand the present social world and patterns of human actions, an understanding of the long-term diachronic process is not only desirable, but also necessary. Such an approach can facilitate an analysis of how the present is connected to the past and is oriented to the future. "Just as individuals, families, communities, and so on, should be conceived as embedded within a network of relations, rather than being seen as isolated objects, Elias argued that they should also be seen as dynamic, in a state of flux and change, as processes." (Krieken, 1998: 67)

Much sociological thinking is informed by a deeply rooted tendency towards a present-centered thinking. In addition, our conceptual apparatus is attuned to permanence and not change. However, to take the study of an individual as an example, Elias stresses: "it would be more appropriate to say that a person is constantly in movement; he not only goes through a process, he *is* a process." (Elias, 1978: 118) Therefore, we must address the constant, yet ever-changing process of social transformation in our research.

Likewise, "instead of speaking of static 'states' or phenomena such as capitalism, rationality, bureaucracy, modernity, postmodernity, Elias would always wish to identity their processual, so that he would think in terms of rationalization, modernization, bureaucratization, and so on." (Kriken, 1998: 67) Elias' analysis of socio-historical phenomena always tries to trace the long-term trends of a multiplicity of processes, that is, the interwoven process of many phenomena-in-process. "Transformations in social relationships are thus intertwined with a variety of other process of change: economic, political, psychological, geographical, and so on. This

main long-term trends Elias concentrated on included increasing social differentiation, industrialization, urbanization, political centralization, integration from smaller to larger social units, state formation and nation building, functional democratization, psychologization and rationalization…" (Kriken, 1998: 68)

Similar to the notion of "beginninglessness" and "endlessness" in Buddhism, Elias also stresses that social processes has no particular beginning and end. "Wherever we start, there is movement, something that went before." (Elias, 1994a: 48) The principle also applies to the idea of an end. Elias' processual thinking is therefore empty of any inherent and fixed starting point and ending point. His processual approach is thus different from earlier theories of evolutionary change which assumes a teleological course of historical development. His study concentrates on how:

> ...a figuration had to arise out of a certain figuration or even out of a particular
>
> type of sequential series of figurations, but [it] does not assert that the earlier
>
> figurations had necessarily to change into the later ones (Elias 1978: 161).

One therefore could not make a mono-causal assertion that one particular phenomenon can be the single cause that necessarily bring about the emergence of another phenomenon as its effect. There is never a necessity or teleology to the social development.

A Relational-Processual Methodology

In his early intellectual career, Elias was inspired by Ernst Cassirer's exposition "that scientists had moved from seeing the world in terms of substances to understanding it in terms of relations."[136] Cassirer (1923)[137] pictured the transition from medieval to modern science in terms of the transition from the concept of "substance' to the concept of "relation," or "function." Elias tried to extend Cassirer's philosophical understanding of relationism to the study of the social and historical context of the objects of scientific study. Through his coming across with Cassirer's relational thinking, Elias developed the notion that:

> One must start by thinking about the structure of the whole in order to understand
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> the form of the individual parts. These and many other phenomena have one thing

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[136] Krieken, Robert van. 1998. *Norbert Elias*. London and New York. P.12-13.
[137] Cassirer, E. (1923). *Substance and Function*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co. (Original work published 1910).

in common, different as they may be in all other respects: *to understand them it is necessary to give up thinking in terms of single, isolated substances and to start thinking in terms of relationships and functions.* The concept of the individual as homo clauses, a little world in himself who ultimately exists quite independently of the great world outside, determines the image of man in general. Every other human being is likewise seen as a *homo clauses*; his core, his being, his true self appears likewise as something divided within him by an invisible wall from everything outside, including every other human being.[138]

Elias therefore rejects this conception of the isolated ego. For him, people are actually linked together in various modalities and in varying degrees. People's knowledge does not begin with them as individuals but that individuals learn from their historically conditioned contexts through the practical process of culturalization and socialization. As Stephen Mennel (1992) indicates, Elias in *The Civilizing Process* analyses the relationship between changes in the structure of human relations in societies with the concomitant changes in the personality structure as part of a societal process. He even traces the historical dependent arising of the image of *homo clauses* back to Renaissance times.

> The philosophers' *homo clausus* is just an externalization of this mode of self experience: the sealed container in which we sense ourselves is sealed with the iron bands of the civilized self controls forged in a long term process. (Mennel, 1992: 193)

The pervasive influence of homo clauses is detected everywhere by Elias at an almost subliminal level. The principle of homo clausus seen as the seal container, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being has been the celebrated invention of modernity. This has been the century of the deluded celebration of personal self-actualization because it is believed that only the individual can work out his or her destiny in isolation. In more academic context, *homo clausus* appears in many guises: *homo economicus*, *homo philosophicus*, *homo psychologicus* and *homo sociologicus*. (1968a: 249)[139] A gloss on these terms has been the modern time intellectuals' dismissal of the actual relatedness of human existence. The assumptions of *homo sociologicus* and the notion of the "social fact *sui generis*" beyond individuals suggested by Durkheim are also found by Elias as problematic. Actually,

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[138] Elias, Norbert. The Civilizing Process (CP), Oxford, Blackwell (1994) [1939], p.204.
[139] Elias, Norbert. Introduction to the second impression of *Uber den Prozess der Zivilisation*, in *The Civilizing Process*, vol. I, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1978: 221-63.

both objectivists and subjectivists are trapped by the notion of *homo clauses*, as he states:

> In the metaphysicists' world, it seems there can be nothing really new. Though the actors change, there is little change in the roles which they play in relation to each other. There are always subjectivists and objectivists or those who try out intermediary positions and compromises. They appear in different guises – as rationalists and empiricists, as apriorists and positivists, as phenomenologists and realists, as deductionists and inductivists, … There is no end to it. Nothing can ever reconcile the polar views and solve the problems arising from the fictitious assumption of an existential gulf between human beings and the world they set out to discover and control – the world of which they themselves form part. This assumption is the stumbling block. Nothing new, no advances in the theory of knowledge and of sciences are possible as long as the assumption of an ontological gulf between 'subject' and 'object', explicitly or not, remains the basis of these theories. (1982a: 23-4)[140]

It seems like that Elias' idea might be compatible to interactionists', who also stress the dynamic, relational character between individuals, and argue against seeing social reality as *sui generis* external to and independent from human actions. However, this similarity is superficial and should be pondered with vigilance, because Elias never contented with the concept of "social interaction." He points out that, at best, it merely "scratches the surface of the relatedness of human beings," to the extent that it is still trapped into the *homo clausus* assumption of human beings as possessing some pre-existing substantiality prior to their interaction with others. (Elias, 1969: 143)[141] Therefore, there is a significant difference between "interactionism" – where independent elements are seen as engaging in a relation with each other, so that the elements are primary and the relation secondary - and 'relational-processual perspective' where the non-substantial elements in a social process emerge from the relations between them, so that the relation is primary, and the elements secondary. The notion of social interaction in the substantialist sense creates "the impression of something solely from the initiative of two originally independent individuals – *an ego* and *an alter*, an "I" and an "other" – or from the meeting of a number of originally independent individuals." (Elias, 1983: 143) This temporal and logical

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[140] Elias, Norbert. *Scientific Establishments*. In N. Elias, R. Whitley, and H. G. Martins (eds), *Scientific Establishments and Hierarchies*, Dordrecht, Reidel: 3-69.
[141] Elias, N. 1969. "Sociology and psychiatry." Pp. 117-44 in *Psychiatry in a Changing Society,* edited by S.H. Foulkes, and G. Stewart Prince. London: Tavistock.

precedence of individuals presented by some interactionists, where independent elements are seen as engaging in a relation with each other, so that the elements are primary and the relation secondary, misunderstood the fundamental relatedness and mutuality of human beings within a wide network of relationships. In general, Elias' relational-processual perspective transcend simple modes of interactions in the sense that people's transactions arise co-dependently on "the essential interdependence of human beings within a wide network of relationships," whereas "even theories of interaction would posit a pre-social individual who only became social when they engaged in social interaction." (Krieken, 1998: 65)[142]

By seeing social life as a process, the old stimulus-response, subject-object, individual-social dualisms give way to recognition that such relationships and processes would take place in a context that also enters into the event. Human activities and structures are seen as transactions in which the individual, and the social, cultural, and natural elements interfuse. In order to transcend these dualistic substntialisms, Elias develops his relational and processual view of individuals and society since his early age, as he remembers later, "what I was dealing with in the form in 1922-24 was clearly – as it still is today – the *functions*." [143] Seen from this vantage point, Elias posed his criticism of the substantialism of human being, which persevered in the formation of the majority of sociological thought. In 1969 he wrote: "Peculiar order of long-term processes and their difference from the lawlike order of physical nature, as a kind of framework for human history."[144] Elias' relational and processual thought also drove to the reflection and criticism of the neo-Kantian idea of "a priori truth," that is, asserting the core categories of thought as existing outside of society and history, as possessing an eternal validity of their own.

> I could no longer ignore the fact that all that Kant regarded as timeless and as given prior to all experience, whether it be the idea of causal connections or of time or of natural and moral laws, together with the words that went with them, had to be learned from other people in order to be present in the consciousness of the individual human being.[145]

Based on that, he extended to observe two main traditions in the study of human knowledge: first, the philosophical tradition, such as Cartesian or neo-Kantian,

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[142] Krieken, Robert van. 1998, *Norbert Elias*, p. 65, London: Routledge.
[143] Elias, Norbert. *The Society of Individuals* (SI), Oxford, Blackwell (1991) [1987], p. 19.
[144] Elias, Norbert. *Reflections on a Life* (RL), Cambridge, Polity (1994) [1987], p.86.
[145] RL, p.91.

wherein knowledge is seen as independent of social processes, and that a clear-cut knowledge perceived as a representation which can be accomplished by following definite rules of rationality. It is concluded in this tradition that true knowledge is obtained by abolishing all socio-cultural prejudices, fallacies and preconceptions, and by judging and observing anew, bound only by certain rules of rationality, which are introduced as everlasting apparatus into the individual human mind. Secondly, the sociological tradition, where all knowledge is considered as socially determined, is therefore ideological and being relativistic. In this sense, since all knowledge is socially determined, all knowledge is relative or ideological and applicable only, if at all, with respect to the social situation in which and by which it is produced. For Elias, both traditions, despite their difference, have something in common: they are non-relational and non-processual, whereby they can hardly imagine the fundamental changing character of human knowledge, including scientific knowledge. Both views together create an artificial dichotomy, in which knowledge can only be universally true or arbitrary.

Elias' relational-processual thinking proposed a path to transcend the dichotomy between the two extremes. He pointed out that knowledge is a social process shared, developed and learned by groups or figurations, not by monological individuals:

> …. The acquisition of knowledge is a process which surpasses the life span and
> the capacity for discovery of a single individual. It is a process whose 'subjects'
> are groups of people, long lines of generations of men."[146]

Knowledge is therefore seen as ever changing in continual flux, in the long run even categories or basic assumptions will be changed fundamentally contingent on varying political, economic and other social processes in historically specific context. This is why Elias was always cautious of laying down a fixed set of doctrines of the type, often based on some philosophical posture, which lie beneath most theoretical presumptions. His figurational studies did not want to be categorized as a "theoretical school," but rather as a mind-opening participant in open-ended research tradition. Therefore, figuratioal studies or process sociology do sees not only the phenomenal world as relational and processual, but the same principle also applies to their knowledge constitution, which is also, to a greater or lesser extent, empty of inherent and independent existence and thereby dependently co-arisen in the long-term perspective. In other words, he tried to conceptualize research problems in a

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[146] Elias, Norbert. "*Sociology of Knowledge: New Perspectives*," part one, Sociology, 5 (1971), p. 165.

relational-processual term.

At the core of Elias's critique of sociological categories and conceptualization is his idea of "process-reduction," by which he means the all-encompassing propensity to reduce process conceptually to substances or states. This tendency is seen not only in ordinary language but also widespread in many specialized discourses of the sciences. As he states:

> We say, 'The wind is blowing', as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as
> if a wind could exist which did not blow.[147]

In sociology, many concepts or conceptual distinctions are formed in this "process-reduction" manner, such as the differentiation between the "actor" and his/her activity (similar to one of the *madhyamika* verses), between structures and processes, between agency and structure, between objects and relationships. And most of all, the differentiation between "individual" and "society" is deeply ingrained and harden in the methodology and theory of sociology, which are both seen as given and isolated objects. Because of this intellectual inertia, it becomes an obstacle to think of the social world relationally and processually while studying figurations of interdependent people in long-term process.

Goudsblom (1977:6, 105)[148] sums up Elias's relational-processual perspective in the following four principles:

1. that sociology is about people in the plural – human beings who are interdependent with each other in a variety of ways, and whose lives evolve in and are significantly shaped by the social figurations they form together.

2. that these figurations are continually in flux, undergoing changes of many kinds – some rapid and ephemeral, others slower but perhaps more lasting.

3. that the long-term developments taking place in human figurations have been and continue to be largely unplanned and

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[147] Elias, Norbert. *What Is Sociology?* , London, Hutchinson (1978) [1970], p.112.
[148] Goudsblom, Johan. *Sociology in the Balance – A Critical Essay*. Columbia University Press. 1977, p. 6, 105.

unforeseen.

4. that the development of human knowledge takes place in human figurations, and is one important aspect of their overall development.

Indeed, one of the primary cognitive interests in sociological analysis is the dynamic *interrelatedenss* between people in a variety of ways. His relational-processual perspective examines the plurality of people's decisions, intentions and emerging processes, because the process by which the actions of various human agents, individual and collective, combine and interpenetrate with each other, by definition lies beyond the control of any of the participating actors. Therefore, people are mutually embedded in and shaped by the social figurations, and are continuously in flux in the long-term. This may bring forth an unplanned process of interweaving—despite the intentional or conscious actions of each individual. Often Elias stressed the unplanned character of social life, mainly because he was against the notion that there can ever be a static and identifiable pattern of relationship between human action and its consequences. Human planning is always involving with an ongoing unplanned process. " From the viewpoint of a process theory what is interesting is the interweaving of an unplanned process and human planning." (Elias, 1995: 26)[149]

Since Elias was always cautious of the inadequacy of abstract programmatic statements in sociology, he would rather present his figurational or processual approach in the actual research works, most of which is at once "theoretical-empirical." In other words, his writings are resplendent with "theoretical" and "methodological' remarks, but his ideas and conceptualizations are always evolved hand in hand with the exploration of substantive problems of human society. Elias avoided the tendency of making the claim that he was developing a pure theoretical system because he wanted to refrain from fetishizing theory, and theoretical perspectives. His perspective thus was embedded within his historical and sociological practice rather then being self-consciously presented as such.

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[149] Elias, Norbert. 1995. "Technization and civilization." *Theory, Culture & Society* 12(3): 7-42.

5.3 Habitus, Field and Capital in the Light of Methodological Relationalism—Pierre Bourdieu

In Europe, Pierre Bourdieu (1989) was weary of the dichotomization between objectivism (structuralism) and subjectivism (agency) and sought to build up an integrative (agency-structure) replacement he named "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism." He stated:

> On the one hand, the objective structures … form the basis for … representations and constitute the structural constraints that bear upon interactions: but, on the other hand, these representations must also be taken into consideration particularly if one wants to account for the daily struggles, individual and collective, which purport to transform or to preserve these structures. (Bourdieu, 1989:15)[150]

Bourdieu therefore reformulates his theoretical-empirical approach by integrating:

> …into a single model the analysis of the experience of social agents and the analysis of the objective structures that make this experience possible (Bourdieu, 1988:782).[151]

Bourdieu's integrative endeavor is an attempt to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy and provide a framework for understanding the relational processes conditioning social reproduction. Bourdieu posits a dialectical relationship between the two, between social structures and their representations, and indicates that the key to understand this dialectic depends on a relational model of social existence. Social structures express themselves as relations of power within a field. By practicing such a relational-processual route he tries to avoid the substantialism of mechanical structuralism or teleological individualism, in which a mono-causal reading of each pole in the structure-agency dichotomy correspondingly constructs. His key concepts are all relational—habitus, field, and capital are all constituted of packages of social ties in different states. They are embodied, objectified, institutionalized operate most forcefully in relation to each other. Therefore, it is important to always retain the insight of the fundamental relatedness and processuality of social reality and sociological reasoning.

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[150] Bourdieu, P. (1989). "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory.* 7:14-25.
[151] Bourdieu, P. (1988), "*Viva la crise*! For heterodoxy in social science", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17 No. 5, pp. 773-87.

Bourdieu's view of the constitution of the social world is an interpenetration of objective and subjective structures and an acknowledgement that the social world shows the way of a "double life." (Bourdieu, 1977:22) [152] Social phenomena dependently arise from both the "objectivity of the first order," constituted by the distribution of material resources and means of appropriation of species of capital (that is socially scarce goods and values) and in the "objectivity of the second order," formed by mental schemes of classification, that function as symbolic guide for the practical activities (conduct, thought, feelings and judgments) of social agents. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) In order to understand the relational-processual perspective in his study of the particular practices in the field in question, it is helpful to outline the relationships between the key concepts of habitus, field and capital.

Habitus

Bourdieu's central contribution to sociological theory is his attempt to find a middle way between individual agency and structural determinacy.[153] Fundamental to that middle ground is his concept of human habitus. The Latin, habitus, means condition (of the body); character, quality: style of dress, attire, disposition, state of feeling; habit.[154] Bourdieu's concept of human habitus suits well with, to some extent, the original Latin meaning, with the exception of perhaps "character." For Bourdieu, habitus refers to socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions.[155] Hence it refers not to character, morality, or socialization per se, but to "deep structural" classificatory and evaluation propensities, socially acquired, and marked in outlooks, opinions, and embodied phenomena such as manner, posture, ways of walking, sitting, spitting, blowing the nose, and so forth. Habitus brings about such second nature human characteristics and their infinite possible variations into different historical and cultural settings. While habitus derives from a social-cultural dependent arising, Bourdieu does not equate habitus with its appearances; nor does he think of habitus as a fixed essence operating inherently and independently and thus determining mental or behavioral outcomes. Bourdieu rubbishes rough the determinist thinking of human action as submissive reflexive responses to conditioning stimuli.

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[152] Bourdeiu, P. (1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[153] Shirley, Dennis. "A Critical Review and Appropriation of Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Social and Cultural Reproduction," *Journal of Education* 168, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 96-112.

[154] Shirley, p.96.

[155] Richard Nice, a principal translator, points out that the semantic cluster of "dispositions" is wider in French than in English, equivalent to predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination. See The New College Latin and English Dictionary (New York: Bantam Books, 1966).

He also rejects the structuralist notions of behavior as an execution of unconscious yet determinate rules of action.

Habitus specifically stands for a system habitual, durable and transposable disposition which functions as the processual and generative condition of some structured, objectively unified practices. Therefore, while the ancient Greeks used the term habitus to refer to permanent dispositions and their mediating effects on behavior and persona. Asked why he picked up on the notion of habitus, Bourdieu replied:[156]

> The notion of habitus has been used innumerable times in the past, by authors as different as Hegel, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim, and (Marcel) Mauss, all of whom used it in a more or less methodical way. However, it seems to me that, in all cases, those who used the notion did so with the same theoretical intention in mind…. I wanted to insist on the generative capacities of dispositions, it being understood that these are acquired, socially constituted dispositions…. I wanted to emphasize that this "creative," active, inventive capacity was not that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition, but that of an active agent…. I wanted to insist on the "primacy of practical reason" that Fichte spoke of, and to clarify the specific categories of this reason…. (Bourdieu, 1990, 12-13)

Bourdieu has developed a non-dual and relational-processual middle path on the theoretical issues of structure and agency, i.e., material or structural conditions shaping human action, as against voluntaristic, egoistic individual action having the potential to construct social structures. His middle path rejects both existentialist subjectivism (Sartre) and structuralist objectivism (Levi-Strauss). As he points out, "Subjectivism inclines people to reduce structures to interactions, objectivism tends to deduce actions and interactions from the structure."[157] Hence, habitus as a durable but transposable system of socially acquired dispositions, functions practically as the generative source that agents act inventively when they encounter conditions identical or analogous to those producing the habitus in the first place. Our capability to measure a social situation and activate a suitable action or attitude such as a welcoming, joke, trick, rudeness, which appears to be the result of self-determined free choice, is actually derive from a particular habitus.

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[156] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 12-13.
[157] Bourdieu, *In Other Words*. P. 129.

Bourdieu insists that the individual's scheme of cognitions is structured due to their social conditions. The social construction of reality thus is not created out of nothing, but rather dependently arisen. Habitus involves these social dependent arising. For him we all are operational with a habitus (shaped in formative long-term process by background culture) that relates us as a particular collective habitus. A collective habitus is a relatively distinctive group feature reflecting group adjustments and dealings to historical inexorableness and struggles. Perceiving individuals, via the ordering and classificatory schemes of the habitus, comprise a world of familiarities. The world is therefore neither manifests as mere chaos capable of being constructed randomly following individual caprice, nor is a substantially structured society imposing on the perceiving subject certain perceptions, attitudes, judgment, and rules of conduct.

Habitus, acquired through a relationship to a certain "field," served to organize and thereby save psychic energy, "Agents merely need to let themselves follow their own social 'nature,' that is, what history has made of them, to be as it were, naturally' adjusted to the historical world they are up against…." (Bourdieu, 1990:90) The habitus enables and, in the meantime, conditions an agent's involvement within the society of which he/she is a member. He calls this fit, or the sense of being "at home" in a familiar milieu, an "ontological complicity" between embodied history in the habitus and objectified history in institutional roles.[158] Habitus is thus embodied in human selves and reformulated through the conjuncture of objective conditions and personal history. Dispositions are thus obtained in social positions within a particular social setting. It implies a subjective adjustment to that position. Thus, habitus does not just manifest in behavior, but becomes an integral part of it.

According to Bourdieu's relational-processual perspective, in order to make a better understanding of social practice, sociology must move beyond those dichotomies, such as: structure/agency; transcendental subject (consciousness, intentionality)/agent (structuralist conceptions of unconscious rule-following or concealed imperatives governing perception and action); objectivist physicalism/ subjectivist psychologism. From the middle way perspective, individual action or practice is empty of subjective and objective essence and thereby retains a degree of inderterminacy and spontaneity due to its mutual involvement with social dependent arising. Therefore, habitus is a socially related subjectivity rather than the mere reflection of personal

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[158] Pierre Bourdieu, "Men and Machines" in *Advances in Social theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*, ed. K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 304-17.

psycho-physical attribute nor is it a group of collective entities. Because of its mode of development, habitus is never "fixed," whether through time for an individual, or from one generation to the next. As positions within fields change, so do the dispositions which constitutes the habitus.

Bourdieu's relational-processual view of habitus, then, leads to recognize the social conditions of possibility on a person's own embodied skill, knowledge and conceptualization of the world. His/her way of thinking and feeling are influenced by the habitus and the way in which dispositions to act and think are preserved in the ethos of the group into which he/she was born. Habitus is at once a "deep structural" open-ended capacity for generating actions (which is analogous to Chomsky's generative grammar) and a durable system of dispositions acquired through experience. Those classificatory schemes of dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations or tastes harden, so to speak, in a social milieu, or field. There is therefore not a randomness of selves that we are free to become, but rather inculcated limits on the autonomy of agents. The order of practices tends to naturalize its own arbitrariness by this system of classification, out of which arises the sense of limit, and the sense of reality.

Field

> I define a field as network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation. (Wacquant, 1992: 37)[159]

"Field" (*champ*) is a very important notion in Bourdieu's sociology. It delineates the structural characteristic of the social setting in which habitus operates. Fields signify stadiums of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to mount up and dominate these different kinds of capital. A field is therefore, seen by Bourdieu, a relation of forces, a structured space that is organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital, within which individuals and organizations operate. This kind of structured space will limit, to a large degree, and, in a way, enable the possibilities agents may act, think, fell and appreciate.

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[159] Warquant, L.D.J. (1992), "Introduction", in Bourdieu, P. and Warquant, L.J.D. (1992), *An Invitation for Reflexive Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Because the chances in which struggle takes place are different in each field, therefore it has a relatively distinct logic and taken-for-granted structure, which is both the product and producer of the habitus of the field in question. Yet, fields are still structurally homologous and they are linked by sets of practices, or logics of practices enacted across fields. Bourdieu's notion of "field" is important because of its systematic exposition of the inter-relatedness and process of various fields in modern society. His idea of field is particularly valuable in understanding these inter-relationships. Bourdieu notes a number of fields that structure social space. Each field is a specific, hierarchically structured domain defined by particular forms of capital in which individuals agents struggle over capital and other resources. For example, in the economic field, economic capital is the key property people struggle over. In the educational field, struggles take place over educational capital. Scientists compete for scientific capital in the field of science. And in the field of cultural production, struggles occur over, as he states:

> ….the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer [or artist] and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer [or artist]… it is the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers [or artists],,, (1993: 42)[160]

There are, therefore as many fields as there are forms of capital. However, all fields are not substantial, and thus are empty of its essence, but still exist dependently in relation to other fields, especially the field of power. In this sense, Bourdieu's notion of field must be a conceptual construction based upon the relational mode of thinking. "To think in terms of field is to *think relationally*," Bourdieu indicates. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:96) The notion is thus a corrective against subjectivism and objectivism in the substantialist sense. Indeed, Bourdieu suggests: "the chief merit of the notion of field, … is that it allows us to transcend a whole series of methodological and theoretical antinomies." (Wacquant, 1989:41)[161] His relational reasoning sought to seek out underlying and invisible, but also practical, relations that shape action rather than substances given in abstract categories. Another specificity of Bourdieu's relational thinking concerning the concept of the field is his emphasizing of the conflictual dimension of social life, which is very different from the positivists and structural-functionalists' pacified terms, such as "milieu," "environment," or

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[160] Bourdieu, Pierre.1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press; New York: Columbia University Press.
[161] Wacquant, Loic J. D. 1989. Toward a reflexive sociology: A workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory* 7 (1): 26-63.

social location. Also, in his discussions of both field and habitus, Bourdieu rejects the sociological concept of functionalism, arguing that social forms are *not* generally determined by needs for survival or integration. The field and the habitus can (and do) vary significantly over time and space, while the processes of struggle and symbolic action may remain operating, the forms that these activities take varies not based on functional determinants, but on historically specific process of social structuring.

Moreover, Moi (1991) quotes Bourdieu as defining the field in this way: "A space in which a game takes place, a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake." (p. 1021)[162] The stake is the amassing of capital, in order to ensure the reproduction of the individual or institution's vested interests. The fields are thus the sites of struggle for power between dominant and subordinate classes. In other words, fields are also sites of resistance as well as domination, one being relationally linked to the other.

Because of the relational-processual character of everyday life practices, which comprises a bundle of fields, and are not clearly and distinctly drawn by Bourdieu. One might be dominant in each of these fields, such as leisure, family patterns, consumption, wok, artistic practices and others, but may vary in its composition, and the process of struggle for capital. Any attempt to establish precise boundaries between fields, Bourdieu contends, derives from a "positivist vision" rather than the more convincing "relational" view of the social world. Actually, boundaries of fields are themselves objects of struggle. In some cases, actors also struggle over the very definitions of what are to be supposed the most valued resources in fields. This is particularly true in struggling for symbolic capital in terms of the struggle for legitimation, or for the position to capture the exercise of "symbolic violence."

Bourdieu's relational thinking also goes against the approach of perceiving fields as determined by the personal attributes of their occupants. Rather, he says, fields are to be viewed as systems in which each particular element (institution, organization, group, or individual) derives its distinctive properties from its relationship to all other elements. Taking the intellectual field as an example, Bourdieu (1971c: 161)[163] points out that it

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[162] Moi, T. 1991. Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture. *New Literary History*. 22, 1017-1049.
[163] Bourdieu, P. 1971c. Intellectual field and creative project. *In Konwledge and Control: New Directions fo rthe Sociology of Education*, ed. M. F. D. Young, 161-88, London: Collier-Macmillan.

cannot be reduced to a simple aggregate of isolated agents or to the sum of elements merely juxtaposed is, like a magnetic field, made up of a system of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or system of agents may be described as so many forces which, by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given moment in time. In return, each of these is defined by its particular position within this field from which it derives *positional properties* which cannot be assimilated to intrinsic properties.

Fields are therefore relational-processual configuration where change in one position alters the boundaries among all other positions. Fundamental for Bourdieu's field research is that the conflicting strategies and positions are dialectically related, dependently co-arisen. One engenders the other. In other words, there is a symbiotic relationship between orthodox and heterodox views. By the logic of practical distinction, dominants or orthodoxies breed the existence of their subordinate or heterodox counterparts. Relationally speaking, both dominant establishment and the subordinate contender share an implicit, fundamental agreement on the stakes of struggle between those pros and cons. In other words, although there might have been sharply divided tension between conservation and subversion, yet both sides share a common interest in maintaining the field itself. The field is the condition of possibility of social struggle or all kinds of interaction. Our access into a field requires the tacit recognition of the rules of the game, meaning that particular mode of conflict is implied while other modes are excluded. Writing about the juridical field, Bourdieu points out that entry "implies the tacit acceptance of the field's fundamental law" and that "to join the game, to agree to play the game, to accept the law for the resolution of the conflict, is tacitly to adopt a mode of expression and discussion implying the renunciation of physical violence and of elementary forms of symbolic violence, such as insults." (1987c: 831)[164]   Therefore, in order to be able to play the game one must learn the practical knowledge of how to play it and also invest appropriate amount of efforts and energy to be qualified for the entry into the field. Eventually, through a critical-relational perspective, we get to know how human competing actions and strategies between two camps unintentionally reproduce the structure of fields. Actors who participate the competition thereby contribute to the maintenance of the social order. A relational approach should be able to analyze the underlying shared consensus and unintended consequences of human action and to debunk the arbitrary character of the structure of field. Bourdieu correlates the relative stability of fields

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[164] Bourdieu, P. 1987c. The force of law: Toward a sociology of the juridical field. *Hastings Journal of Law* 38: 209-48.

with his notion of symbolic capital or power, that is, the capacity to legitimate existing social arrangements.

Capital

For Bourdieu, capital includes "all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation." (Bourdieu, 1977:178) [165] In opposition to Marx, Bourdieu thus contends that there are immaterial forms of capital – cultural, symbolic, and social – as well as an economic form and that it is possible to convert one these forms into others, as he argues:

> These fundamental social powers are … firstly economic capital, in its various kinds; secondly cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. (Bourdieu, 1987:3-4)[166]

Bourdieu extends the notion of capital to all forms of power, whether they are material, cultural, social, or symbolic. Individuals and groups draw upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources in order to maintain and enhance their positions in certain fields. Capital must subsist within a field in order for the field to have meaning and participants to associate with it. In other words, goods or resources must be perceived as "rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation." (Bourdieu, 1977:178) These forms of power, and their unequal distribution among individuals and groups explain for Bourdieu why random and perfect competition models are actually inadequate for understanding the dynamic of social life. The most prominent contribution of Bourdieu beyond Marx is to extend the logic of economic analysis to ostensibly non-economic goods and services, and thereby to see much broader range of types of capital (social, cultural, political, religious, familial, and so on) that constitute power resources, and that, in some cases, can be converted from one to another. He explains how the different types of capital can be acquired, exchanged, and converted into other forms. Because the structure and distribution of capital also represent the structure of the social world, Bourdieu

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[165] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. p.178.
[166] Bourdieu, P. 1987f. What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 1-18.

argues that an understanding of the multiple forms of capital will help elucidate the structure and functioning of the social world. Indeed, how and under what conditions people employ strategies of capital accumulating, investing, and converting various kinds of capital in order to uphold or boost their positions in society constitutes a spotlight in Bourdieu's social research.

Economic capital is that which is "immediately and directly convertible into money," (Bourdieu, 1986:243) distinguishing it from other forms of capital. In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu specially addresses the importance of cultural capital. His notion of cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources including things like verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials. Credentials for example helped define the modern social hierarchies not only by sorting and allocating them across the different slots that make up the social structure, but also, and more importantly, by presenting the resulting inequalities between them as ineluctable necessities born of the talent, effort, and desire of individuals. This is because cultural capital, though mainly dependently arisen and handed down in the family, appears to be the inherent and independent essence in the person of its bearers. The actuality that it "manages to combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition"[167] makes it uniquely suited to legitimizing the continued inheritance of social privileges in societies obsessed with the democratic ideal of freedom of choice. In order to debunk this naïve and essentialist view that attributes academic success or failure to natural aptitudes, such as intelligence or giftedness, Bourdieu suggests us to consider the relatedness and embeddedness of individuals within his/her family. In other words, credentials or school success is better explained by the amount and type of cultural capital succeeded from the family milieu than by measures of individual talent or achievement. This is another demonstration of his relational thinking.

Cultural capital in its institutionalized state provides academic credentials and qualifications which create a "certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to power." (Bourdieu, 1986: 248)[168] These academic qualifications can then be used as a rate of conversion between cultural and economic capital. The educational credential system represents the *institutionalized* form of cultural capital, which has been increasingly important for gaining access to advantageous positions in the job market. This has

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[167] Pierre Bourdieu, «Forms of Capital,» in John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 245.
[168] Ibid. p. 248.

become the incentive for parents to invest in a good education for their children so they can obtain the "profit" on the job market. This process of investment is relational in the sense that the cultivation of children's cultural capital requires the input of the parents' economic capital. Moreover, Bourdieu argues that "the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family"[169] and "the initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital."[170] Based upon these assertions, it appears that cultural capital regulates and reproduces itself in a similar fashion as habitus.

Furthermore, cultural capital can also be objectified in the material form, such as books, works of art, and scientific instruments, that require specialized cultural capability to operate it. They also can be appropriated both materially with economic capital and symbolically via embodied capital. Cultural materials differ from economic goods in that one can appropriate or "consume" them only by picking up their meaning.

Another significant dimension of the working of cultural capital refers to the embodied state directly linked to and incorporated within the individual and represents what they know and can do. Embodied capital can be increased by investing time into individual cultivation in the form of learning, as embodied capital becomes integrated into the individual, it becomes a type of habitus and therefore cannot be transmitted instantaneously. Accumulation of cultivated temperaments that are internalized by the individual throughout socialization makes up schemes of cognition, understanding, action and appreciation. The cultivation of temperaments or habitus requires long term embodying since early childhood. It involves "pedagogical action": the input of time and resource by parents, other family members, or hired professional to sensitize the child to cultural distinctions. Here we can use a processual perspective regarding the cultivation of individual dispositions. The investment and accumulation of individual cultural capital is not a monological process though. It involves one's social relatedness. In addition to family background which significantly influences our opportunity structure, schooling is no less crucial in the modern world. Educational distinction rewards those with large amounts of incorporated cultural capital and mistreats those without. In other words, the unequal

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[169] Ibid. p.244.
[170] ibid. p. 246.

distribution of cultural capital plays a significant role to shape the stratification structure.

Bourdieu defines social capital as, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition."[171] Social capital, in Bourdieu's approach, is a personal asset that provides tangible advantages to those individuals, families or groups that are better connected. An individual's social capital is determined by the size and durability of their social network, the sum of its cumulated resources (both cultural and economic), and how successfully (quickly) the individual can set them into motion. According to Bourdieu, social networks must be continuously maintained and fostered over time in order for them to be called upon quickly in the future. Social capital has proven to be a useful heuristics for drawing attention to neglected non-market aspects of social relationship and process. It constitutes a needed corrective for predominant economic models, especially rational choice theory.

For Bourdieu, one may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility, such as a good family name that it is the safeguard of the "well to do." (Bourdieu, 1986: 243) Social capital, as a network of connections, is not substantially fixated, but something relational and processual that must be worked for on a continual basis. It "is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable in the short or long term." (Bourdieu, 1986:251) These relationships can occur in the neighborhood, the workable, or amongst political realm.

Bourdieu's notion of social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources" are linked to membership in a group - which bestows each of its members with the support of the collectivity owned capital." (1986: 249) The emphasis is upon social networks that provide access to a group's resources. The result of this social capital is ultimately economic incentive obtained through enduring partaking in the network as mutual benefits accumulation. Social capital is therefore a means, through social interconnections, to resources which are eagerly wanted in capitalist societies.

Methodological Relationalism

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[171] Ibid. p. 248.

A relational technique of data analysis whose philosophy corresponds exactly to what, in my view, the reality of the social world is. It is a technique which "thinks' in terms of relation, as I try to do precisely with the notion of field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96)

The relational thinking is the basic approach that Bourdieu applies in his research on issues such as culture, lifestyles, class analysis, and pop culture. His theoretical concepts such as habitus and field are all conceptualized relationally. As indicated by Wacquant: "What is special about Bourdieu is the zeal and relentlessness with which he deploys such a conception, as evidenced by the fact that both of this key concepts of habitus and field designate bundles of relations." (Wacquant, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:16)

Furthermore, social practice is also perceived as structured relationally around hierarchized distinctions such as high/low, distinguished/vulgar, pure/impure, and aesthetic/useful. The property of each element of the pairs cannot exist independently and inherently. Each is defined in relation to the other elements of the same pair. For Bourdieu, relational thinking allows no substantialist view of the independent existence of things. Therefore, social opposites are always already relational; they cannot be opposites otherwise. Nor can they be a fixated unity, and have an essence. They are the alternating imprints of one another. There is no high without low, no low without high, no distinguished without vulgar, no vulgar without distinguished, and so forth. The meaning of this notion is indicated in the form of a statement: "single elements only hold their properties by virtue of the relations linking one with another within a system, that is to say, by virtue of the function they fulfill within the system of relations."(Bourdieu, 1968: 682)[172] The asymmetrical opposition or value-laden hierarchy in which one term is promoted at the expense of the other is what Bourdieu's relational approach is most concerned with the second term can be shown to constitute or signal the condition for the first, and the hierarchy of unequal distribution and placement is maintained relationally but also processually though not eternally.

The asymmetrical opposition detected by Bourdieu's relational approach is the one established by political conservativists. Likewise, sociological theorists who take it for granted will pose a conservative sociology. Actually, Bourdieu urges his fellow

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[172] Bourdieu, P. 1968. "Structuralism and the Theory of Sociological Knowledge." *Social Research* 35 (4). Pp. 681-706.

social scientists to "think relationally" and also to share his conflict view of the social world. He thus criticizes that substantialist thinking constructs the methodological underpinning for bigoted and prejudiced practices by characterizing individual and collective differences as inherent and intrinsic properties or essences. Only if we can problematize the legitimacy of this kind of methodological discrimination, otherwise, we can hardly change the unequal world practically. Bourdieu problematizes the legitimacy of the unequal arrangement by emphasizing that individual and collective properties are not essential but are dependently arisen and contingent to arbitrary competitive positions in socio-historically specific contexts. The relational thinking therefore de-naturalizes and de-legitimates such substantializing claim.

According to Wacquant, Bourdieu's central vision of sociology proposes a methodological relationalism in order to transcend the outmoded monism, dualism or substantialism in social theories. Wacquant describes:

> Against all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological
>
> priority of structure or agent, system or actor, the collective or the individual,
>
> Bourdieu affirms the primacy of relations. In his view, such dualistic alternatives
>
> reflect a commonsensical perception of social reality of which sociology must rid
>
> itself. (Wacquant in: Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:15)

Throughout the preceding discussion of Bourdieu's works and theory, we can see that an applied relationalist method of reflection in sociology would scrutinize "the collective scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems, an categories of scholarly judgment." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 40) For Bourdieu, the substantialist image of social reality assigns an epistemology that "recognizes no other reality than that which is directly given to the intuition of ordinary experience." (1987f: 3)[173] With an awareness of the ways scholarly discourse is constructed, sociologists should be able to challenge any previous reified assumptions, methods, or theoretical orientations embedded in the language we use, "which is better suited to express things than relations, states than processes." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15)[174] Substantialist thinking "privileges substances" over relationships, for "it treats the properties attached to agents –occupation, age, sex, qualifications –as forces independent of the relationship within which they 'act.'" (Bourdieu, 1984a: 22)[175]

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[173] Bourdieu, P. 1987f. What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32: 1-18.
[174] Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992. p. 15.
[175] Bourdieu, P. 1984a. Distinction: A Social   Critique of the Judgment of Taste. Cambridge, Mass.:

Through relational-processual thinking, sociology will develop an understanding of the processual relationships between people's habitus, the fields, and institutions.

> To think in terms of field is to think relationally. The relational (rather than more narrowly 'structuralist') mode of thinking is, as Cassirer (1923) demonstrated in Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff, the hallmark of modern science. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97)

It is obvious that Bourdieu's relational-processual thinking is inspired by Norbert Elias whose relational-processual thinking insists that ordinary language leads us to "draw involuntary conceptual distinctions between the actor and his activity, between structures and processes, or between objects and relations" that would consequently block us from perceiving the social world relationally and processually. (1978a: 113)[176]

Bourdieu's relational thinking not only broke away from a methodological or epistemological dualism and substantialism, but he also rejected the ontological dichotomization between object and subject. Thus

> based on a non-Cartesian social ontology that refuses to split object and subject, intention and cause, materiality and symbolic representation, Bourdieu seeks to overcome the debilitating reduction of sociology to either physics of material structures or a constructivist phenomenology of cognitive forms by means of a genetic structuralism capable of subsuming both. He does this by systematically developing not a theory *stricto censu* (*sic*) so much as a sociological *method* consisting essentially in a manner of posing problems, in a parsimonious set of conceptual tools and procedures for constructing objects and for transferring knowledge gleaned in one area of inquiry into another. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 5)

Bourdieu therefore claims to overcome such familiar oppositions in sociology as individualism-collectivism, subjectivism-objectivism and agency-structure. He believes that the reality of social classes is wrongly the hazy lens of the subjectivism/ objectivism antinomy. Indeed, he writes that

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Harvard University Press.
[176] Elias, Norbert. 1978a. *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

The problem of social classes is one of the sites par excellence of the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, which locks research in a series of fictitious alternatives. (Bourdieu, 1990h: 289)

Hence, Bourdieu himself assesses the evolution of his thought by speaking of "the progress leading from the substantialist concept of class to the relational notion of class position, which was a crucial turning point, and thence to the notion of social space." (1993a: 264)[177] Wacquant offers a similar appraisal when he declares that "within the same broad relational framework, on can detect a notable evolution from earlier to later conceptualizations of class as a historical construction rooted in social space." (Wacquant, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 6, note 10) For Bourdieu, social inequity is entrenched in objective structures of unequal distributions of various types of capital, in which individuals and groups struggle to maintain or enhance their relative position within a hierarchically structured social space. He thereby discards what he calls the subjectivist approaches to the topic of stratification. On the other hand, he also rebuffs the objectivist approaches to social equality, in which social reality is seen through macro-level systems, often in the form of structured mold that are external to and coercive of the engaging actors and which must be constructed by social scientists. But, the social scientists of this sort ignore the actors' act on their practical knowledge of the social world. In other words, actors are reduced to mere reflections of an overarching structure. Wacquant offers a similar appraisal when he declares that "within the same broad relational framework, on can detect a notable evolution from earlier to later conceptualizations of class as an historical construction rooted in social space." (Wacquant, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 6, note 10)

In his social analysis, of social stratification and elsewhere as well, Bourdieu presents his relational approach as one that includes the actors' mode of experience and action formed by the structuring/structured habitus, and the objective structuring/structured space, the field, in which habitus operates. Perception, cognition and, broadly speaking, the classification schemes are related to and derived from the fundamental working of social conditions. "The social" in turn is related to people dispositions. The division of the social is therefore related to the vision of the self. In a critical tone, Bourdieu terms the correspondence between social and mental categories "miscognition,' implying that the insensible acceptance of social subjection is founded on some type of false knowledge.

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[177] Bourdieu, P. 1993a. "Concluding Remarks: For a Sociogenetic Understanding of Intellectual Works." In *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. Eds. C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, and M. Postone. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pp. 263-75.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout the discussion of Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu's works in the light of the middle way perspective, we can clearly detect a different approach of seeing the social world, we realize that a quest for epistemological is fundamentally deluded; a Cartesian dualism that divides subject and object is untenable; a substantial self existing inherently and independently is unacceptable; a process-reduction in sociology is distorted; a substantialist view of the social world is objectionable. A relational-processual theory of society is thereby confirmed to be a more acceptable approach to study the social world. By overcoming a misled epistemologism, we also sense the necessity of contemplating the ontological examination of the basic constitution of society. Therefore, I attempt to engage a middle way examination of the constitution of society in the next part.

PART FOUR: A Middle Way Examination of the Constitution of Society

6. Time/Space, Language, Self and Society

In this chapter, I attempt to conduct an ontological examination of the constitution of society in the context of the middle way perspective. The subject matters I am going to address are temporality, spatiality, language, the self and society. The reading attitude of this chapter will be more synthesized, in which I will put the perspective of the middle way and the relational-processual sociology together to deal with the following topics.

6.1 The Temporality and Spatiality of The Constitution of Society

Temporality

Nagarjuna devotes chapter XIX of the MMK specifically to time, as follows: (Garfield, 1995: 50-51)

1. If the present and the future depend on the past, then the present and the future would have existed in the past.

2. If the present and future did not exist there, how could the present and the future be dependent upon it?

3. If they are not dependent upon the past, neither of the two would be established. Therefore neither the present nor the future would exist.

4. By the same method, the other two divisions—past and future, upper, lower, middle, etc., unity, etc., should be understood.

5. A nonstatic time is not grasped. Nothing one could grasp as stationary time exists. If time is not grasped, how is it known?

6. If time depends on an entity, then without an entity how could time exist? There is no existence entity. So how can time exist?

In this very short but extremely important chapter, Nagarjuna devotes his effort to the examination of the issue of time. Based on the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising, he attempts to show that time (and space as well) does not have its own-being. The middle way perspective of Nagarjuna's criticizes the view of the substantial existence of things during the three periods. It was argued by the substantialists that since substance exists, time with which it is associated must also exist. It is this independent existence of time that Nagarjuna takes up for criticism. His criticism was based on the actuality that a thing (*bhava*) or its substance (*bhavasvabhava*) and time (kala) are empty and related to one another. In this chapter, he stresses the emptiness and dependent arising of time in terms of three arguments. In the first argument, Nagarjuna's method is to divide time into the past, the present, and the future. And argues that if any one of these time units have their own-being, then the conception of time would lose its coherence and becomes self-contradictory. In other words, none of these can be said to be inherently existent. He employs his dialectic to demonstrate the unreality of substantial time in any sense. Nagarjuna's argument was based on the principle of dependent co-arising that two things cannot be related unless they are dependently co-arisen and have no own-being.

In the first two verses, Nagarjuna emphasizes the implicit dilemma: The present and the future either depend upon the past or they do not. If "the past" is considered the producer of "the present" and "the future," the latter two parts would be already "in" the past and "must somehow emerge from it as a basis." (Garfield, 1995: 254) In this case, they could not be properly said to have separate moments. However, if they did not, that is, the present and the future are separate from the past, then their very separateness and disconnection will make them exist inherently and independently and have no connection to the past. In other words, their existences become uncaused, or unconditioned. But according to the nature of dependent co-arising, the very concepts of present and future involve a processual relation to the past, and thus an independent existence of any one of them is self-contradictory. If we considered their temporal relations in terms of causes and effects in the substantialist sense, then we would find two difficulties. As Garfield points out: (p.255)

> …we have two incoherent situations from the standpoint of anyone who considers the causal relation or its relata to be inherently existent. There must be a real relation between the cause and the effect in which the effect is contained potentially in the cause, and this would unfortunately entail the past existence of the present and the future. But second, there is a little regress to be developed. For

> if the present and the future depend upon the past, they must succeed or be simultaneous with it. But they must succeed or be simultaneous with it in time. That requires a super-time in which the parts of time are related, and so on, ad infinitum.

Therefore, the present and the future do not inherently exist in the past, nor do they exist independently in themselves and disconnected from the past. Their inherent existence in the past implies that an identity with the past must exist. On the other hand, their independent existence in themselves implies an absolute difference from the past. However, according to previous discussion, neither identity nor difference is justifiable. Likewise, neither identity with nor difference from the past is sufficient to establish the existence of the present and future. In general, according to the middle way relational-processual perspective, the inherence and independence of any of the elements of time could be opposed on the basis of their dynamic relatedness and fundamental reference to each other. How can we, for instance, imagine an independence of the "past" without referring to the present and the future? Thus, Nagarjuna says: "if they are not dependent upon the past, neither of the two would be established. Therefore neither the present nor the future would exist."

The independency of the parts of time will make the ordering of moments and events untenable, by which the very definition of time as the relational ordering of events and moments will be shattered. "The present is the present only because it is poised within the past and the future. If it were not, it would not be the present. So either the present is in the past, in which case it is nonexistent, or it is independent of the past and the future, in which case it is nonexistent." (Garfield, 1995: 256)

Another argument that Nagarjuna articulates in order to dispute the substantial separateness of time is through epistemological means, as shown in verse 5. From a knower's point of view, if time exists as an entity in a stationary state, there is no possibility that the knower could establish a knower-knowing-known relation in order to grasp time and make it comprehensible. Therefore, Nagarjuna questions: "How, then can one perceive time if it is not 'grasped'?" In other words, if time is acknowledged to be continuously flowing, then there is no coherent conception of time as an intelligible entity. There are no absolute static components of time that can be perceived by our knowing mind. If we propose, as some social theorists (consciously or unconsciously) hold, that there could be a "static moment" of a thing, and of time as well, then it would no longer count as a thing and time. Time, just like

other things, in and of itself can never be grasped, and thereby will never be known. Actually, the knowing act is not instantaneous—it, too, is dependent upon temporality. The noticing of an object or social event is always temporally dissimilar from the perception of the thing, even by the minutest quantity. Perception is also distinct from the thing itself. Thus, the knower and that which he or she knows do not form a static and unified whole. The middle way examination of time in turn indicates the temporal process by which our knowing of the world takes place. There is a to-be-known physical (conceptual) object, which is noticed by the knower. This noticing is then classified and made cognizable through the relatively separate processes of perception. This perception is schemed by dispositions, or habitus (in Bourdieu's term), and that affects the formation of the consciousness of the object. The thing which the knower becomes conscious of is thus always in the immediate past simply due to the temporal deferment. Although the time-consumption of this knowing process might not be as rapid as light travels, it is still quick enough to be undetectable by our ordinary mind. Hence, time cannot be observed directly in the process of knowing, but only extrapolated, that is, to use observable changing phenomena as the clue from which to draw implications or conclusions about the dependent co-arising of time.

Therefore, the middle way perspective shows that time cannot be considered as a self-existing thing that is independent of other conditional phenomena. As Nagarjuna has shown, there are no inherent and independent things in the world, nor could time be itself truly independent as long as it remained defined by its interdependency with other conditions. Hence, on the other hand, "we cannot suppose that time exists as one entity dependent on some other as its ground if we want time exist inherently." (Garfield, 1995: 257) This is because none of the things that exist in time are inherently and independent existent. So the ontological basis for an inherently and independently existent time is untenable. To place the argument in a more sociological way, time is not a self-existing substratum or ground in which equally independent social phenomena endure or where independent social events occur, and vice versa. The middle way perspective explains that inherently and independently existent things or time would be immutable, since in their essence they are independent of other phenomena and so unaffected by any interactions. Conversely, independently existent things or time would also be unable to influence other phenomena, since they are self-contained.

David Kalupahana summarizes Nagarjuna's view in the following remarks:

> Time denied by him is absolute time....This is a rejection not of temporal phenomena, but only of time and phenomena as well as their mutual dependence so long as they are perceived as independent entities. (Kaluphana, p. 279)[178]

Despite Nagarjuna's deconstruction of the absolute existence of time and phenomena, his notion of dependent arising does not deny the fundamental non-dual mutuality in which time and things that change are basically related and inseparable. Hence, as Nagarjuna points out, where there is no thing to be temporally related, there is no time. Phenomena are always phenomena-in-flux and time is always involving with flux-in-phenomena. That is, "the only mode of existence that time has is as a set of relations among empirical phenomena. Apart from those phenomena and those relations, there is no time." (Garfield, 1995: 257) By the same token, the only mode of existence that phenomenon has is a set of relations that occurs in temporal process. Sociologically speaking, there is neither "Time" nor "social entity" that can persist permanently, but only a change of social phenomena over time and a flux of time through social phenomena.

Sociologically speaking, the middle way perspective is profoundly historical: it sees temporality as the constitutive feature of conditional social existence and the formation of our knowledge. Thus, social reality and its knowledge can only be dependently arisen against that which was temporally before it, which itself had dependently arisen against that which came before that. According to the middle way perspective, the constitution of the self and the society are fundamentally spatio-temporal. It rejects both the methodological individualism's account of a given and independent quality of individual existence that discounts the contingency of spatial-temporal condition. It also rejects the methodological collectivism's assertion of seeing society as an a-historical system with functional equilibrium, or structure with universal binary oppositions of sign system. The epistemological quest for certainty as performed in both positivism and intepretivism has also been reputed as ignoring the dynamic relational-processual conditions of space and time. The intellectual trend in the middle way perspective emphasis on a pervasive dynamic relational-processual condition of social reality, that is, to perceiving the self and society temporally in changing process and spatially in relational context. For sociology, it meant that society should be conceived as a continuous, unending stream

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[178] Kalupahana, David J. 1986. *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

of events in relation to its interconnected spaces, or fields. Relationally and processually speaking, society (group, community, organization, nation-state) may be said to arise only if something relational and processual occurs within and without. Ontologically speaking, society as a steady state or as an independent entity cannot and does not exist in any way.

Basically, according to the middle way perspective of time, social process and the constitution of the self are like a historical stream of becoming rather than static being. However, some social realists tend to speak of a series of discrete moments, i.e. a relation of independent serial entities, such as the discrete periodization of traditional/modern/postmodern, *Gemeinshaft-Gesellshaft*, mechanical/organic solidarity, developed/underdeveloped, and so on. Moreover, Whorf argues that "Standard Average European" languages thrust a certain reified conception of time on us. (1956: 57)[179] Whorf's main point is that European languages make us see time as an objective quantifiable kind of thing like space. Those languages reify time by quantifying time in precisely the same way that they quantify physical aggregates: "ten days" has exactly the same linguistic form as "ten miles." Most decisively, their tense/aspect system has a substantial tripartite distinction of past/present/future which encourages this view of time. The conceptual distinction is thus reified in this case. As Whorf contends:

> all languages need to express durations, intensities, and tendencies. It is characteristic of SAE (Standard Average European) … to express them metaphorically. The metaphors are those of spatial extension, i.e. of size, number (plurality), position, shape, and motion. We express duration by 'long, short, great, much, quick, slow', etc.; intensity by 'large, great, much, heavy, light, high, low, sharp, faint', etc.; tendency by 'more, increase, grow …'; and so on through an almost inexhaustible list of metaphors that we hardly recognize as such, since they are virtually the only linguistic media available. It is clear how this condition "fits in". It is part of our whole scheme of objectifying – imaginatively spatializing qualities and potentials that are quite nonspatial … (1956: 145)

Derived from this, social processes are seen as being comprised of these serial and quantifiable elements in a teleological and to some extent evolutionary framework. This kind of framework implies discrete substances of past, present and future in an

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[179] Whorf, Benhamin Lee. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. And intro. John B. Carroll. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

orderly connection. Nagarjuna without a doubt refutes these notions of serial becoming. As discussed previously, it makes no sense to talk about the relation between absolutely separate moments, nor the possibility of the transition from one substantial moment to another. Because, in the substantialist sense, there can be no way to relate the arising of a historical moment or a period of time with its cessation. As examined by Nagarjuna in verse one of Chapter XXI:

> Destruction does not occur without becoming. It does not occur together with it.
> Becoming does not occur without destruction. It does not occur together with it.

By examining the phenomenon of momentary impermanence, destruction and becoming are seen as mutually incompatible and but still related. Supposing if they had both inherently and independently existed, they would contain contradictory properties. On the one hand, if arising and ceasing existed together, then a thing would be disappearing at the same time that it was appearing. On the other hand, if arising existed without ceasing, then things would move toward a one-directional eternity---they would arise, but never cease. Conversely, if ceasing exists without arising, then there would be the demise of a thing which never will arise. Nor can we say that, in order to transcend the antinomy, there is a "potential" of ceasing in a thing that is arising, but is not yet "actualized." This is similar to the fallacy that the present and the future already had existed in the past as a potential. This would attribute to a thing two oppositional and discrete natures, that of arising and that of ceasing, which becomes contradictory because the identity of one thing in the substantialist sense is incompatible with essential differences, in this case, between potentiality and actuality.

Generally speaking, Nagarjuna shows that, as Garfield interprets: (1995: 269)

> Becoming and destruction are mutually contradictory. So they cannot be properties of the same thing at the same time. But everything that is coming into existence is at a stage in a process that culminates in its destruction. So everything that is becoming is at the same time being destroyed. Everything that is being destroyed is in a later stage of a process that earlier resulted in its coming into existence and, indeed, is coming to exist in some other form. So everything that is being destroyed is also becoming. So becoming and destruction cannot coexist, but cannot exist apart. Hence they cannot exist independently at all.

In the same way, if we nominally divided socio-historical phenomena into transient moments, they are then constantly disappearing to be succeeded by later emerging moments of what are conventionally identified as the same socio-historical phenomena. So every socio-historical phenomenon that has ever existed is empty of a static nature and has thus constantly disappeared and arisen. In actuality, socio-historical phenomenon is a shifting set of co-dependent relations—impermanence and change are built into them at the most fundamental level. For as soon as they exist, they disappear because of the emptiness. But they do not disappear in eternal destruction due to dependent co-arising. Those phenomena co-arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, their dynamic mutual embeddedness. As Nagarjuna implies, emptiness precludes the inherent establishment of becoming on the one hand, but also rules out the inherent founding of destruction. That makes possible and sensible the socio-historical phenomena-in-flux and the understanding of "impermanent of all things." More importantly, the mutual embeddedness and co-dependencies of various socio-historical phenomena and their continuously shifting connections with each other secures that all objects and subjects are impermanent, ceaselessly arising, becoming, maturing, and disappearing. In short, since impermanence are pervasive in the socio-historical phenomena the transformation and change in the temporal process are built into the core of all existences, both subjectively and objectively. In this way, the socio-historical impermanence is a direct expression of emptiness and the dependent arising of time. In other words, our treatment of the meaning of socio-historical phenomena must enable us to show that one of the central problems of all ontology is rooted in the phenomenon of time. We can thus say that time itself is none other than socio-historical phenomena; and socio-historical phenomena is none other than time.

What Nagarjuna means by "time" is neither time objectively conceived nor is time subjectively perceived. Thus, it shouldn't be reduced to the objectified or subjectivized status of a substantial entity. According to the middle way perspective, time means impermanence. Impermanence means continual flux of becoming and disappearing. This is to say, our socio-historical existence is temporal, and man and society, being temporal, is processual. Sociologically speaking, this fundamental processuality and temporality makes possible the socially constructed time, that is, the derivate time, institutional time, clock-time, bio-rhythm, mental-rhythm, and so forth. But this fundamental processuality and temporality does not have its own inherent and independent essence, it arises dependently upon the socially constructed time. However, in modern mechanized time, the emptiness and dynamism of fundamental

temporality has been objectified and reduced to mere derivate time or quantified time, conceived as a series of static now-points. The quantification of time into discrete time-units as a succession of substantial moments generates deluded preoccupation of the conceptions of eternalism, annihilation, historicism, evolutionism, teleology, or an ahistorical view of socio-historical phenomena. Nagarjuna points out that it is not possible to measure time substantially. He maintained that nonenduring or nonstatic time cannot be quantified, because it cannot be manipulated, and that an enduring or static time, although manipulatable, does not have substance.

In macrosociology, such as structural-functionalism, historical materialism, evolutionary theory, human ecology theory, and other theories, despite their significant differences in many aspects, there is one thing in common among them, that is, they share a concern for the "big picture" and are united in their pursuit for fine tune frameworks, or mono-causal explanation, that would encompass all "societies" across time and space. Their theoretical system implies a substantized view of time, or history, which is actually a-historical and a-temporal. According to the middle way perspective, this view of social development is definitely unacceptable.

Substantialist macrosociology commonly presumes the distinctive, coherent, self-sustaining and teleological characteristics of societies, cultures, or great events. In their view, social entity not only exists but also possesses its own logics of development. They often assume theoretically or empirically identifiable states in stasis or in discrete sequences of time in their objects of study. In the meantime, sociologists divided up their own specialties mostly by structured phenomena –families, religions, industrialization, crime, culture, and so on –and drew their evidence chiefly from observation of the societies they currently lived in. Their developmental views divided between broad evolutionary and stage schemes, scattered cases demonstrating universal arguments, and vague overtures to studies of contemporary social phenomena. These approaches of sociology actually substantialize the derivate time implicated in their project as constant and real. After World War II, ideas of development and modernization followed the substantialized derivate time model and moved toward the study of processes within independent countries or regions of secularization, industrialization, revolution, democratization, and population growth. They tended to construct patterns of development to explain the social transformation and general sequences within those transformations within each independent social entity. Most sociologists in their research tried to align

comparable cases in order to identify whether or where those cases could fit in the pattern. This kind of imputed patterning is in fact a-historical and a-temporal, and in turn untenable to the middle way perspective. Even though their identified cases exist in history, their explanatory patterns remain quite a-historical due to their disregard of the time-space contexts of the social processes under investigation. The fundamental temporality of socio-historical phenomena is misrepresented by considering time as additional variables rather than the condition of possibility of the constitution of socio-historical phenomena. As Nagarjuna points out that if time exists depending on a substantial structure or pattern, then it cannot be obtained without such a structure or pattern. But no substantial structure or pattern is to be found, for he has already refuted such a structure or pattern. Hence, according to him, time does not exist in the absolute sense. If a societal structure or pattern exists depending on time, then it cannot be obtained without temporality. But no substantial time is to be found, for he has already refuted such a time. Thus, according to him, the structure or pattern proposed by these social scientists does not exist in the absolute sense.

It is necessary to take into account the temporal dimension in every socio-historical phenomena and the constitution of the self. When we speak of the unfolding of socio-historical phenomena in operation, or the mobilization of individuals for action, the time dimension is definitely implicated. All these processes, as illustrated by Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu, can occur only in time. However, in the social sciences, the temporal extension of processes was often treated as self-evident and taken for granted, and thereby as something additional and secondary in their studies. In this case, as Sztompka (1991:105)[180] indicates: "It is limited to what may be called the 'internal time,' as opposed to 'external time,' the time of functioning as opposed to the time of transformation. The action of the agents, the operation of structures and their synthetic fusion in the praxis of the agency are not yet seen as producing any novelty, but rather as reproducing the same conditions." That is why most of the sociological studies of socio-historical phenomena or the self remain static in accordance with their pattern or developmental schemes. In that case, the external time frame was wrongly seen as something identifiable, and they should be sufficient to show that the future events in history can be predicted with absolute certainty. The dynamic changing process of the society and the self was taken as implicit within the substantialized entity (with independent essence and clear and distinct boundary) rather than changing internally and externally in a relational-processual sense. In other

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[180] Sztompka, Piotr. 1991. *Society in Action –The Theory of Social Becoming.* The University of Chicago Press.

words, while internal temporality was mysteriously implied, the external entity and development was to remain fixed or patterned. This is contradictory and unacceptable. The fundamental temporality of phenomena does not allow us to the assertion that there is an absolute and substantial time whch is predictable.

One of the immediate results of the analysis of social development or its temporality into discrete units or patterns is the view that time is moving from the substantial past into the substantial present and from the substantial present into the substantial future. Otherwise, the presumption would be that there is a transcendental temporal substance, which remains unchanged and is external to and coercive of the succession of momentary events. The teleological view of socio-historical development in various forms, as mentioned earlier, is of this kind. The problem is that as a socio-historical phenomenon, two aspects will be contradictory: the characteristic which is temporal and the substance which is timeless or pre-designed.

Sociologically speaking, the recognition of temporality should be done to make sociology "fundamentally historical." And the historicity must be empty of any inherent and independent existence. This means that sociological analysis must address long-term processes of dependent co-arising of the societal transformation and the constitution of the self. The linkage of the level of individualities and totalities is possible only if history is brought into the picture. (Sztompka, 1991: 105) Therefore, Giddens calls for the "incorporation of temporality into the understanding of human agency." (1979: 54) In this correlation he introduces his core concepts of "recursiveness", that is, "in and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible." (1984: 2) And "structuration", that is, "the ways in which the social system, via the application of generative rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, it produces and reproduces in interaction." (1979: 66) Interrelatedness between agency and structure is therefore realized in this consideration of historicity: "with the recovery of temporality as integral to social theory history and sociology become methodologically indistinguishable." (p. 8) Here, "phenomena-in-flux" can be understood as society-in-history. As claimed by Abrams: "the social world is essentially historical."(Abrams, 1982: 3) [181] Therefore, Abrams stresses for "the need to reconstitute the action and structure antinomy as a matter of process in time, to reorganise their investigations in terms of the dialectics of structuring." (1982: xvi) He even defines historical sociology as "the attempt to understand the relationship of

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[181] Abrams, Philip. 1982. *Historical Sociology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

personal activity and experience on the one hand and social organization on the other as something that is continuously constructed in time." (p. 16) Similarly, Lloyd states that: "human agency and social action relate dialectically to social structure over time." (Lloyd, 1988:11)[182] He proposes to "retain a temporal dimension as intrinsic to any study of society since structure, action, and behaviour are interrelated in a dynamic, transforming, manner." (p. 314) Therefore, it is important to take time, its fundamental processuality, into consideration in order to link structure and agency and to understand the dependent co-arising of socio-historical phenomena. Otherwise, "without the proper incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be satisfactorily resolved." (Archer, 1988: 2)[183] Archer elaborates this notion: "structure and action operate over different time periods … structure logically predates the actions that transform it and structural elaboration logically post-dates those actions." (p. 22)

According to the middle way perspective, the three moments of time in the past, present and future, are conceptual components which do not have inherent existence, but still can be understood as an expedient means to explain the dependent arising of a relational-processual phenomena. In this sense, past, present and future are interrelated. Sociologically, we can thereby specify a sequence in which "structure, agency and behavirour are interrelated in a dynamic, transforming, manner." With the temporal perspective, Abrams claims that these three aspects of society can be imagined: "(1) Given circumstances, which are enabling and disabling of action, (2) Conscious action that is historically significant, (3) The intended and unintended consequences of action, which turn into objective and seemingly unalterable conditions of action and thought." (Abrams, 1982: 283)

In Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu's works, we can see that most of their conceptual components are implicated with temporality. For instance, Gadamer's version of hermeneutics is linked to an ontological-processual notion of historicality, and as relates particularly to the theory and practice of experience, consciousness, play, hermeneutical circle and the fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, our interpretative mode of being is related to history and tradition, which are fundamentally temporal. Inspired by Heidegger's ontologization of hermeneutics, Gadamer sees the relation between interpreters and interpreted as similar to the relation between *Dasein* and the world in process. With reference to the question of historicality, a comment from

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[182] Lloyd, Christopher. 1988 [1986]. *Explanation in Social History*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
[183] Archer, Margaret. 1988. *Culture and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Being and Time may be constructive. Heidegger writes: "In analyzing the historicality of *Dasein* we shall try to show that this entity is not "temporal" because it "stands in history", but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being." (428) In other words, historicality is not something additional to *Dasein* as property that belongs to it, or a contingent characteristic of it, but is a non-dual, non-differentiable, fundamental quality of its mode of existence.

Gadamer's notion of "effective-history" implies that the fundamental temporality as an existential quality is significantly relevant for the practice of hermeneutics. Tradition, or historicality, is not something like a fixed entity which we blindly follow without an interpretative recognition of the legitimacy of its content. From the middle way perspective, tradition and its historicality cannot be substantialized as some quantified or objectified which are totally alien to us and exist out there. We are always standing within tradition and history. In the same way, we always stand within time. Gadamer's notion of the "horizon" is crucial to the condition of possibility of historical hermeneutics. Hermeneutical understanding requires a process of the fusion of horizons. Thus, the temporality of understanding makes the horizon remain open and is never completed. Since to exist historically and temporally means that knowledge of oneself and others can never be given and completed, we must always open and participate ourselves to processes of dialogue and mutual embeddedness.

Interpretation for Gadamer is not a reproduction of the past, a point he argued as impossible. Rather, every interpretation, according to Gadamer, was a fusion of the present horizon and the past. None of them, the present and the past, can be substantive. Hence, assertion of a meaning coming objectively and unchanged from the past is untenable. Therefore, historical hermeneutics consists in the 'fusion' of historical horizons with that of the present, which is incomplete and remain processual. In addition, every human being finds him/herself to be a spatially and temporally situated subject. That is to say, one finds oneself already thrown into a tradition at a certain time and place, and one finds oneself always already involved with a past that simply canot be suspended, since it provides the basis for one's projection into the future. For Gadamer there is no arrival at a hermeneutic whole that is considered concluded. Gadamer's hermeneutic inquiry places the researcher in a process of temporality, or historicality, in which past and present are fused. Past fore-structure and present interpretative understanding are inextricably related and embedded. The hermeneutic circle then describes the temporal relation and process of

the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter, which remains open to the future and the other.

Sociologically speaking, the hermeneutical fusion of horizons involves the relational process that entails a dialogue between people in the past, present and future, that is, between predecessors, contemporaries and successors. According to the middle way perspective, the emptiness and relativity of time is the condition of possibility of hermeneutical understanding and the fusion of horizons. It makes possible the ongoing process of interpretation whereby the true meaning of a social event, a text, a work of art, or an historical occurrence is never complete. The object of socio-historical research is not fixed. The emptiness, its lack of inherent existence and relativity of the three temporal moments helps us to appreciate the interrelation of different horizons in time. "Time is thus merely a dependent set of relations, not an entity in its own right, and certainly not the inherently existent vessel of existence it might appear to be." (Garfield, 1995: 257)[184] We can also state that tradition is thus merely a dependent set of relations, not an entity in its own right, and certainly not the inherently existent vessel of existence it might appear to be.

The temporal structure of human existence, according to Mead, can be portrayed in terms of the concepts of emergence, sociality and freedom. The basis of the temporality of human experience, for Mead, is demonstrated with the dependent arising of "emergent" events in experience. The emergent events, which arises dependently in the present, sets up a tentative disruption of the continual flux and institutes a hurdle between the present and the future. Since this hurdle is a problem that disturbs the continuity of individual or collective motion, we must activate ourselves in order to overcome such a temporal break. Without this intervention of emergent event in between the continuity of present and future our initial temporal structure of human time-consciousness can hardly arise. For Mead, it is our practical coping with the emergent problem in our present situation and looking to the future as the ground of prospective resolution of disturbance that makes us active and temporal. In other words, the future is a temporally distant realm to be reached through practical action. Human action, in turn, is action-in-time. Mead contends that, without dealing with the emergence of disturbing events, there can be no action and experience at all. Without its breaking effect, there can be no experience of time. Without emergent events, the future will be a total reproduction of the present, and must already exist in

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[184] Garfield, Jay, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p. 257.

the present which is self-contradictory according to Nagarjuna. In this case, change will be untenable. As Mead points out, without disruption "there would be merely the passage of events" and mere passage does not constitute change. (Mead, 1938: 346)[185] Passage is pure continuity that presupposes the identity between past, present and future without interruption. If the past, present and future are the same, how can we then differentiate them and recognize the difference between them? According to the middle way perspective, this is definitely absurd and unacceptable. We cannot imagine a continual flux, or passage independent of the phenomena of human action in dealing with emergent events. Otherwise, we will presuppose an inherent and independent existence of time without relating to any phenomena, which is a substantialist view of time, and therefore untenable.

The fundamental processuality is made possible because of the tentative and relative disruption of continuity. However, it does not mean that a changing process involves the eternal disappearance of continuity –there must be a "persisting non-passing content" against which an emergent event is experienced as change. (Mead, 1938: 330-331) Only if we can recognize the relativity and dependent co-arising of continuity and change, we can then understand the constitution of mind, self and society.

As one of the initiators of American pragmatism, Mead stresses that problem-solving as the fundamental condition of our experience formation. Thus, we can hardly experience anything in continual flux unless there is an interruption. In other words, time is not an object of perception unless something becomes problematic. This problematic situation is known as a result of the emergence of disrupting events. Therefore, again, continuity and change are not contradictories, but interrelated moments co-arisen dependently that shape our experience. "The now is contrasted with a then and implies that a background which is irrelevant to the difference between them has been secured within which the now and the then may appear. There must be banks within which the stream of time may flow." (Mead, 1938: 161) According to the middle way perspective, the metaphorical term, "bank" of Mead's is exactly the manifestation of emptiness and dependent co-arising. The dependent co-arising of emergence, then, is a fundamental condition of possibility of our experience formation that could not be imagined if emergence were not to be temporal. Action in coping with the emergent events must occur in time. Likewise, time must also occur in events.

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[185] *The Philosophy of the Act*, ed. C.W. Morris *et al.* (University of Chicago 1938). P. 346.

What is then the characteristic of the past in these temporal processes? For Mead, while the emergent event presents itself as interruption of continuity, our coping experience, through its activity of retrospection in order to reconstruct the past, makes the conceptualized three moments of time continuous again in our mind. "The character of the past is that is connects what is unconnected in the merging of one present into another." (Mead, 1964: 351)[186]   The emergent event in our reconstructed past experience seems like a determined event that is constructed by our mind, but, on the other hand, the emergent event that causes problem, incurs our experience to deal with it and to reconstruct the past is more like a determining event. The dependent arising of a determining event and a determined event is another illustration of the temporality of human action and human experience. The emergent event, appearing to be discontinuous, is the condition of possibility of continuities within which event may be experienced as continuous. The reconstruction of the emergent in our experience as the past event also demonstrates Mead's unique revision of the idea of the irrevocability of the past. That past is thus both irrevocable and revocable. This notion indicates the non-substantiality of the past. In other words, there is no sense to assert an inherent and independent past, for the past is always devised in the context of the emerging present. Moreover, since emergence itself does not have its own inherent and independent property, it is necessary to constantly revise the past experience from the vantage point of newly emergent situations. The newness of emergence therefore makes our human condition always open to something novel and capricious. Even the past is always open to question and reinterpretation. Every discovery, every new project, and the future-orientation of history, will revise our picture and meaning of the past. In this case, how can we assert that there is an unchanged past in the temporal process?

The human world is thus temporally constituted and the temporality of experience, Mead contends, is a flow in the present. The past constitutes and is constituted by our experience in the now, and, likewise, the projected future is also part of our experiences in the now. Since the now is a continual flux of the present moment, the new must exist relatively in relation to the past and the future. In this sense, the dependent arising of the now makes possible the temporality of our self-constitution and social constitution. Human existence is in this manner rooted in time, that is, in a living present with continual reference to the past (in the form of memory, history, tradition, etc.), and moving towards a future newness.

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[186] *Selected Writings,* ed. A.J. Reck (Bobbs-Merrill, Liberal Arts Press, 1964). P.

Spatiality

Furthermore, it is important to note that, although the nature of temporality is the primary focus of chapter XIX, Nagarjuna nonetheless demonstrates, in passing, the applicability of the same principle to all concepts of relations. The same argument was also used to refute the substantiality of above, below and middle in the spatial sense. Therefore, following the same method, related spatial concepts such as the highest, the lowest, and the middle, and also here and there, identity, difference, etc., should be empty of substantiality. The emptiness of the substantial spatial location is in turn implied. In other words, the distinguishing of spatial locations always already involves spatial interrelations. Thus, one cannot attribute the substantial quality to any spatial unit independently. For example, a nation's geographical remoteness cannot be sensible independently; her remoteness exists in relation to the one who is nearby. Hence, we can say that there is no inherent and independent existence of the upper, lower, middle, or near and far.

The constitution of human beings and human societies are not only temporal, but also spatial. Indeed, Nagarjuna devotes his examination of the ontological status of space in chapter 5 of MMK as follows:

> 1.Prior to a characteristic of space there is not the slightest space. If it arose prior
> to the characteristic then it would, absurdly, arise without a characteristic.

The line of argumentation implies that in no case has anything existed without a defining characteristic. Whatever we regard as existing must be able to be identified by the senses or isolated in thought in some way. We can do this only in terms of some "defining characteristic" of the thing under consideration. However, the problem with "space" is that it is thought to have none of its own defining characteristic, nor can we consider it in isolation prior to the characteristics. Since it has none of its own characteristics and cannot arise prior to the characteristic it seems that space cannot exist in isolation. Thus, space, just like other things, cannot be considered as having its own-being. Nothing however substantial can be asserted of it. Space is not analyzable in terms of its own-being. Yet, while we cannot say that space "is," we must still acknowledge that it nevertheless arises in a particular form, that is, in dependent co-arising. In other words, space has relative spatiality. Sociologically speaking, spatiality is relative to societies and social activities. It is not presented as an absolute place, as something independent, in which things reside.

Nagarjuna's interpretation of emptiness and dependent co-arising implies that all that can be said to have any reality is the process in time as well as the relation in space. In other words, without the social characteristic of space there is no the slightest space. Our "conception of space" as well as our living social space, or field, are all socially constructed. Therefore, we can say that the spatiality is co-dependently arisen with the sociality. In other words, the characteristic of space is socially related. By the same token, the characteristic of society is spatially related. Wrong views arise when one, through a substantialist approach, believes there to be absolute societies or absolute spatiality without regarding to the other. As Nagarjuna points out: " I do not think that those who teach that the self is the same as or different from the entities understand the meaning of the doctrine." (X: 16) In this sense, both space and society should not have any inherent and independent self-nature, and they relate to each other co-dependently but are neither identical nor different.

The middle way perspective offers a broad view of selflessness, or emptiness, and declares that, not only are persons devoid of an own-being, but that all of the elements containing existence are also without substance. In this sense, space is empty, *sunya*, of inherent and independent nature. A substantialized view of space and matter was presumed by classical Newtonian physics, which asserts that everything is composed of irreducible atoms with a determinable location and momentum. In accordance with such a view of the fixated pattern of motion and position in space, a French mathematician, Pierre de Laplace, declares that, could he theoretically know the location and momentum of every monad in the world, he could foretell the exact future development of the entire universe. This substantialist view of the qualities of irreducible elements of existence and space is questioned by quantum physics, which holds that the characteristic of the monadic elements of existence is inherently unknowable. According to Nagarjuna, the utter smallness and irreducibility of the thing is contradictory to each other. If a thing, whatever size it is, cannot be reduced any further, it must be an independently existent substance occupying a position in space. However, as soon as it occupies a spatial position, it must be dependent upon spatiality as its condition of existence. In this case, it is not dependent anymore. In addition to that, any spatial thing must have the property of directionality, which contains at least seven dimensions of eastern, western, northern, southern, up, down and middle. Once the thing is identified as having spatiality with these seven dimensions, it is not a single-sided element anymore. The middle way perspective, as indicted earlier in this section, cannot accept the independent existence of any one of these dimensions. In other words, east must immediately arise dependently upon west,

north, south, up, down and center. This relatedness and directionality of a thing is against the presumption of irreducibility, because the relatedness and directionality indicates the divisibility of a given thing. Therefore, when a thing is considered spatial, it must be related, directional and thereby divisible. When it is divisible it is not independent substance at all. In this case, we may probably continue dividing it until it is indivisible. However, this process will be infinite and in vain as long as it is still considered a thing occupying a position in space. The infinite division of a thing will eventually destroy the substantiality and spatiality of its existence. It is here we see the contradiction of the substantial existence of things in space. For Nagarjuna, the emptiness negates the identifiable entity of things and space while dependent co-arising acknowledges the relational-processual existence of things and its spatiality. Thus, according to the middle way perspective, we cannot accept an absolutist view of space and things as proposed by classical Newtonian physics and other realist approaches; yet we still affirm a relative, or conventional, existence of things and their spatiality.

In another sense, the middle way perspective is thoughtfully geographical: it perceives spatiality as the constitutive part of the establishment of our relational becoming and to our knowledge of reality. Hence, reality and the knowledge of reality can only be dependently arisen against that which is spatial. Indeed, sociologically speaking, the geographical spaces drawn by geographers, historians, state administrators, and others, for instance, are socially produced through discourses and value-laden experiences. These constructed spaces and places are empty of any absolute spatial essences, but due to their dependent co-arising in relation to people's territorization in their practice at different levels, it is to a large extent conventionally real. According to the middle way perspective, we can question and deconstruct the absolute equivalence of physical spaces and imagined territories. As mentioned above, some approaches of sociology tend to substantialize the derivate time implicated in their project as constant and real. Similarly, the derivate spaces, or places, often been identified to substantial spaces as something real existing out there. However, the imagined territories and its realization in map form, for instance, always involve mental, and social imaginaries, or even power relations. Our social practice, as Bourdieu points out, entails negotiations of power that take place across and within a number of spaces: regional or topographical, domestic or institutional, architectural or electronic, real or symbolic. Therefore, a transparent space without mental, social, symbolic, cultural and political characteristic is untenable. Social theories and social researches must not ignore the relationship between physical spaces and actual human practices. In a way,

we can say that the co-dependence of people in social practices is at the same time a form of co-spatialization.

Space has become a significant metaphor in contemporary social science. This is already apparent, for example, with many social scientists' attraction to the spatial models of Henri Lefebvre, Mechel Foucault, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Homi Bhabha, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Erving Goffman, Giddens, Hagestrand and Bourdieu. David Harvey observes that literary theory has "permeated social theory" in analysis of urban space while others point to the emergence of a new "cultural geography" embracing aesthetics and cultural critique. The question of identity, social stratification, location, positionality, territoriality, boundaries, horizon, field, social space, diaspora, globalization, localization, gender-related distinction between the public and the private space, Orientalism (the spatial and cultural image of the exotically distant other), and so on, has been reframing many problematic issues in the social sciences. Despite the disciplinary divergence of these authors, we can detect the emergence of their common interest: the making of space as a social product. In other words, they recognize the non-substantiality of human spatialization.

Henri Lefebvre, for example, used to point out that "(social) space is a (social) produce." Space, for him, is not merely "there," as a transparent container waiting to be filled, but a dynamic, humanly constructed, "means of control, and hence of domination, of power."[187] Michel Foucault's theorizing of "space," in his unique way started almost around the same time. Other authors with differing value-relevance construct their particular spatial imaginations differently. The relativity of spatiality is in turn manifested. The relative existence of spatiality was illustrated by the work of Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf.[188] The main argument of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is that perception of space is conditioned by culture, and particularly by language. After the studies of several languages including Hebrew, Aztec, Mayan, Hopi, and Chinese, for Whorf, it seems that the European's notion of time and space is much rather culturally specific than universal.

A middle way relational-processual perspective would question the assumption that institutional, cultural spatialization is fixated and unchangeable, and, in turn, examine

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[187] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (1974; reprint, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26. See also Edward W. Soja, Postmodern Geographies (New York: Verso, 1989).

[188] Sapir, Edward. 1921.*Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Harcourt, Brace, and Co.: New York. Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality*. John Carroll (ed.) MIT Press: Cambridge.

the dependent arising of how they are constructed and maintained through linguistic, symbolic and psychical dichotomization or differentiation (for example, high/low; horizontal/vertical; open/closed; internal/external; and so on). In other words, human spatialization is related to rhetorical and discursive activities, which characterizes space with human values and desires. Hence, spatiality, while empty of an inherent property, no less than temporality, is one of the constitutive parts of the social and the self. Therefore, it is necessary to include these questions in social inquiry. What are the consequences for the ways we imagine and categorize space? How are social distinctions rhetorically and geographically inscribed? How do people embody a sense of place, and how do places limit access as they reproduce social hierarchies?

A middle way examination of the formation and functions of the deluded power of substantialization is one of the ways in which social studies can contribute to the relational-processual understanding of space and spatiality. By doing so, we can conduct an interpretative practice, which both clarify the workings of and question the assumptions about the substantialization of spatiality. The making of a global geo-political division, national and local territorization invites theoretical consideration of the dependent conditions and consequences of the social practices, symbolic representations, discourses and images that give it legitimate form. The middle way examination responds to the cultural works of spatializations at different levels, which will assist us in a critical reflection of the spatial constitution of human society. Therefore, we can say that, on the one hand, spatiality is historical and social, while, at the same time, historicality and sociality are spatial.

Actually, there is a large majority of conceptual metaphors in terms of spatiality consisting in the systematic mapping from the concrete to the abstract domain in the social sciences. Let me address the notion of spatiality of Foucault and Bourdieu's.

Foucault's spatial metaphor in *Discipline and Punishment* is so evident that even though he did not express it explicitly, he still admits in one interview that: "people have often reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me."[189] Indeed, Foucault's relational insight on the power/knowledge complex makes him address the spatialzation of individualized bodies by means of disciplinary normalization. Discipline, for him, is not a static organization or a schematic; instead, "it individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them fixed positions, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations."

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[189] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980), p. 69.

(Foucault, 1977: 146)[190] "It is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field." (1977: 177) One of the significant concerns for Foucault in these statements is how the normalizing forces of modern society can be spatialized, or placed metaphorically, as a form of confinement. He stresses that modern institutions, such as prisons, asylums, workplaces, schools, hospitals, and so on, evolved into places of observation. In addition, the practical techniques developed by these institutions for the constitution of the self indicated the transformation of modern society. Power in these institutions proceeds "from the distribution of individuals in space."[191] The space he refers to in these statements is not necessarily physical space but socialized or historicized spatiality and symbolic space. The internalization and embodiment of disciplinary techniques by individuals in order to abide by a norm establishes symbolic and materialized yardsticks by which each is differentiated exactly from another. This practical technique "measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value of the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals… In short, it normalizes." (1977: 183) Normalization, in terms of spatial arrangement of the range of our bodily movement threatens our agentic autonomy. Individuals appear qua individuals (that is as subjects) only within the locations created for them by this social network. "Space," Foucault contends, "is fundamental in any exercise of power."[192]

Foucault's dynamic metaphor of society as spatial field is in harmony with Nagarjuna's non-substantialist view of space. Space in this sense is empty of any inherent essence but arises co-dependently with social characterization, which, for Foucault, is loaded with localized and structured forces. But just as power is relational, dynamic and multiple, the spatiality is also relational, dynamic and multiple, and not just given. Therefore, a fluid geography open to change and struggle is anticipated in this imaginary of social space. Spatiality to Foucault is all at once a site of domination as well as of resistance. Since for Foucault, all politics is territorial and spatial to some extent, it is necessary to have a spatial imagination in the social sciences in order to better understand the constitution of society.

Bourdieu's notion of fields as "spaces of possibles" emphasizes the contested and conflicted activities of individuals vying for positions and resources in several fields and spaces. Bourdieu argues that the social world can be represented as a

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[190] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1977) P. 146.
[191] Ibid. P. 141.
[192] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), P. 252.

multi-dimensional space with the different axes composed of the various areas called "fields" in which force or power is possessed. The axes, thus, represent the different forms of power or capital that exist in the different fields. Individuals or groups of individuals can then be defined by their relative positions in these spaces. In these differing spaces, his notion of accumulating and investing various types of capital (as we have discussed earlier) is an important means to describe various systems of exchange and distribution. The field of cultural production, for instance, exists as a field of "possible forces" which structures and is structured by the agents operating within it:

> (and is) defined in the relationship between the structure of average chances of access to different positions (measured by the difficulty of attaining them and, more precisely, by the relationship between the number of positions and the number of competitors) and the dispositions of each agent, the subjective basis of the perception and appreciation of the objective chances.[193]

Dispositions and positions combine to form a sense of social direction that orients individuals in a given field. Bourdieu's notions of field, taste and habitus overcome a simplified description of social and cultural mobility by accounting for the activities occurring within and between the fields, emphasizing that they are related in more complicated, mobile, relational, processual and multi-dimensional ways. Moreover, based on this multi-dimensional space, classes can be singled out. Bourdieu argues that:

> social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is "normally" (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position. (Bourdieu, 1984a: 372)

Furthermore,

> a class is defined as much by its being-perceived as by its being, by its consumption—which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic—as much as by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former). (Ibid., 483)

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[193] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1993. p. 64.

In addition, a class isn't necessarily real in the realist sense – they are theoretical or probable classes – but they are "real" in the practical sense. In practice, there are fewer barriers to mobilizing such a class than for a group of people who are not close to each other in social space—the likelihood of mobilization is inversely proportional to distance in social space. Without spatial metaphors, Bourdieu's arguments concerning social distinction and hierarchization would not be tenable.

Since the social world can be represented in various ways, for Bourdieu, there is a struggle to represent it—to impose individual (legitimate) visions of the social world onto others—to change the way the social world is perceived. Since these perceptions are based on objective structures of the social space, they condition each agent's opportunity structure and incline them to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to overturn or de-legitimate it.

Actually, the structuring of social space could be regionalized into different physical spaces, such as the dynamic process of the distribution of goods, services and capitals in space through which people flow dependently. The structuring/structure of the spatial arrangement, where people come to act may be sites in which different categories of people are divided. These could also be the sites of struggle over access and distribution of these resources, though it is a struggle dependently conditioned by an already existing arrangement of indigenous social hierarchies. Therefore, John Urry suggests that "there is no simple space, only different kinds of spaces, spatial relations or spatialisations," where space is not transparent, or neutral.[194] Urry evokes Lefebvre's theoretical structure for the examination of the making of space that is composed of three aspects: spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation. (Urry, 1995: 25) Spatial practices could be the concretization of zoning, for instance, through urban planning. Spatial practice involves the condition of possibility of the flow of different capitals and serves up to distinguish difference in physical locales. Representations of space include the forms of knowledge and practices that organize and represent space in particular forms. Spaces of representation involve the imaginative construction of collectively experienced sites: "These include symbolic differentiations and collective fantasies around space, the resistances to the dominant practices and resulting forms of individual and collective transgression." (Ibid: 25)

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[194] John Urry, *Consuming Places* (New York: Routledge), 1995: 65.

The combination of these three dimensions in the make-up of space assists us in gaining a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between the socialization of spatiality (symbolically, culturally, economically, etc.,) and the spatialization of social practices. Both the individual and society occupy space and thereby construct spatiality (such as field) in relation to other spatial conditions. However, we must not substantialize our conception of space as something indivisible and independent because this view will destroy the spatial interconnection within and without the individual and society. If substantiality exists inherently and independently how can we imagine the dependent arising of substance spatially in relation to other spatial things? If individual and society can be seen as a substance existing indivisibly and independently, then its directionality of left/right, up/down and inside/outside and its relatedness between left/right, up/down and inside/outside will be untenable, because directionality and relatedness implies relativity and divisibility. Therefore, the notion of field, social space, spatial practice, representations of space, spaces of representation, must be relational and processual rather than substantial. It is only in the non-substantial sense that the struggle for spatial resources, socio-spatial resources or spaces of representations can be sensible and examined. All these factors that compose social spaces are interconnected, in which they provide contexts for the formation of individual habitus and thereby the schemes of action, feeling, perception and appreciation. Each social space extends and limits the horizon of the action, feeling, perception and appreciation and the transaction of ideas, capital and other resources.

It may be insightful for us to think that spatiality along with many other social activities (culturally, symbolically, economically, politically, etc.), are only dependently arisen, or socially constructed, and hence do not have to bear the burden of representing an eternal "essence." Seeing the rise of spatial metaphors in contemporary sociological theory in light of Nagarjuna and other *Madhyamika* philosophers' insights, we may say that the emptiness of space, or spatiality, does not mean that nothing exists. The power-driven forces of our disposition in the social field, as implied by Foucault, Bourdieu and others, have dependently built layers and layers of conventional and structural spatiality that condition people's action and manifest the constitutive power among networks of social relation as Foucault indicates, and the unequal distribution of various kinds of resources in the different fields as Bourdieu articulates. Of course, just as the divisibility of things in space challenges the claims of its substantiality, social science should endeavor to peel off layer by layer, through a middle way examination, till emptiness, or *sunyata* is revealed. The

middle way perspective does not accept either the views of a non-existence or a full-existence of spatiality. The emptiness of space is only the cognitive and practical flip side of the dependent co-arising of spatiality. The human cognitive world and spatiality are conventionally created conditioned by our socio-practical experience, which itself is dependent upon the spatial condition.

6.2 The Linguistic Dimension of The Constitution of Society

> We are too much of slaves to words and logic—Daisetz Suzuki[195]

> Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language. While in fact language remains the master of man. M. Heidegger[196]

Language is a product as well as a constitutive part of humanity, and a source at once of meaning and of the uncertainties that call for interpretation. Language is deeply embedded in the constitution of society. To some extent, we even claim that language is anterior to the world it shapes; reality is a linguistic construct; thought is linguistics in form. Charles Taylor[197], in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I*, argues that it is the constitutive power of language which brings a person to maturity in knowing and accepting his cultural traits. Language in this sense is indispensable to understanding, and is beyond the spoken or written word and encompasses our vision and corporality. Therefore, the constitutive power of language is very pervasive in the human social life. Since language is the constitutive part of society, we cannot think about actions and institutions apart from it. Hence, we cannot escape the judgments and processes that are built-into the language that one use. This acknowledgement can facilitate us to shift our sociological emphasis away from the priority traditionally granted to "consciousness" or "social facts" in the discussion of the social world to an opening up of new insights into the "linguistic turn" in social thinking.

Whorf points out that language is "the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity" (1956:212)[198]. In other words, language imposes on

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[195] This quote is from p. 61 of *Introduction to Zen Buddhism including a manual of zen Buddhism.* 1973. Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. Causeway Books, New York.
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[197] Taylor, Charles. 1985. *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I.* Cambridge University Press. And see also "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
[198] Whorf, Benhamin Lee. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. And intro. John B. Carroll. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

experience. As a result of this shaping and imposing, the socio-historical dependent co-arising of various languages might lead to a relatively different ways of thinking. Whorf also tends to make a strong argument by saying that a language forces people to think in certain ways and constrains their worldview; it has "unbreakable bonds," (p. 256) and a "tyrannical hold," (Sapir, 1931: 128)[199] which prevents them from having certain thoughts. It seems that differences between languages lead to insurmountable incommensurability. This kind of linguistic relativism or determinism is not acceptable to the middle way perspective because it proposes that language would have to exist inherently and prior to thought. But if it were, there could be no plausible explanation of the origin of language. Reasoning it with *reductio ad absurdum*, we could easily detect that this viewpoint would be as if language sprang miraculously out of nothing. This is certainly untenable. However, Whorf's insight about the influence of language on thought is very helpful for us to understand the significance of language but we cannot accept a linguistic determinism or relativism. Undeniably, language provides and constitutes us with conceptual resources, but it does not determine how those resources are to be used in our relational-processual social world. Indeed, the vocabulary a language provides does influence thought. It is much more difficult to coin concepts than to use the ones already available.

Similarly, the social sciences cannot escape language, as Taylor writes, because social realities "cannot be identified in abstraction from the language." ("Interpretation and the Sciences of Man") Language makes many concepts available. Consider thoughts about the unobservables; for example, let's consider the concept like structuration. It is very hard to have thoughts abut structuration unless one has been introduced to the word "structuration" (or a translation or description of that word). This means that social realities are not directly and externally observable in the sense commonly evoked by the positivistic sociologists, who treat social facts as something existing independently out there. The fallacy of equalizing sociological concepts to social reality is similar to Nietzsche's critique of philosophical mythology's linguistic realism.

> [W]e do not only designate things with them [words and concepts], we think originally that through them we grasp the true in things. Through words and concepts we are still continually misled into imagining things as being simpler than they are, separate from one another, indivisible, each existing in and for itself.

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[199] Sapir,, Edward. 1931. "Conceptual Categories in Primitive Languages". Science 74: 578. Reprinted in D. Hymes (ed*.), Language in Culture and Society: a Reader in Linguistic and Anthropology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964: 128.

> A philosophical mythology lies concealed in language which breaks out again every moment, however careful one may be otherwise. (Nietzsche)[200]

It seems that language is the condition of possibility of our social existence through which we develop our self-identity and social relations. On the other hand, however, an over-attachment to a language's substantiality and its correspondence to reality will be problematic. No matter how well the language is initially handled, Nagarjuna teaches that if one has not yet been awakened, the predicament of the propensity of the human mind to become entangled by language has to be dealt with over and over again. Nagarjuna realized at a reflective level the difficulty of implementing Buddhist discourse in the medium of language, and the extent of attachment that would occur with even such subtle concepts as *sunyata*. Therefore he endeavors to avert people from falling into the slip of attaching to emptiness as a "something" or as "non-existent." He made his undertaking an exercise in consciousness that sought to free people from being limited in thought by the linguistic options of "this or that" and "existence or non-existence." Thus, while acknowledging the significance of language in human life we will still have to be cautious and not be entrapped by its substantializing tendency.

As Norbert Elias points out, the substantialist thinking corresponds closely to grammatical patterns deeply embedded in Western languages. An extended quotation regarding these modes of speech and thought is a typical pattern of this problem, as follows:

> Our languages are constructed in such a way that we can often only express constant movement or constant change in ways which imply that it has the character of an isolated object at rest, and then, almost as an afterthought, adding a verb which expresses the fact that the thing with this character is now changing. For example, standing by a river we see the perpetual flowing of the water. But to grasp it conceptually, and to communicate it to others, we do not think and say, "Look at the perpetual flowing of the water"; we say, "Look how fast the river is flowing." We say, "The wind is blowing," as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point in time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if a wind could exist which did not blow. This reduction of processes to static conditions, which we shall call "process-reduction" for short, appears

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[200] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Wanderer and his Shadow [1880], in *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 306.

self-explanatory to people who have grown up with such languages. (Elias 1970:
111-12)

At the heart of Elias's critique of sociological categories and conceptualization is his
notion of "process-reduction," by which he means the pervasive tendency to reduce
processes conceptually into states. It is seen as much in everyday language as in the
specialized discourses of the sciences. With this substantialism in language as a
self-identically enduring substratum, it also shapes the categories and modes of
thought in many dimensions. As Whitehead points out, it is the 'subject-predicate'
mode of thinking that distorts our understanding of the phenomenal world.

> Many philosophers, who in their explicit statements criticize the Aristotelian
> notion of "substance," yet implicitly throughout their discussions presuppose that
> the "subject-predicate' form of proposition embodies the finally adequate mode of
> statement about the actual world. The evil produced by the Aristotelian "primary
> substance" is exactly the habit of metaphysical emphasis upon the
> "subject-predicate" form of proposition. (Whitehead 1969, p.45)

Indeed, the Aristotelian "subject-predicate" mode of thinking, as a sort of
logocentrism, has become so habitual in the metaphysical thinking of the West, the
rejection of it is fundamentally difficult. This is why even until today many people
still believe that a language must include a referential element. If one spoke of a
reality by name of "social fact," one referred to an actual society that existed
independently of the language about it. If one described it in a particular way –as
reality *sui generis*, or organism—that also referred to real features of this society, and
one's description was understood to be true or false according to these features.

In sociology, the pressure towards "subject-predicate" mode of thinking is presented
in the dualistic thinking, such as the conceptual distinctions between the "actor" and
his/her activity, structures and processes, agency and structure, and between objects
and relationships. Such kind of dualistic epistemology is predicated on a rigid
separation and substantialization of subject and object that makes us unable to grasp
distinctive features of the human life and social activities, as well as the phenomena
of physical objects and natural worlds. Apparently, language is a specific and
powerful instance of the way in which human cultural construction constitutes the
social world and the individual self, making it impossible to grasp either adequately
from a completely epistemologist approach. After all, at the very center of the

problems of the substantialized sociological thinking is that the concepts of the "individual" and of "society" have this same quality of referring to the static and isolated external objects. Substantialists believed that this was true not only with respect to concepts like "individual" and "society" but also with respect to its various manifestations, such as gender, sex, nationality, ethnicity, history, tradition, and so on. One task of sociology, according to the substantialists, was to explain the relation between the objects of ordinary experience and these scientific objects. Another task was to explain the relation between the subjects of the experience of these objects and the objects themselves, as we have discussed in the methodology chapter.

Unlike Greek thought that fostered the subject-object separation and the development of logocentric metaphysics and identity thinking, the *sunyata* of the middle way perspective negates any linguistic categories that appear to be ultimately real, or substantial. In other words, the middle way perspective sees language with its imaginary construction (*vikalpa*) of the forms of subject and object as ontologically empty. The notion of *sunyata* as an emptiness of self-nature or essence (*Svabhava-sunyata*) is simultaneously a critique of ontological claims of absolute Being or Nonbeing, of epistemological claims for certainty, and the view that there is a language-reality isomorphism. The *Pratitya-samutpada* (dependent co-arising) opens up the relational context, temporal process, diversity and multiple possibilities within language, and its relation with the mind, the self and the social. In this section I shall undertake a reexamination of Nagarjuna's middle way with regard to its rejection of the two opposites in language use. Nagarjuna, in his *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, by using his *reductio ad absurdum* analysis, presents many apparently contradictory statements of Indian philosophy and challenges the adequacy of language to express our thoughts and beliefs. Nagarjuna's basic thrust is to deconstruct the delusion of permanence, stasis, or substance that ordinary people and many philosophers have superimposed on language, and to demonstrate the fundamental *sunyata* and dynamic process of dependent co-arising of language. In order to overcome the problem of linguistic substantialism, Nagarjuna negatively points out the problems of expressibility of language in the verse XVIII. 7.

What language expresses is nonexistent. The sphere of thought is nonexistent.

It is important to note that Nagarjuna's middle way thought is neither substantialist nor nihilistic. Thus, the nonexistent characteristic of language and the sphere of thought in this verse is not a nihilistic statement. It is rather a criticism of the realist

delusion concerning language and thought. Therefore, the actual implication in the first sentence of this verse is the worthlessness of linguistic realism. In opposition to realism, Nagarjuna does not think that language can be used to identify something substantial. Language in this sense is worthless and nonexistent. Moreover, if language is used for expressing some sphere of thought we might think that at least language conveys something real in our thought. Hence, Nagarjuna makes a further negation of the substantiality in thought in the second sentence. After all, if the idea in thought does not exist substantially, how can we possibly think about it or express it by means of language? Some phenomenologists, such as Hussserl, claim that language is merely the instrument for us to express our true thought. In other words, there is a transcendental ego whose consciousness is real that can express meaning thoroughly through language. Language is the place in which Husserl's demand for absolute truth can appear. It is, for him, the indispensable medium for absolute ideal objectivity, for truth itself. The problem in Husserl is that, he made the ego the fundamental of all knowledge and consciousness. This ego, as he understands it, is utterly abstract and formal, and every object, every content is freely constituted by it and rendered transparent. This notion is unacceptable from the middle way perspective. The fallacy of this kind of thought can be seen in our discussion of the methodological individualism and the interpretist sociology.

For an unreflective person, the sphere of the thought exists very strongly, yet from the middle way relational-processual perspective, we know that the inherent and independent existence of our thought is untenable. Unless our thought is empty of any unchanged substance, which is thought to exist inherently and independently, we can never be able to think dynamically and reflexively in a socio-historical process. By the same token, without the emptiness of language the dependent co-arising of language is not possible. They is why, in the context of Nagarjuna's middle way, these two sentences explain that the terms we use in our language do not refer to entities that exist independently of convention. (Garfield, 1995: 250) Sociologically speaking, everything we can express or consider depends upon some socially constructed convention and, therefore, is empty of inherent and independent existence.

Nagarjuna has been consistent throughout his work that everything is fundamentally empty. Even the concept of "empty" is empty, in order for us to prevent the possible attachment to emptiness in a nihilistic sense. Since we are immersed in our horizon or tradition, everything is nominal and true in relation to our convention. At the

conventional level, we should not stick to the assertion of the non-existence of things. From our middle way non-dualistic thinking, we still need to recognize the nominal and conventional world while at the same time not to forget its fundamental emptiness. In other words, language is not suitable for discussing ultimate truth. It is not possible for us to characterize the ultimate in any way. We are never able to transcend our convention to reach the ultimate standpoint for characterization (unless of course we have attained enlightenment, in which case we would no longer have the need to characterize things). Language expresses only nominal truths.

In order to utilize contradictions to illustrates the limitations of linguistic expression, Nagarjuna formulates following group of verses:

> Views that after cessation there is a limit, etc., And that it is permanent, etc.,
> Depend upon nirvana, the final limit, and the prior limit. (XXV.21)

> Since all existents are empty, What is finite or infinite? What is finite and infinite?
> What is neither finite nor infinite? (XXV. 22)

> What is identical and what is different? What is permanent and what is impermanent? What is both permanent and impermanent? What is neither? (XXV. 23)

Therefore, for Nagarjuna, that of which he speaks is ultimate in the sense that nothing underlies language, whereas it is constitutive of all things. It is neither subject nor object, neither concrete nor abstract, neither mental nor physical. It is neither one nor many, neither actual nor ideal. It is neither identical nor different, neither permanent nor impermanent. It empties all attributes or qualities whatsoever. "Thing-as-it-is" is indescribable in the sense that language formed to speak of its instances but cannot identify it. What can be said is that it is the relational process of nominal truth, which is fundamentally empty.

The meanings of words are not discoverable by finding the label on which a word is written and following the string to the object. The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: "We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign. (One of the reasons for this mistake is that

we are looking for a 'thing corresponding to a substantive.')"[201] As Robinson points out that Nagarjuna cannot agree to this kind of fallacy:

> These stanzas [of Nagarjuna's] refute the contention that since the Dharma talks about the passions (*klesas*) and misconceptions (*viparyasas*), these must be existent. This contention is a typical example of the 'doctrine of names' …, the belief that words must mean something and thus that if there is a word, there must be a thing as its counterpart. Nagarjuna denies this.[202]

For Nagarjuna, the linguistic distinctions drawn between *dharmas* are based not on objective fact but on the nominal-conventional distinction which is done by people, for example: "Prior to a characteristic of space there is not the slightest space. If it arose prior to the characteristic then it would, absurdly, arise without a characteristic."[203] What Nagarjuna means is that space does not exist at all before its mark (*laksana*). If it would exist before its mark, then one must falsely conclude that there would be something without a mark. In addition to Nagarjuna, we can also see this notion in the *Prajnaparamita* sutra: "A man may speak of space by way of definite definition, but of space no definite definition exists; …space is conventionally expressed, but is not conventionally expressed by way of defining or accomplishing any dharma whatever."

Therefore, there are no essences for the words to represent. We divide up the linguistic terms into "objects" according to conventionality. Once we have made the distinction, we are able to construct reality according to our social convention. However, while the conceptual distinction is designated, it doesn't mean that the world will stop its changing process. Thus, it is not plausible to slip back into the assumption of "essences" because there is no such thing existing inherently. In the middle way perspective, the notion of emptiness is used to express a condition in which there is no ontological substance in the process of becoming, and no reality independent of a language system.

Nevertheless, the disclosure of the reified and contradictory tendency of language doesn't mean to totally discard the use of language. In fact, it is conventionally unfeasible. From the viewpoint of social hermeneutics, the human agent and its speech and action can be understandable only as a participant in a linguistic

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[201] Wittgenstein, L., 1966. *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd edit. P. 5.
[202] Robinson, R. H., 1967. *Early Madhyamika in India and China*. Wisconsin.
[203] *Mulamahdyamakakarika*,V1.

community. Human being is the user of language and s/he can only be truly human and truly individual by virtue of an inter-relationally co-arisen and co-maintained language. Correspondingly, language itself cannot be understood entirely as a matter of reference and predication judged externally from the standpoint of observers who are themselves posited as initially pre- or extra linguistic. In this sense, we should consider language as inseparable and be a constitutive part of social persons and society, in which language not only manifests the inner being of selfness or cultures, but also gives scheme and sense of reality to them. Moreover, relationally and processually constituted agents are never in a purely external relationship to language. Therefore, the worlds in which we live are language worlds. The interconnectedness of human beings and language and the interconnectedness of every word with other words in the linguistic system, of which it is a part, reveal that the substantialist view of language and the world is unacceptable. We can say that any form of substantialism is exhausted by this interconnectedness, and thereby there is no way that words, or concepts, can refer to entities existing independently of the language.

Apparently, language is intertwined with our form of life, as Wittgenstein pointed out. That means the complex relationship between language and the form of life that goes with it mutually influences each other. When people say something, what they mean depends not only on what is said but also on the context in which it is said. Meaning, indication, significance are arisen co-dependently within the surroundings. Words, gestures and expressions exist elationally and processually within a language game, a culture, a form of life. Meaning is not an objective property of the things in the way its size and shape are, neither is it the thinking of our independent minds. Any objective thing and internal thinking must be interpreted through language within a form of life. Therefore, by encountering a relatively different form or way of life, we are at once within a different language of relatively different concepts, different rules and a different logic. In other words, linguisticality is at once sociality. Private language of one's own is thus not understandable and not feasible. To picture an individual solitary from birth is scarcely to imagine a form of life at all, but more like just imagining an organic lifeform. Language is relational, which involves rules agreed by dialogical partners. For example, rules of grammar express the requirement that we should express things "in this way" and "not that way" in order to be understandable to each other in communication. Mutual agreement is crucial to such practices. Without language, communication and social activities cannot be done.

'without language we could not communicate with one another' – but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate.' (Wittgenstein, 1953: 146-155)[204]

Could a solitary individual, then, engage in any practice, including linguistic ones? With whom could he or she agree? If we imagine of an individual who has been in solitude for a whole life long, then we have slashed away the relational process of instruction, interaction, correction and acceptance. In other words, the conditions in which a rule is designated, implemented, practiced and modified are missing. Even if the solitary individual is able to use language, this language must be "private language, that refers to private sensations. Such a private language by definition cannot be understood by anyone other than its user. This kind of a "private language" is no language at all, because language cannot survive outside of a socio-historical process. Without socio-historical conditions and rules, language used by a solitary individual will ultimately disappear and become incomprehensible. Therefore, private language in this sense is not possible.

In fact, Gadamer's hermeneutics illustrates greatly of how we are involved within language by focusing on what he terms "the linguisticality of experience." For Gadamer, language is the medium of human existence. But it is not merely an instrument we utilize after encountering the world or a mirror we hold up to reflect reality. In other words, Gadamer opposes linguistic instrumentalism and realism, and stresses that language is not its own sphere of life separated from other, but an integral part of human experience. "Reality does not happen behind the back of language…reality happens precisely within language."[205] Although our concept of reality is linguistic and nominal, this does not mean that language can determine reality or social arrangements. Because language no different from other phenomena, is also empty of its own essence and arises co-dependently in the social world. Language and social arising are thereby mutually embedded. Language, for Gadamer, is one of the constitutive elements of our categories of experiences in the social world, that is, there are no categories of experience apart from language from which we can reflect on that language process. The dialogical process in social relations through

[204] Wittgenstein, L. 1953. *Philosophical investigations.* (Anscombe, G.E.M., trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
[205] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics. Trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) p. 35.
[205] Ibid, p.31.

language is the bridge and medium of our understanding of the world. Gadamer emphasizes: "being which can be understood is language." Therefore, language is an intermediary of existence that allows for reflection upon itself in which we use as creative and interpretive beings. Due to such an intricate embeddedness of language and in our social existence, we as mutually embedded beings therefore relationally and processually constitute and embody our social self (our mind, bodily movement, unconscious, tacit knowledge, prejudice, *Erfarung*) and learn all previous experience and interpretation through language, which bears the mark of the past and projects this horizon to the future.

Through language, our relatedness with each other becomes possible. Dialogue, for instance, must be mediated by language. This is why Gadamer points out that "language has its true reality in dialogue"[206] and thereby "dialogue is what we are."[207] Language is even the condition of possibility of our understanding with one another, as Gadamer claims that "All understanding is rooted in *Miteinanderleben*-in our lives with, our interwovenness with, one another," which implicitly rules out applying the terms "understanding" to non-linguistic exchange.[208] Here we see the dependent co-relation between language and understanding. Thus, there is no understanding existing independently and inherently without a linguistically mediated dialogue and exchange.

According to the middle way perspective, a dichotomy between the non-linguistic and linguistic aimed at understanding is not plausible. The *telos* of language is not for its own self-sufficiency but for dialogue and understanding. Therefore, in harmony with Gadamer's view, it is necessary to connect language with forms of interaction which are meaningful, but which themselves do not manifest the substance of language but rather the dependent co-arising of it. The fundamental interconnectedness between the social interaction, language and human experience is thus indisputable.

From a more critical-reflective perspective, ordinary human beings are not completely awakened to the fundamental wisdom of emptiness and dependent co-arising. People still attach to desire and power and remain in much ignorance. Therefore, our social world is not only constituted by language, but also by power in different forms. Furthermore, in this case, language becomes the medium of power in

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[206] *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadame.* Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XXIV (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p .274.
[207] *The Enigma of Health* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 166.
[208] *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* p. 532.

relations between people. In other words, language often serves to legitimate relations of force and inequality. With its reifying tendency, language misrepresents or camouflages the inequalities at different levels of social practice. Therefore, a middle way examination must also address the power dimension embedded in the use of language. We should reflect not only upon the medium of language but on the actual conditions of force and inequality on which a significant part of language is based. A middle way reflection must be able to examine upon the transmitted meaning of language and expose its attachment regarding relations of power, thus changing the cultural tradition or social field, which causes the suffering of people through linguistic mediation. Just like our attempt to overcome the problem of substantialism in the social sciences, we also need to deconstruct the unnecessary interconnectedness between power and language because this is another manifestation of substantialism in terms of social practice, which reinforces the unequal distribution of social resources and justifies the hierarchical relations of different strata of social relations. After all, the limit of linguistic expression can be used as a means of exploitation or mass deception. The bearers of language might also become the bearers of domination. The middle way perspective must therefore demystify much of what had previously passed unexamined in the construction of linguistic terms, narratives, texts or discourses. The power relation between interpreter and interpreted, colonizer and colonized, for instance, may also be constituted through language in which the dominated are usually silent or absent from the linguistically mediated knowledge-constitution.

The language-power duality is an actual dimension of the social world but it doesn't mean that it is justifiable or substantially real. No matter how well language is initially gripped, Nagarjuna teaches that if one has not yet been awakened, the problem of the tendency of the human mind and human relations to become entrapped by language has to be dealt with over and over again. If this problem is not continually addressed in a fully critical-reflective manner, even the most profound of the Buddhist teachings or sociological investigations will be deadened, or become the means of domination. Since language itself and therefore logic in the social end seem to presuppose adeluded reality and power relation, even the negation of language, being an assertion in itself, cannot escape the threat of self-contradiction. Nagarjuna realizes at such a profound level that even though language is significant to how we are constituted, it is still undeniable that through the medium of language our view of reality is often distorted. Different degrees of attachment to language could occur even with such subtle concepts as freedom, equality, or *sunyata*. Therefore he

endeavored to prevent people from falling into the fallacy of attaching to language and its referent as "something" or as "no-thing." He made his middle way examination an exercise that sought to free us from being limited in thought by the linguistic options of "this or that" and "existence or non-existence." His neither-nor way of thinking demonstrates the overcoming of linguistic substantialism and thereby poses an opportunity to reflect upon the unequal power relations within the social world mediated by language.

At the level of self-constitution, Mead stresses the importance of language in its process. Mind and the self are seen as the emergent from the interaction of the human organism and its social environment. Within this dual structure the gap between impulse and reason is bridged by the use of language. By mastering language, the self sets up assumptions as to his or her role in life, and self and consciousness-of-self emerges. Of the psychological means that mediate our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, language is seen to be the most important. Language is initially used in interaction between adult and child as a means of communication. Gradually it is internalized into a means of the child's own thinking and control of his or her own activity. The emergence of self-awareness and the voluntary control of our actions are enabled and mediated significantly by language. With young children parents act to regulate their behavior, as the child develops greater awareness of what is acceptable or unacceptable by taking the role of others. Throughout this process, eventually, the child will be able to talk to his or herself about what ought or ought not to be. For the child to become responsible for his or her deeds, self-awareness is necessary. Language is the constitutive of this self-awareness and consequently, voluntary control of our actions. The structure of the language one habitually uses influences the way we perceive the world. As Vygotsky argues:

> In growing up within linguistically structured and sustained relationships 'the child begins to perceive the world not only through its eyes but also through its speech. And later it is not just seeing but acting that becomes informed by words'. (Vygotsky, 1978: 32)[209]

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[209] Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: the Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, and E. Souberman (Eds.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Without a doubt, it is through language that we construct conventional reality. By using socially constructed verbal designations, we define, shape, and experience. Without the language to think, converse, experience and understand our lifeworld would be an unworkable affair. Language expands our mode of experience and horizon, but also limits us as we can only fully experience or understand those things that we have the words for, which simultaneously carries our pre-understanding or prejudice. Language provides the scheme through which we perceive, experience and act. Since language constructs reality, so symbolization constitutes objects. As pointed out by Mead:

> Symbolisation constitutes objects not conceptualised before, objects which would not exist except for the context of social relationships wherein symbolisation occurs. Language does not simply symbolise a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of the situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created. (Mead, 1934: 78)[210]

Sociologically speaking, what we know about the realities are mere concepts, and they are not realities in any substantialist sense. It would be absurd to maintain the existence of social realities, but it would be more so to maintain their fixity and their non-dynamic existence. This is actually the death of its changing activities. This is therefore no different from proclaiming its non-existence. Social worlds exist relationally and processually which have no inherent and independent existence. Thus, the sociological knowledge about them is mere concepts, and they are not realities in any substantialist sense. Sociological knowledge should remain conceptually unfinished or undecided about its being social realities. Therefore, our critique of sociological-realist conceptualization must be non-dualistic, non-substantialist and non-nihilistic. This is particularly relevant to the task of handling research findings in building the middle way perspective of a long-term social dependent co-arising. For example, what is signified by the concept "bourgeoisie" changes very significantly with the development of the social stratum over a period of several centuries; what it was meant in the nineteenth century is somewhat very different from what it was in the eleventh, yet the two meanings are linked by a long continuum of changes. Therefore, the concept has a shifting meaning in the context throughout the socio-historical process. We can therefore say that only that which has no history is definable; only that which has no process is conceptually graspable. Actually, this

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[210] Mead, G.H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*.

insight has been illustrated in many parts of this dissertation, such as the concepts of "self," "society," "space," "time" and even "language" itself.

The knowledge of the world is mediated through language by the categorization and conceptualization of perceptual data and their semantic articulation. Thus, the linguistic description of the world has no absolute truth-value. The middle way perspective is therefore a tendency to avoid the use of reified concepts and thereby to place more attention on the relational and processual characteristic of the social world. A study of this kind does not seek to define the universal, static, features of the concept. Its asserted essence is thereby emptied, but is certainly not empty as a "non-being" against the empirical dependent co-arising of self and society mediated by language across a time-space span.

6.3 The Constitution of the Self and the Society- Beyond the Individual-Social Antinomy

The Constitution of the Self

> What is the elimination of sickness? It is the elimination of egoism and possessiveness. What is the elimination of egoism and possessiveness? It is the freedom from dualism. What is freedom from dualism? It is the absence of involvement with either the external or the internal. What is absence of involvement with either external or internal? It is nondeviation, nonfluctuation, and non-distraction from equanimity. What is equanimity? It is the equality of everything from self to liberation. Why? Because both self and liberation are void. How can both be void? As verbal designations they are both void, and neither is established in reality. Therefore one who sees such equality makes no difference between sickness and voidness; his sickness is itself voidness, and that sickness as voidness is itself void.[211]

This is the Vimalakirti sutra's message for us to transcend the dualism of absolute existence and absolute non-existence. The ultimate truth of non-duality, emptiness and dependent co-arising is the path to free us from the suffering of attachment and to attain enlightenment. In the first part of this statement it indicates that suffering arises due to egoism (self-grasping) and its possessiveness (grasping that which I believe

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[211] Thurman, Robert, tr., 1981. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture.* University Park, Pa and London: Pennsylvania State University Press. P. 45.

to be mine). To overcome this we need to transcend the dualism of "involvement with the external and the internal", that is, the subject/object dualism, or the conviction in an enduring and separate self on the one hand, and the corresponding belief in the enduring and separate objects on the other. The reason why we have this attachment, or ignorance, is because of our lack of insight into emptiness and dependent co-arising. Here Vimalakirti introduces a crucial idea in the text, one that stretches the Buddha's practical teaching of the middle way between opposites to move beyond all antinomies.

Thus, inherent existence should not be wrongly applied to the mind-body complex; we must not take our conditioned existence as unconditioned and self-existent. According to the middle way perspective, both subjective and objective selves are empty without inherent and independent substance. This mirrors what we have discussed in Mead's notion of the dialectic between the "I" and "Me." None of them is substantial, they are rather nominal convention, or verbal designations. The concepts of "I" and "Me" are nominal and arise co-dependently. Therefore, the verbal designations of both the subjective self (I) and objective self (me, or society) are dualisms which have no essence and should be transcended. Inspired by this, we should therefore confront and deconstruct any sociological dichotomies concerning the reified antinomy between the self and society.

In chapter XVIII of *Mulamadhyamikakarika*, entitled "Examination of Self and Entities," Nagarjuna addresses the untenability of the concept of a permanent soul, or atman, as follows:

1. If the self were the aggregates, it would have arising and ceasing (as properties). If it were different from the aggregates, it would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.

2. If there were no self, where would the self's (properties) be? From the pacification the self and what belongs to it, one abstains from grasping onto "I" and "mine."

3. One who does not grasp onto "I" and "mine," that one does not exist. One who does not grasp onto "I" and "mine," he does not perceive.

4. When views of "I" and "mine" are extinguished, whether with respect to the internal or external, the appropriator ceases. This having ceased, birth ceases.

5. Action and misery having ceased, there is nirvana. Action and misery come from conceptual thought. This comes from mental fabrication. Fabrication ceases through emptiness.

"If there is an inherently existent self, it must either be identified to or different from the aggregates." (Garfield, 1995: 245)   For Nagarjuna, the self is neither identical with nor different from its constituent aggregates. If it were identical, then this would deny the relative existence of the self which is not reducible to our name, body, and consciousness or unconscious. How can one take the self to be identical to some of the aggregates or to the whole collection of the aggregates? If it were different from the aggregates, then it could not have shared characteristics of, or relation with them; e.g. self would become unknowable and the activities of body or consciousness becomes irrelevant to the activities of the self. "It would be a bit bizarre to suggest that whatever happens to my mind, body, memory, sensory experience, and so forth, is independent of what happens to me." (Garfield, 1995: 246) Therefore, the self is non-inherent in any sense. Neither can the self have any characteristics of its own nor can it have possessions. The problem about the possessor of the aggregates and properties of the self occurs only given that one conceives of them as properties and aggregates that are something of substantial. We must then be cautious of not constructing the substantial notions of "I", "me" and "mine." "When one stops grasping the aggregates and the self as independent entities or as the possessions of independent entities, one recognizes one's own lack of inherent existence. One also recognizes the lack of inherent existence of the aggregates, as in the case of perception." (Garfield, 1995: 247) This is not to say that one does not exist conventionally. This is nihilistic and unacceptable. Rather, one should understand one's existence and that of other entities in the context of emptiness and dependent co-arising and, hence, to regard existence as a necessarily relational process.

In addition, Nagarjuna also, from chapter VIII to XI, examines the self as the agent which appears to underlie or precede these phenomena. He first examines the nature of agent and its action, the preexistent self and then the relation between the self's existence and its temporal states and finally the prior and posterior extremes of the self's existence. Chapter VIII is presented as follows:

1. This existent agent does not perform an existent action. Nor does some nonexistent agent perform some nonexistent action.

2. An existent entity has no activity. There would also be action without an agent. An existent entity has no activity. There would also be agent without action.

3. If a nonexistent agent were to perform a nonexistent action, then the action would be without a cause and the agent would be without a cause.

4. Without a cause, the effect and its cause will not occur. Without this, activity and agent and action are not possible.

5. If activity, etc., are not possible, entities and nonentities are not possible. If there are neither entities nor nonentities, effects cannot arise from them.

6. If there are no effects, liberation and paths will not exist. So all activity would be without purpose.

7. An existent and nonexistent agent does not perform an existent and nonexistent action. Existence and nonexistence cannot pertain to the same thing. For how could they exist together?

8. An actual agent does not perform a nonfactual action. Nor by a nonfactual one is an actual one performed. From this, all of those errors would follow.

9. An existent agent does not perform an action that is unreal or both real and unreal as we have already agreed.

10. A nonexistent agent does not perform an action that is unreal or both real and unreal as we have already agreed.

11. An existent and nonexistent agent does not perform an action that is unreal or both real and unreal as we have agreed.

12. Action depends upon the agent. The agent itself depends on action. One cannot see any way to establish them differently.

13. From this elimination of agent and action, one should elucidate appropriation in the same way. Through action and agent all remaining things should be understood.

Through "Examination of Agent and Action," Nagarjuna "announces that, with respect to agency and action as well, he will steer a middle course between inherent existence and a complete nonexistence. Neither action nor agent will come out to be an inherently existing entity. Nor will either end up being completely nonexistent." (Garfield, 1995: 179) Nagarjuna points out that it is impossible to say that there is a really existent agent who performs a really existent action. A really existent actor must be an inherent and independent existence which implies immutability, because if the actor changes it will destroy its inherent and independent existence as an entity. For safeguarding the inherent and independent actor, there must be an immutable and impassable dichotomy between the essence of the actor and their movement of action. However, since action stands for the changing motions of the actor, then how can the former be separable from the latter and have its own real existence? On the other hand, without action how can an actor really exist? Here, Nagarjuna illustrates the incoherence of a position that tries both to posit inherently existent, independent entities and then to get them to interact.

Of course, Nagarjuna does not mean to say that the actor and action are non-existent. Otherwise, the action will be causeless and there will be no justification for calling the agent an agent. Ethically speaking, the actor in turn won't be able to act in order to attain enlightenment. The relation between agent and action are, according to the middle way perspective, nothing more than dependent co-arising, for neither of the two can have either a real or an unreal existence. They all depend upon conditions and have no self-nature. "If we think of them as dependent, we can make perfectly good sense of agent, activity and action in interrelation." (Garfield, 1995: 179) Therefore, agent and action are interdependent. Neither one of them is causally or ontologically prior to or independent of the other. We cannot think of any other way of establishing them.

In the next part, "Examination of the Prior Entity," Nagarjuna examines and refutes the speculative approach of his opponents. They try to establish the reality of the

agent through logical induction. To them, if there were the fact of perception, then the approach that there is the entity of a perceiver would hold. To those challengers, it is determined that, prior to perceptions, given perceiver must exist. But "How is an entity existing prior to seeing, hearing, etc., and the felt, etc., itself known?" (*karika*, XI 3) Such a prior subject being purely substantive will not then be able to provide any direct evidence for its own existence because evidence of it would require that it could be an object seen, heard or felt by seeing, hearing and feeling. It is like saying that "I am, therefore I think, see, hear and feel," but since the "I" exists prior to thinking, seeing, hearing and feeling then there must be a moment of the "I" which does not think, see, hear and feel. This is absurd. If such a prior entity were posited, then perceptions would exist after and independent of the "I," which is incongruous too. This verse indicates the impossibility of independence specifically of the perceiver and perceiving. It also points to the impossibility of the subject's existence independent of any of its experiences by virtue of existing prior to them. The consequence of this is profound and broad. "For whomever prior to, simultaneous with, or after seeing, etc., there is nothing, for such a one, assertions like 'it exists' or 'it does not exist'—such conceptions will cease." (*karika*, IX 12) In other words, there is no such person who exists prior to, simultaneous with, or posterior to perception. And therefore neither is the experience itself substantial.

The positing of an absolute "I" as independent of its action, characteristic or possession and surrounding will make the individual forever divided from and in conflict with the world or separated from any knowledge. Since dichotomy is implied as absolute in this thought, their relation and process is then inconceivable and there is no hope for resolution. If "I" inherently exists, then there is an absolute division between that which is "I" and that which is "not-I," such as "me," "mine" and "the social self." There is then no dependence of one upon the other. Each would be independent and self-existent. But without dependent co-arising, that is, interrelationships, how can "I" be in any way related to "not-I"? How can I construct or be constructed by the world? If I exist inherently and independently, I am absolutely isolated and divided from the world with no possibility of experiencing it or affecting it. Sociologically speaking, this is simply unacceptable.

Through a middle way examination, we can detect the fallacy of taking the relational-processual self as an absolute existent. We therefore are able to reveal the emptiness, the relative and conditioned nature of the self. Sociologically, we take the relative and conditioned nature of the self as a social construction. The self thus arises

dependently upon it. We think, see, hear and feel as a social self. We have then arrived at the truth with respect to the conventional world: that self is empty of inherent and independent existence. However, having denied the inherent and independent existence of the self, we still need to be aware of not clinging to this denial as absolute. In other words, we cannot assert an inherent non-existence. We can only recognize a socially related self.

With Mead's relational-processual view of the constitution of the self, Elias' figurational, or processual view of sociogensis and psychogensis, Bourdieu's methodological relationalism and Gadamer's insight of *Erfahrung* and the fusion of horizons, we therefore claim that sociological conceptualization of the self and society must not be presupposed as an unchanged and independent entity. From our discussion of temporality and spatiality, we should realize that things are impermanent in continual flux and interdependent with each other. Through our discussions of linguisticality we must understand that all dualistic dichotomies and categories are simply nominal differentiations and thereby not essential in themselves.

Actually, the middle way notion of a non-substantial, non-nihilistic, relational, processual, temporal, dynamic self has its counterpart in terms of Nietzsche's positive self-overcoming of nihilism through the affirmation of becoming. For Nietzsche, our personal constitution is not static. We are growing and diminishing, therefore changing constantly. Creation and destruction are inbuilt around us. Whereby utilizing those aspects over which we exert control, we reinterpret ourselves. Nietzsche's idea in this sense is very compatible to the Buddhist notion of the self. The nature of human being, as elaborated by Nietzsche, cannot simply be classified as either this or that, either good or bad. Each person has a particular processual history, and thus we, as a self, cannot be substantially defined. In harmony with the Buddhist notion, Nietzsche indicates that we are constantly changing, constantly transcending into something new. We are not in any sense definable by some essential quality, characteristic or possessions. Contrary to what ordinary people often think, for him, our lives are both self-created and self-generated.

However, the problem with Nietzsche's processual self is that, in comparison with Buddhism, it lacks a relational dimension. Nietzsche believed that the good life is to call for a heightened sense of individuality, of one's radical separation from the herd, of one's final responsibility to one's own creativity. Of course, Nietzsche is not simply saying that we should do what we like. He believed that this sort of

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self-creation requires immense spiritual and emotional discipline. Nietzsche is not saying everyone should simply do as they please, Nietzsche is speaking of a much higher call to a solitary life, a life lived with the most intense but personal joy, suffering, insight, courage, and imaginative discipline. It is here that the middle way perspective finds its subtle difference. Even though self-overcoming process tends to de-reify the self, but Buddhist does not practice self-overcoming simply for the sake of personal gains. The acknowledgement of our interconnectedness and relatedness, and co-responsibility with others is the ultimate goal of Buddhist self-overcoming.

The set of practices in which the West concerns the constitution of the self—and that which Foucault, following Nietzsche's genealogical investigations, calls technologies of the self, was formed through discursive formation (especially in modern sciences concerning the mind, body and their movement) and institutional practice (the mobilization and deployment of power over body). Inspired by Heidegger, his criticism of our current technological understanding of being, Foucault explored the shifting patterns of power within a society and the ways in which power relates to the self. He investigated the changing rules governing the movement and judgment of our body at different times in history. Foucault's observations developed through three stages. First, in Madness and Civilization[212], he traced how, in the Western world, madness—which was once thought to be divinely inspired—came to be thought of as a mental illness. He contrasted the subordinated image with the creative force of madness that Western societies have traditionally repressed. In this book he attempted to expose the dividing practice concerning the separation and categorization of persons in Western societies. Foucault's last period was inaugurated by the publication of Discipline and Punish in 1975.[213] It ostensibly questions whether imprisonment is a more humane punishment than torture, but it is more generally concerned with the way society orders individuals by training their bodies. For example, basic training may discipline and prepare a person to be a good worker. Foucault's last three books—*History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (1976), *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), and *The Care of the Self* (1984)—are parts of an unfinished history of sexuality. In these books, Foucault follows the stages by which

[212] Michel Foucault, 1988. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* NY: Vintage.
[213] Michel Foucault, 1995. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* NY: Vintage Books. Alan Sheridan trans.

people in Western societies have come to understand themselves as sexual beings, and relates the sexual self-concept to the moral and ethical life of the individual.[214]

Foucault's genealogical investigation of Western discourse concerning self-constitution illustrates a good demonstration of the non-substantiality of the human body and mind. He endeavored to de-reify the essentialism of body and mind of the self in Western history. In other words, the contingency of history discloses the emptiness and dependent co-arising of the technique of self-constitution. This is also why he recognizes the plasticity and changeability of human bodily practices. He not only studies how everyday practices enabled people to define their identities and systematize knowledge, he, inspired by Nietzsche, also implies a self-inventing alternative to the self-discovering regime. Only if the self can empty itself of the reified property can the self attain the aesthetics of existence. In Foucault's work, experiences of oneself are not a given, but are constituted in power relations and true-and-false games. In the interplay of truths and power relations, the individual constitutes a certain relationship to him/herself. In his aesthetics of existence, he invited the individual to problematize the relationship with the self by using "self-techniques" to transform him/herself into a work of art.

As Heidegger had confirmed: "A person is not a thing, not a substance, not an object"[215], Foucault's notion of the constitution the self, through his genealogical and archaeological investigation, is also non-substantial, non-objectifiable, relational and processual which is very much similar to the contemplation and practice in Buddhism. Foucault was quite familiar with the practice of Zen Buddhism; he even visited Japanese Zen temples several times. However, similar to the problem of Nietzsche, Foucault, while de-reifying the self-essence, still attached too much to "the care of the self." He seldom addresses the dialectical relation between the self, as a moral agent, and its social responsibility. Even though self-invention, or its aesthetics of existence, tends to de-reify our self-attachment, but again from the Buddhist viewpoint it should not be a practice of self-invention simply for personal gains. The acknowledgement of our mutual embeddedness and relatedness, and co-responsibility with others is the

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[214] Michel Foucault, 1978 [French, 1976]. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction,* translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York.   1985 [1984], The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol. II, translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York. 1986 [1984], The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Vol. III, translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York.

[215] (2) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (1927) trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, (NY: Harper & Row, 1962) p.72.

ultimate goal of Buddhist self-overcoming. Here, a subtle attachment of Foucault's notion of the self is detected.

Sociologically speaking, self is always related to a broader society, in terms not only of ontological sense but also ethical. Self-making process is thereby inseparable from our mutual embeddedness with other people, other conditions within society. Therefore, any kind of antinomy between the self and society is fundamentally problematic. In this point, I agree with Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu, in saying that the self is not an isolated I or, a Cartesian subject, but a relation of *Erfahrung* and fusion of horizons, I and Me, psychogenesis and sociogenesis, mental structure and social structure.

The relational-processual perspective and non-dualistic, non-substantial notion of society and self has also been illustrated by Piaget:

> There are no more such things as societies qua beings than there are isolated individuals. There are only relations .... and the combinations formed by them, always incomplete, cannot be taken as permanent substances (Piaget, 1932, p. 360).[216]

> .. there is no longer any need to choose between the primacy of the social or that of the intellect: collective intellect is the social equilibrium resulting from the interplay of the operations that enter into all cooperation (Piaget, 1970, p. 114)[217]

Moreover, Dewey also tries to elaborate the notion that there is an intimate interrelation between the environment that human beings inhabit and the human psychological processes. Therefore there is no inner essence within the individual. He states:

> ... we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which is in large measure what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities. When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something that goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are

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[216] Piaget, J.(1932) *The moral judgment of the child*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[217] Piaget, J. (1970) *Structuralism*. New York: Basic Books.

sources outside an individual which give rise to experience (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 39).[218]

Cooley was one of the very first to systematically develop the notion of a social self in American sociology. Against the Cartesian reliance upon the notion of a decontextualized and disengaged subject, pioneered by post-17th century science and the epistemology to which it helped give rise, Cooley opposes seeing the individual as an independent unit. Nor did he see group as the sum total of parts or the collective consciousness of the group as having primacy over individuals. Rather, Cooley believes that society and the individual are to be understood as "collective" and "distributive" aspects of the same phenomenon, as the two sides of the same coin. Cooley therefore develops a systematic critique of all theories that regard society and the individual as opposing or antithetical entities. Moreover, against Freudians, Cooley does not see the individual and society as being in conflict. He in turn asserts: "I think, then that the antithesis, society *versus* individual, is false and hollow whenever used as a general or philosophical statement of human relations." (1964, 41-42)[219] Cooley's theory of the "looking-glass self" notes the reflexive notion of the social self according to which a person's self-image depends on the image that other members of society have of him. In other words, individuals can never be insulated from their social relations.

> We cannot realize ourselves except in so far as we can recognize the other in his relationship to us. It is as he takes the attitude of the other that the individual is able to realize himself as a self.
>
> There are various ways in which we can realize that self. Since it is a social self, it is a self that is realized in its relationship to others. It must be recognized by others to have the very values that we want to have belonged to it. (Mead, 1962 [1934] p.194)

Inspired by Cooley and American pragmatism of his time, Mead also rejects the Cartesian idea of a substantial ego, which requires nothing than itself in order to exist, and maintains that the self is always a social self which is intersubjectively constituted by its relationships to others in a community. Mead's concept of the social self as an "I-Me" dialectic deconstructs the Cartesian subject into a web of social interweaving.

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[218] Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.
[219] Cooley, C.H. 1964. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Schocken.

For Mead, the self, mind, and consciousness are all a function of sociality, and thus have a relational-processual spread in both space and time. Concurrently, Whitehead's objective in "Process and Reality"[220] tried to formulate a view based on an ontology of becoming process, in which he uses part of his vision of "reality as social process" to elaborate a non-substantive view of personal identity. This is somewhat close to what the middle way perspective would like to propose.

This continuous contingency of the self, demonstrated by the preceding thinkers, obviates the need to posit a substantial and transcendently enduring mind. Since the conditions of the individual co-arises together, and these conditions account for the entire conditioned nature of the individual, then there is no need to posit an extraneous metaphysical entity like the self. The perceived existence and continuity of the individual is likewise explained without recourse to self-nature (*atman*). Thus, the debate of free will versus determinism can be overcome. There can be no "free" will, for no element of existence is independent. All things are dependent upon other things, and so is the will. This does not mean that the human world is bound by inexorable determinism. We still have situated, or conditioned "free action," for it is one's will in the form of volitional dispositions (or habitus) which both caused the existence of the conditions of action in the relatively prior place and will subsequently bring about the structural property of the consequences of action, which would become the medium of our further actions. Both actional will and structural conditions are operative in the middle way perspective as co-dependent arising, which should not to be confused with the compatibility of two in the sense of substantialism. In other words, neither is ultimately real, but in the context of the social construction of reality, both are conventionally real.

No self is eternal, for, when a self's conditioning factors changes, then it will follow through. Neither is the self destined to face destruction in nihilistic sense, for as contingent upon other conditions the self still relatively durable. Emptiness of the self is synonymous to the co-dependent origination of the self. So according to the middle way tradition it is always suggested that one should see things in terms of s*unyata* and start the observation with a non-substantitive view.

The self is traditionally held to be synonymous with individual identity and autonomy, while the mind is widely held to be a necessary basis of cognition and volition, and

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[220] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (1929; rprt.; New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 4.

the body is held to be a constant essence. However the middle way perspective and other relational-processual thinkers all hold that the notions of an inherent, independent, subsisting, self-identical person are delusory. Noting the processual nature of each of the aggregates (*skandhas*) of our body and mind, they conclude that there is no adequate justification for the common inference that these constantly changing phenomena are just changing appearances of a persistent, independently subsisting self or ego. The self is empty of a substantial and autonomous existence. Thus, the self is also called "empty-self"—the self without self-entity. Empty-self does not mean that there is nothing called a self at all—only nihilists would say so. Empty-self here opens up the potentiality of seeing self as an ongoing emerging acting individual, which is inseparable from its social dependent co-arising. This is an important realization. When we realize this, then we realize emptiness and the dependent co-arising of the self at the same time. We realize also, egolessness—no substantial ego, no fixed self. So therefore, ego-grasping and self-grasping assumptions in the social sciences are views of distortion. However, by the same token, ego-negation and self-renunciation is also a vision of delusion.

From the middle way perspective, there is no I, no me, no self, no inherent existent self, no independent existent self. This realization is called the wisdom of empty-self. The true nature of self is empty with no inherent existence, no independent existence. This selflessness of the middle way perspective, its denial of any substantial self as a receptacle for whatever happens in an individual's experience, is the necessary counterpart of dependent co-arising. And this realization is very important for the social sciences to study the individual as a social self in the context of specific time-space frames. In other words, the process of the shaping of individual self (its body and mind) and the process of the constitution of the social are mutually embedded.

The Constitution of the Social

What is the constitution of the social? Does it have causal priority over the self? Is there a substance called "the social" to sociology? To many sociologists, the answer is positive whereby they try to identify some essential characteristics that could enable practitioners to have a unitary and coherent presumption to start with. However, the actual picture of sociology as a discipline is more heterogeneous, or pluralistic. Since various theories (such as the theories we have mentioned) define the concept of "the social" differently, one can hardly think of a singular, static, inherently and

independently existent own-being called "society" through which social theory can constitute itself as the unified discourse. It seems like that the theorization of "the social" in the history of sociology is still in a changing process, through which social theories have, at different times and in different contexts, been shaped variously.

John Urry contends that it is such a "myth" to believe that "there is an essence to sociology, that it has some essential characteristics that gives it and its practitioners a unity, coherence and common tradition."[221] Indeed, in the history of sociology, we can find that different authors, schools or methodological presuppositions imagine "society" differently. Although most of them imagine "the social" essentially and claim its exclusivity, seeing it from above all of them, we find it difficult to conclude an homogeneous, unitary and coherent scientific object called "the social," around which social theory can constitute itself as a unified discourse. In other words, if the condition of possibility of the formation of social theory relies upon the nature of its object of investigation—the social, then it is hard to believe that various social theories have captured the unitary essence of "the social." It is even more difficult to believe that there are multiple essences of society that different theorists have identified as different essences, because according to Nagarjuna, the coexistence of different essences without any interrelation is self-contradictory and thereby unacceptable. The middle way perspective proposes that no self-nature (own being, essence) of beings occurs in the conditions of beings. Since self-nature is not present, other nature does not occur either. Sociologically speaking, the essence of social entities is not present in the conditions otherwise there will be no dynamic relation and process possible. If there is no essence of social entities, there can be no otherness-essence of social entities either. Social entities are neither self-caused nor do they come to be through the power of other entities. That is, there is no causation when causation is thought of as substantial. We sense that different sociological schools espouse different substantialist positions, and each of them has something "real" to say for itself. They try to presuppose a sense of reality involving causal powers as essential properties of the social. According to the middle way method of *reductio ad absurdum,* we must deconstruct substantialist sociology concerning specifically the constitution of the social by means of emptiness, dependent co-arising and verbal designation. In short, in the complex arising of various social conditions we can find no self-existence of social entities. Where self-existence is deficient, we should also leave no room for otherness-essence that determines the existence of the

[221] John Urry, 1995. "Sociology as a Parasite. Some Vices and Virtues". In *Comsuming Places*. London: Routledge, pp. 33-45.

social. Since social reality has no essence, how can it become the causal precedence of the self?

Although we accept neither that there is a single generally acknowledged exemplar from which the concept of "the social" is derived, nor that there are essentially different views of "the social" co-existing without any mutual influence and change, we cannot acknowledge the nihilistic and relativist assertions by saying that "the social" is non-existent, or the different socials are unrelated. "The social" is a nominal term conceived to be a skillful means to help us better understands the social world surrounding us. In other words, it should be seen as an appraisive term which enables us to examine the relational-processual dynamics of a specific society. The concepts in sociology, such as rationalization, bureaucracy, class, social facts, anomie, alienation, iron cage, are not substantial but nominal as heuristic devices, which facilitate us to understand better the various conditions, changes and consequences of social phenomena. Furthermore, sociological concepts should be contingently adjustable to the observation of the changing configuration of the social reality at different times and in different circumstances. In other words, what is "the social" is empty of essence, is open to change conditionally. Therefore, without essence, society is variously describable. The plurality of social theories might be attributed to the difference of social imaginaries among different schools whereby their epistemic positions lead to multitudinous ways of specifying "the social". However, that is not the whole story. Besides epistemological variety within the discipline of sociology, the wondrous constitution of "the social" is another crucial source of the theoretical variations in sociology. Therefore, it is necessary, in addition to a theoretical and epistemological examination, to conduct an ontological reflection on the constitution of "the social."

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour points that the non-duality and interrelationship between the human and non-human worlds, between the world of nature and things, and the world of human beings and society is the actual situation of the ontological world. [222] His work is a great manifestation of the relational-processual arising of the world. In his observation, he tackles a practical logic in the social world, in which things are actually a mixture of politics, science, culture, human beings, material things, religion, economy and so forth. However, in modern theoretical world, we conceptualize things as purely discrete entities. Above

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[222] Latour, Bruno. 1993 (1991). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

all, we divide science and the knowledge of nature and things from politics, society and the realm of human beings. What intrigues me most is that, Latour detects the "work of purification" which establishes and maintains the dichotomy between non-humans and nature on the one hand, and human, culture, society and politics on the other, while in actual practice things are more mutually embedded in the creation of hybrids, networks, and collectives. The unintended consequence of the "work of purification" is the production of a multitude of hybrids, which illustrates the relational-processual result of the substantial attempts.

Sociologically speaking, it is also true that there is a tendency of the "work of purification" in terms of scientific logic regarding the reality of "the social" engaged by various sociological theories. They implicitly or explicitly reinforce the fixed distinction between the "logic of science" and the "logic of practice." That is why the social world is perceived by certain sociological theories as something purely essential, unitary and homogeneous. However, such kind of differentiation and purification is the result of one basic false assumption. That is that a thing is only either this or that in origin.

Ironically, the dissimilarity between different theories rightly indicates the actual non-essential, non-unitary and heterogeneous social world. Not only that, it also discloses the changeability, relatedness and processuality of the theoretical world, which actually implicates the mutual embeddedness and hybridization between the "logic of science" and the "logic of practice." Therefore, the intended result of the work of purification is impossible because everything has a fusion of political, natural, social and historic components which may be downplayed, but may certainly not be nonexistent.

By refuting the relational existence of mutual embeddednesses and hybridizations and insisting on the absolute existence of purified theory, the work of such practical logic (of networking and hybridizing) still can proceed relationally and processually, as emptiness is unimpeded in every phenomenon. This is why the social imaginaries in social sciences itself is always in a continual flux no less than the actual world. In that case, are we really modern? If we conceptualize purification and hybridization together, Latour argures: "we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change" (p. 11). On the contrary, since many sociologists implicitly identify themselves as the main builders of the modernity project, the overcoming of the various dualisms and substantialisms becomes quite a difficult task.

As mentioned above, in sociology, the concept of "the social" is presupposed by methodological collectivism as an independent whole, which has its reality *sui generis* external to and coercive of individual, and has clear-cut boundaries differentiating it from other entities. Most of the classical social theorists address their research on such kind of unified entity at different levels. Durkheim, for instance, was one of the most important advocates of the principles of considering society as a reality *sui generis* onto itself and that society was the sole determinant of individual characteristics. As he formulates it, the "determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts." (1938: 110) That is also to say that there is a distinct and self-referential social entity, which are in no way other than "the social," and which can only be detected and analyzed by a theory specific to them. He even compared society to an organism to help convince us of his whole paradigm of social realism.[223] Sometimes he labeled society as a collective being. Moreover, not only was society an organism for him, he went as far as to describe it as possessing a collective personality (Durkheim, 1974a: 51).[224] Durkheim's repeated statements that society was a being and an organism could be construed as a "totality." For Marx, the social formation of the capitalist society is founded on economy, which determines the unity of the whole structure of the society. Hence, to him, the revolution should aim at this "essence" to change the society. On the other hand, Marx detected the social contradiction within the society as a conflict between different social classes. But this does not prevent him from seeing society as a whole. As in Ann Game's words, even "notion of conflict function is in a unifying manner…First, conflict, class and/or gender, accounts for the whole; or, the contradictions of capitalism are the basis of the unity of the social formation. And second, conflict operates as a means of neutralizing difference." (Game, 1991: 24-5)[225] For Weber, the unifying element of modern society as a whole was rationality. A totally rationalized society is also a totally administered society, which Weber called an "iron cage." Since he pictured modern rationalized society as a whole, he saw no way out of this "iron cage." In addition, Weber's comparative studies of the socio-cultural traits between the West and non-West also implied a clear-cut boundary between different societies.

In general, in classical social theories, we can sense different kinds of images of society, but they shared one thing in common, that is, the idea of the unity, or the

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[223] Durkheim insisted that not only was society a holistic entity, it was an organism. His references seem extensive. See Durkheim, Emile 1982 *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Eighth edition, New York: The Free Press, p. 129.

[224] Durkheim, Emile. 1974a. *Sociology and Philosophy*, Glencoe: The Free Press

[225] Game, Ann. 1991. *Undoing the Social-Towards a Deconstructive Sociology*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

wholeness, of society. In other words, classical theorists have different kinds of substantalism regarding the essence of society. In addition to that, they also presuppose the causal laws of social change in order to elucidate integrating force of "the social," which sustains a stable order and cohesion (through shared values, norms, compulsion, etc.). For Durkheim, order in the modern society was maintained by "organic solidarity." For Marx, even though the class conflict of capitalist society implies an intrinsic changing momentum, but he still insisted that the capitalist economy had some mechanisms of social integration. Besides, he believed that the communist society as a whole would eventually replace capitalist society in the future. For Weber, the "iron cage" was, of course, a concept of order, however tragic.

Classical theories share one thing in common, that is, the quest for epistemological certainty. The certainty of social reality as a whole, and the existence of sociological knowledge as real had been largely assumed. Of course, to some extent, Weber might be exempt from this accusation for his methodological reflection on the infinity of reality and the interpretative character of social research, but his substantive studies still cannot immune him of subtantilizing Western society as a whole. For Marx and Durkheim, apparently, their approaches tend to postulate the existence of a substantial entity called "society." This kind of quest for purified certainty is in accordance in the context of an emerging modernity. In other words, there is an "elective affinity," or even interdependency, between the "spirit of time" of modernity and the *"episteme"* of modern sociology. On the one hand, modernity is the constitutive of sociology as a discipline and of sociologists as an heir of Western civilization. On the other hand, just as social theory is fundamentally a modern discourse, it has at the same time been a discourse that has legitimized modernity itself and contributed to its construction. (Bauman, 1993)[226]

The substantialist portion of classical sociology is not acceptable in the context of the middle way perspective. According to Nagarjuna's *karika*, there is no substantial essence underlying and supporting the phenomena, whether as a whole or as a cause. This insight should apply to the examination of "the social." A social essence is that which stands under something social and provides the ground of its existence and movement. But this idea must presuppose something, which is unchangeable, inherently existent, and independent from any conditions of the social world for its existence. However, according to the principle of emptiness and dependent co-arising, anything that is not dependent cannot be real. Otherwise, it would presuppose a

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[226] Bauman, Zygmunt. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

transcendental social essence. Which is untenable. The sociological substantialists perceive and believe in the real existence of the social society, or the self. Which includes their notion of wholeness, coherence, reality *sui generis*, and causality, and the substantial characteristics of social units and relations between these substances. Nagarjuna devotes the majority of his *karika* to the examination of many aspects of the putative world; sociology should also examine the putative social reality in the light of his middle way perspective.

One of the most important reasons for Nagarjuna to refute the substantialist theories is the moral-practical one. The potential of things to change and to be changed is prerequisite for human growth and liberation from suffering. Sociologically, if one's substantial social determinants were immutable, change at the individual level would be simply an illusion. In other words, human freedom will not be achievable without the mutability of "the social." In order for one to escape suffering by changing the attachments and reifications, substantiality must be deconstructed and the world must be seen as mutable relationally and processually.

However, the deluded sociological solution to methodological substantialism is that, since one's substantial nature is immutable and fixated, the interrelation and interaction is not really a change of inner substance of individuals or societies, but change of the accidentals, or their appearances. Some substantialist theorists recognize the change of societal types or modes, but they see it as simply a morphological change. The "alienation," "reification," "anomie" or "underdevelopment" is removable or improvable, because they were considered extrinsic bondage or repression. Thus, the focus of its changeability was merely located at the change of its superficial organization outlook or institutional arrangement. A middle way response to this would be that, if truly extrinsic, the adventitious elements of social formations could never really dissolve the substantiality of the social. That is why social revolutions of many kind ended up with a substitution of one form of substantiality for another. But as long as we are still attaching to the belief of the substantiality of the social, we are still confined by its reified form.

Foucault's observation of power in *Discipline and Punish*, for example, criticized the ways in which the exercise of disciplinary power is obscured within modernity by the continued commitment to a conception of sovereignty power which is understood to be substantial as a possession to be "owned" by specific social entities and "located"

at specific places within the social whole. Many thinkers thought that as long as we can bring down such kind of domination or negative repression, we can be totally liberated from its confinement and thereby attain "true" freedom from suffering with a better type of social entity, such as society with many "humanized" social institutions and disciplinary techniques. However, in the analyses to be found in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault indicates that the notion of repression found within psychoanalysis and within much of the heritage of western political thought as well, makes it impossible to understand the positive or generative moment of power. Power as repression has been understood in relation to sexuality in the following ways: Firstly as being primarily a negative force. This is a power that rejects, excludes, refuses, blocks and masks. Secondly as essentially the power of legislation; the power to enact rules and laws and by so doing to prohibit. Hence this is also a conceptualization of power as primarily juridical in nature. Thirdly as the power of censorship or as the power to enforce silence. Fourthly, it is also understood to be absolutely uniform in its application and function, whether it is at the level of the individual subject or of a society as a whole. Just like the power supposedly possessed by a sovereign agency, like the power of the king who enacts such force as negation, legislation and censorship, the thinkers who believe in a "repression hypothesis" also see power as negation, domination and so forth. However, as Foucault contends, within modernity power is not simply negative but also constitutive. In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that the shift from the juridical to a normalizing form of bio-power was brought about by radically new practices which literally created different types of bodies and subjects. Differing from the discourses of sovereignty, modern practices promote the "humane" production of docile bodies which are obedient, malleable, and much more materially productive. In general, in Foucault's analysis, the production of the docile prisoner, soldier, or worker is inseparable from the operation of power. In his description of power's effect on the body of the prisoner, he remarks "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A soul inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body."

Generally speaking, the modern form of power is not simply negative, exercised by a sovereign agency, but also constitutive. The change of exterior characteristic of the societal mode, say, from monarchy to democracy, does not guarantee the disappearance of the power of substantialism. For example, the disciplinary practices by means of which power is exercised over the desiring body have something to do

with micro-politics, a subtler way of substantializing the desiring body and mind. Modern society in this sense, implicated or equipped with transcendental powers, which, by Foucault, has been multiplied into different forms of knowledge and institutional practice, by means of substantializing our notion of the self, in order to positively constitute our bodies and minds. The modern construction of the self, with sexuality for example, developed ultimately into a means, at the hands of medicine and the sciences, by which both to extract and constitute the truth of the "normal" self. From the middle way perspective, unless we can detect fundamentally the substantializing forces of modern society in different manifestations through an internalized surveillance mechanism, the panopticon of "the social" will always reign. It no longer needs to be arrayed around us as a repressive force; we have internalized it in our passion for telling and uncovering the "essence" about ourselves and for endlessly monitoring and reflecting upon our normality or abnormality. Since the "essence" of the self is a delusion, a socially constructed property, our attachment to its substantiality will eventually cause suffering of different kinds. Because "essence" is supposed to be unchanging, to be incompatible with dependent arising, we tend to grasp and maintain our essential property without admitting its unidentifiablity and actual impermanence. The eventual conflict between the illusory substantialism in our mind and the actual changing process (arising-changing-ceasing) will cause us a tremendous suffering, a sense of loss. Therefore, if we perceive the existence of the social existents in terms of either the external entity or inner essence, then we will contradict the actuality of dynamic social dependent co-arising. According to the middle way perspective we have articulated earlier, our endeavor to conceive the fundamental non-duality, relationality and processuality should enable us to claim that sociological analysis should not essentialize the distinction between structure and agency, individual and society. We must first empty the inherent and independent existence of each of these concepts and their referents, observe the actual dependent co-arising of the social and the self in the light of a relational-processual perspective.

For Bourdieu, the social under modern circumstances, is developed into many fields, and the society is changing in a relational process whereby these fields are developed with greater relative autonomy yet remain intermingle with each other. Thus, we live today in a society containing a number of relatively autonomous but mutually embedded fields: economy, culture, education, religion and an aesthetic field, all with their relatively particular logics of development. This plurality of the social opposes the concept of the unified and coherent society. For Bourdieu, there is no such thing as an undifferentiated unity of society integrated by systemic functions, common

culture, essential economic base, or an all-encompassing power apparatus. In contrast, the social is rather "an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of 'play' that cannot be collapsed under an overall societal logic, be it that of capitalism, modernity, or postmodernity." (Wacquant 1992: 16-17) We must understand those "spheres of play," or fields, with a practical relational-processual imagination. In other words, it involves the "feel of the game" of the agency that make sense to the particular values and regulative rules of each field. Thus, the agency and the structure are not two things in this regard. The fields are, for Bourdieu, not only relational-processual but also hierarchical. The difference between capital resources in each field signifies the hierarchy between the privileged and under-privileged. The structural forces of each field cannot be possible without taking into account the agency who in actual practice embodies such kind of structural inequality. It is therefore important for Bourdieu to comprehend the notion of habitus into his social analysis. Habitus for Bourdieu stands for as an embodied system of dispositions, which enables us to act, think, feel, adjust and acquaint ourselves in the social world. If we conceive the social as an external or transcendental entity then we will have difficulty to observe the constructive dimension of the agents. Bourdieu in turn conceives the field as a system of relations between positions occupied by acting agents and institutions struggling over something common. The fields themselves are characterized by an internal struggle for dominance among two or more groups of people. In conditions of the formation of "fields" and "habitus" we can find no self-existence of entities, but relational and processual dynamics of the social and individual.

For Bourdieu "a differentiated society is not a seamless totality integrated by systemic functions, a common culture, criss-crossing conflict, or an overarching authority but an ensemble of fields." (Wacquant, 1992: 16) Apparently, this notion of field opposes the assumptions of functionalism and organicism, which yet remain substantialist in their imaginaries of society. The structural performance of a field cannot be understood as the products of a system characterized by common functions, internal cohesion and self-regulation. The field is rather a "locus of relations of force - and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change." It is "born of conflict and competition, not some kind of immanent self-development of the structure." (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 103) Besides, every field is "a potentially open space of play whose boundaries are dynamic borders which are the stake of the struggle within the field itself." (ibid., 104) Hence, his relational-processual perspective reminds us that there is no ever-lasting boundary of the social existing as a clear and distinct stasis.

Elias, on the other hand, proposes his figurational sociology in order to attain a synthesis of sociology, psychology and history. In a way, the basic driving force of his long-term synthetic research is to overcome the continuing dichotomy of individual/society in sociological thought. While many sociologists generally agree that individuals cannot exist independently outside of society, their substantive research still adheres to a theory of action that "smuggles the concept of an 'autonomous individual' opposing an 'autonomous society' back in via another route, re-embedding it within sociological thought at the very same time that a contrary theoretical position is taken up when the question is addressed overtly." (Krieken, 1998: 49) Parsons, for example, by incorporating Freudian psychoanalysis into his work, spoils his own consideration of the individual by his systemic approach. "Sociology had become organized around a dismissal of psychology, producing a schism in its understanding of human social life which Parsons' appropriation of psychoanalysis could only approach from the other side." (Ibid., 48) In other words, Elias is skeptical of the sociologists' overt and explicit agreement that individuals are social beings, because the latent structure of sociological theory continues to embody a continuing Hobbesian –and Parsonian – opposition between "the individual" and "society."

Elias argues that the presupposition that societies are either equilibrium, or, by contrast, conflicting systems makes little sense because both views neglect the historical interweaving of stability and conflict. In other words, the imagination of convoluted and intricate relational processes of the dependent co-arising of integration and differentiation of societies is missing. For Elias "it was important precisely to make the long-term processes of social integration and disintegration themselves the object of sociological study, rather than assuming a condition of either integration or conflict." (Ibid., 48) The theoretical dichotomization of integration and conflict, which has dominated sociological debate for such a long period of time in the discipline, are basically misguided from Elias' point of view.

In order to overcome the substantialist and a-historical shortcomings of the sociological approach, Elias proposes his figurational or process sociology, which sees human beings and their social world as: the unplanned and unintended outcome of the interweaving of intentional human actions; as interdependent, forming figurations or networks with each other which connect the psychological with the social, or habitus with social relations; as relations rather than states; as dynamic processes of development and change, rather than static structures. (Ibid., 49)

In agreement with Bourdieu's notion of the field and Elias' figuration, the middle way perspective proposes that emptiness and dependent co-arising, or dynamic and complex relations and processes, are constitutive of "the social," and hence we cannot conceptualize "the social" merely in homogeneous, static and substantial terms. Nagarjuna's *karika* points out that we should affirm neither identity nor difference; neither existence nor nonexistence; neither permanence nor impermanence, but show the relativity of all conceptions in its particular context. Similarly, in sociology we should not affirm either homogeneity or heterogeneity; either existence or nonexistence; either permanence or impermanence of "the social" as absolute and substantial. Thus, we cannot conceptualize "the social" merely in homogeneous terms as demonstrated by Parsonian sociology. In other words, the relativity of social homogeneity is inseparable from the relativity of its heterogeneity.

At the level of conventional truth, the nominal arising of "existence" is necessarily concomitant with its opposite, non-existence. Similarly, the concept of the arising of homogeneity is necessarily concomitant with heterogeneity. Georges Bataille's definition of society, for example, draws on homogeneity and heterogeneity simultaneously. For Bataille, homogeneity means when human worlds are governed by rules and when they are characterized by interchangeability. It is based on the utilitarian principle, where productive activity is an end it itself. "According to the homogeneous society, each man is worth what he produces." (1997: 123)[227] For example, an employee is in the homogeneity, since he doesn't have any value in himself, but only in relation to what he produces. An analogy of the homogeneity is a closed-circuit system of communication or an economy where debit and credit go together. Replying upon the identity principle, the homogeneous force fends off the heterogeneous and works consequently as censorship. Social heterogeneity is the irreducible complexity (somewhat like Latour's notion of hybridity), which is not assimilated into homogeneity; it is something un-quantifiable and incomparable, the radical other. It is also characterized as wastefulness – expenditure. It represents "something other ... incommensurate." (1997: 125, 128) Heterogeneity is usually excluded from the field of logical-rational scientific enquiry in the same way as the unconscious as elements are excluded from the conscious ego. In fact, Bataille considers the unconscious as "one of the aspects of the heterogeneous." (1997: 126) Concurrently, the identity principle, or homogeneity, of science tends to exclude what

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[227] Bataille, Georges. 1997. *The Bataille Reader.* (Ed: Botting, Fred & Wilson, Scott). London: Blackwell.

is inexplicable in its framework, while Bataille proposes what he calls "heterology," or the science of heterogeneity.

Bataille's concern to show how highly homogeneous productions often conceal an unassimilable base element, reminds us that the identity principle (resembling Latour's notion of the "work of purification") in sociology is substantialist, which reduces all complicated dynamics of dependent co-arising into a single identifiable concept framework. Through this framework, the self becomes a unitary self that reflects either psycho or physical essence. The self is considered in the social sciences as either a Cartesian thinking subject or a neurological-chemical function. The relational parts and processual conditions of the self, such as its sociality, unconscious and practical consciousness are thereby excluded. On the other hand, "the social" is assumed as a homogeneous whole. It does not distinguish between relatively different traits or figurations of social groups in society. It only sees the possible benefit or harm for society as a whole. In reality, society is relatively heterogeneous: What might be beneficial for the rich might be malignant for the poor. Besides, due to the dependent arising of the force of differentiation, modern society develops various kinds of fields, which have relative autonomy of their own.

The principle of homogeneity cannot sufficiently explain the utter complexity or heterogeneity of society. Furthermore, "the social" can never be reducible to a formalized structure under a single principle, such as the instrumental rationality or the "work of purification". "The social" is also constituted by something un-definable, "between-and-betwix," liminal, anti-structural or communal, which are heterogeneous and, in a way, unformed. This part of "the social" can be seen in the process of ritual practice as elaborated by Durkheim in his late work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, or Victor Turner in *Ritual Process*, and van Gennep's work, *Rites of Passage*, which point out that the static structure of a society is actually a process. Ritual practice as a social process propels and transforms people and groups at critical moments. During the ritual process, the forgotten, unreified sacredness, that is, "the social" with non-utilitarian sentiment, will emerge through a densely interrelated and interwoven process. This sentiment will be recognized by people who participate in the practice as a transcending force that can overcome the reified "social" and thereby reinvigorating this vital force and symbolizing a new image of "the social." For late Durkheim, this process is called collective effervescence, which is the foundation of social ontology and social epistemology. In other words, the foundation of "the social," according to Durkheim in this late work, is not, at least during the ritual

process, a structured, utilitarian, dualistic, homogeneous form, but rather an unformed, moral-sentimental, non-dual, heterogeneous force. The mundane differentiation, stratification and ego-attachment will be put aside at this moment, while the higher sacred fusion of egalitarianism and altruistic compassion will emerge. Of course, this sacred process can never be ever-lasting; "the social" as an unformed force will be concretized and objectified into an identifiable symbol and this process of collective representation will generate or recall an un-reified and non-substantialized force of society. Without this process and this force, society will be either reified or hectic.

Similarly, for Turner, there is a liminal stage in the ritual process and he believes that this liminality is of "crucial importance." Inspired by van Gennep's notion of liminality in rites of passage, Turner elaborates liminality as a state of being in between phases. In such a rite of passage the individual is "neither-nor"—he/she is neither a member of the group he/she previously belonged to, nor a member of the group he/she will belong to upon the completion of the rite. Turner contends: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." (Turner, 1969: 95)[228] Turner extended the liminal notion to explain modern societies in his study of liminoid phenomena in Western society. For him, many aspects of modern activities shared similar liminal process as presented in "the rituals and myths of archaic, tribal and early agrarian cultures." (1977: 43)[229]

Another important notion related to liminality is communitas which illustrates "the social" during a liminal period, which is "unstructured or rudimentarily structured [with] a relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals..." (Turner, 1969: 96) In opposition to structure, Turner calls this moment of commuitas the moment of "anti-structure." Turner comprehends together the notions of liminal, communitas and anti-structure as below:

> I have used the term "anti-structure," ... to describe both liminality and what I
> have called "communitas." I meant by it not a structural reversal... but the
> liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from
> the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses
> (1982: 44).

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[228] Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co.
[229] Turner, V. 1977. *Variations of the Theme of Liminality. In Secular Ritual*. Ed. S. Moore &B. Myerhoff. Assen: Van Gorcum, 36-52.

I think that the late Durkheim's notion of ritual practices and Turner's notion of ritual process are important for us to understand the non-dualistic, relational and processual constitution of the individual and the social. It is not only insightful, in Durkheim's case, for understanding the social foundation of the knowledge, time, space, language and other categories, but also brilliantly notices the un-homogenizable, un-structured forces of the social that enables individuals to ascend beyond their egoism and attain higher moral being by recognizing the mutual embeddedness with others, and dissolves the static and reified social structure and brings back the dynamic changing momentum of "the social." On the other hand, for Turner, the potential of an anti-structured liminal person or liminal society (i.e., communitas) also make our image of "the social" relational and processual. Individuals or societies in a liminal phase are a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of social change." (Turner, 1982: 45) Turner's notion of liminality, communitas and ritual process are therefore very important for us to understand the changing process of the self and the social.

Similarly, in disagreement with the reduced framework of academic productions which often exclude out the undefinable and unassimilable social force, Bataille turns himself to ethnographies of societies whose social bond seemed to be founded on the practices quite horrific to modern sensibility. What he has learned from Aztec sacrificial rites is that these human sacrifices are a way of introducing disequilibrium into a society dominated by utilitarian exchange values. The bloody ritual in conjunction with the practice of human sacrifice has to be linked to a baseness that transcends the degradation of utilitarian structure and embodies the relatedness and humanness among people. Sacrifice therefore restores to the sacred world that which was profaned and degraded by exchange-value. The sacredness, then, lies beyond exchange-value; it has no equivalence, identity or substance. It ruptures the homogeneity and introduces heterogeneity into the social life.

As "a social ritual" of violence, the interweaving of people encourages the acting out of life impulses (that could be sacred, violent and compassionate all together) previously beset with taboos or administration. And through the process, it also encourages the ceremonial enframing of the acting out of this vital force. It momentarily concluded with a strongly committed belief in a collectively constructed framework of rules of conduct. This ritual moment and its consequences are constitutive for the sociality of society. A societal process has all that is necessary to arouse the idea of "the social" as both physically and morally superior to individuals,

exchange values and reified social structures. For late Durkheim, society cannot exist except in and through the ritually exalted collective conscience and thus it both demands our sacrifices and periodically strengthens and elevates the "divine" (transcendental) principle within each of us. Differing from his early externalist definition of "social facts," Durkheim recognizes the dynamic and interior dimension of "the social" in his late work. Furthermore, through his observation of ritual practice, Durkheim detects the temporal process of the constitution of "the social." "The social" is not an inherently pre-given entity independent of individuals, nor an eternal structure and function prescribing coercively of individuals from without. Rather, "the social" is at once within and without the self. There is neither absolute exteriority nor interiority regarding "the social." According to Nagarjuna, neither exteriority nor interiority is tenable. Besides, "the social" is also a changing process in the cyclical succession of intense moments of "collective effervescence" in opposition to the moment of egoistic-oriented mundane activity. In other words, Durkheim suggests that there are two momentums of "the social"— the sacred and the profane, and both are relative to and in sequence to each other. Neither the sacred moment nor the profane has a substantial element in itself. Without emptiness of "the social," the dependent co-arising of the sacred and profane would be untenable.

While Durkheim perceives "the social" in a diachronic sense as the succession of pre-ritual, ritual and post-ritual moments, Bataille's observation of "the social," more or less, is conducted in a synchronic sense, that is, both homogeneity and heterogeneity are constitutive of "the social." None of them is essential and independent of each other. Hence, we can perceive "the social" neither in homogeneous sense, nor in terms of heterogeneity of course. Bataille's definition of "society" thus draws on homogeneity and heterogeneity simultaneously. However, the homogeneous mode of "the social" seems to be more powerful, explicit, structured and thereby visible, and the heterogeneous mode of "the social" is often been systematically excluded from the visible world.

According to the middle way perspective, in the homogeneous and the heterogeneous we can find no self-existence of entities, but two dynamic and interrelated modalities. The two modalities arise co-dependently in relation to each other. Any heterogeneous social element is defined by its intensity and the affective reactions through which it breaks the logics of homogeneity. But they are also mutually embedded and interpenetrated. Elements that emerge to be constitutive of homogeneity can also belong to heterogeneity. There is a process of what Latour calls "hybridization"—the

proliferation of both modalities. Hence, there is never any society that is purely homogeneous or heterogeneous, despite numerous scientists' efforts to label, classify, and purify their object of study. The sacred, for example, is supposed to be communal and thereby commonly shared as homogeneous, but it also constitutes a part of heterogeneity, of hybrids. Such as some invisible, marginal, unknown, awed, unformed dimensions of "the social." They constitute "the social" the way we barely articulate (like mana), or the way we keep away from (like taboo), or even the way we deny or try to repress (like unconscious, madness). However, no matter how dominant the homogeneous is the heterogeneous can never disappear.

If the homogeneous represents the substantializing tendency of "the social", then the heterogeneous is its negation and the memento of its de-reification and emptying. By subsuming the heterogeneity under "the social" the heterogeneity remains as a dialectical counterpart of the homogeneity. Bataille argues that it remains in a state of "unemployed negativity" or as radical negativity. (1997: 296) If the homogeneous represents positivity then the heterogeneous represents its negativity. Or, as Bataille states:

> The reality of heterogeneous elements is not of the same order as that of homogeneous elements. Homogeneous reality represents itself with the abstract and neutral aspect of strictly defined and identified objects (basically it is the specific reality of solid objects). Hetergeneous reality is that of a force or shock. It presents itself as a charge, as a value, passing from one object to another in a more or less abstract fashion. (1997: 128)

We can say that the "solidity" of the homogeneous of "the social" can never exist inherently and independently. Neither can it exist eternally. In all temporal moments of its "solidity" there is simultaneously a modality of "liquidity" that makes "the social" non-substantial in the continual flux. While "the social" is understood as a normality, structured order, law, or authority, the "liquidity" of "the social", on the other hand, will be the escapes, transgression or what flows in and through homogeneity. I don't mean to say that there is an absolute dichotomy between these two modalities, homogeneous/heterogeneous, or solidity/liquidity, because this kind of dualistic thinking is unacceptable and fundamentally erroneous. However, if people have an attachment to this dichotomy, or affirm one end of them as the only true and at once deny the other, then they will eventually experience the counter-force coming from its relative opposite, as the force of anti-attachment. For example, the

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assumption that society is normally well-integrated systems makes little sense because its counter-force coming from its relative opposite makes both social and system integration constantly contested. Therefore, according to the middle way relational-processual perspective, sociological research with regard to "the social" should not overlook the synchronic and diachronic, or the socio-historical interweaving of homogeneity/heterogeneity, solidity/liquidity and purity/hybridity. Thus, the interweaving of the two modalities that constitutes "the social" across time-space span is what sociology should study. Similarly, Elias cautioned: It was the neglect of "long-term processes of integration and disintegration as a theoretical and empirical topic of sociological enquiry." (Elias, 1972: 278) For Elias, sociological enquiry concerning "the social" should be understood "in the same sense that one talks of a natural order, in which decay and destruction as structured processes have their place alongside growth and synthesis, death and disintegration alongside birth and integration." (Elias, 1978: 76) This is exactly in the same line with what the middle way perspective is concerning—the dependent co-arising, the changing and ceasing of the phenomenal world.

Since the heterogeneous dimension of "the social" was systematically ignored by mainstream sociology, it is therefore necessary to, in the light of the middle way perspective, demonstrate the significance of "the other," which is fundamentally heterogeneous, anti-structured, relational-processual, non-economic, unproductive, altruistic, compassionate and unconscious dimensions of "the social." However, as Nagarjuna cautions, we shouldn't attach to "the other" and try to absolutize its existence or non-existence. The two modalities of "the social" in the synchronic sense and three moments of it in the diachronic sense are only nominal designations. It is merely a skillful means for us to better understand the complexity of "the social." The dependent arising of "the social" is not reducible to any one of these modalities, or moments. If we try to essentialize any one of them as real and refute the rest as unreal, we are then trapped into the fallacy of linguistic realism.

The middle way perspective, based on the insight of emptiness, dependent co-arising and verbal designation, accept neither extremes of thought concerning "the social." In other words, "the social" is neither whole nor parts; neither unity nor disunity; neither homogeneous nor heterogeneous; neither solidity nor liquidity; neither sacred nor profane; neither structure nor anti-structure in the substantialist sense. Apparently, this list is not exhaustive. Whereas, on the other hand, at the conventional level, "the social" is dependently co-arising, interrelational, interpenetrational of both

dimensions of each pairs. The dependent co-arising of "the social" is twofold. It comprises two processes that are two sides of the same coin. That is the process of purification and the process of hybridization, the process of institutionalization and the process of de-institutionalization, the process of homogenization and the process of heterogenization, and so forth. Our middle way perspective perceives the constitution of "the social" as the dependent co-arising of a plurality of relations and processes, all of which interweave with each other, with no causal primacy being given to any one of them substantially. Transformations in one dimension or field of the social process are thus intertwined with a variety of other process of change, as Latour rightly pointed out.

PART FIVE: Conclusion

What I have demonstrated in this dissertation is a critical examination of the methodology, epistemology and ontology of the modern social sciences in the context of the Buddhist middle way perspective. I attempt to establish a constructive connection between the Buddhist middle way critique of substantialism and nihilism and the relational-processual insight in sociology. My elaboration of the core concepts of the middle way perspective--emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal convention--in the first part is designated to establish a critical attitude—to negate all kinds of substantialism and nihilism. The middle way negativity is radical that can facilitate the social sciences to thoroughly throw away different kinds of substantialism and nihilism revealed in the discipline.

In the first chapter, I have established an articulation of the core concepts of the middle way perspective and their sociological implications, as following:

Sunyata, as emptiness, means that the conventional world, the socially constructed reality for instance, is not, as some stubbornly think, composed of substance inherently and independently existent; in *Madhyamika*, this entity is devoid of inherent existence—it is empty. *Sunyata* is a skillful means (*upaya*), which unravels oneself from unsatisfactory clinging. In other words, emptiness discloses the non-substantiality of phenomena and hence frees oneself from fundamental attachment. In other words, all phenomena are radically empty of any defining essence. However, this kind of deconstructive attitude does not lead us to another extreme—nihilism. I have demonstrated that, emptiness implies at once the condition of the possibility of existents. Qualities such as freedom, action, interaction, creativity, social movement, institutionalization and social change are realizable only because of the empty nature in which substantial elements are lashed out and negated in the on-going process.

The more affirmative attitude towards the observation of phenomena is the notion of dependent co-arising. As indicated earlier, the full meaning of the *pratitya-samutpada* is that which arises, or becomes manifest in reliance upon conditions, meeting through the force of causal conditions (*pratyayas*). Nagarjuna explicitly equates "*sunyata*" and dependence in the form of *pratityasamutpada* not in order to argue that dependent things are non-existent and therefore empty, but to argue that emptiness expresses the dependent nature of all things. Thus, everything exists insofar as it is dependent. The

core of all formulations of the middle way perspective is the mutual interdependence and interweaving of phenomena. Every phenomenal thing is at once both condition of and conditioned by others. Therefore, causality cannot be absolute or transcendental there is no universal law of cause-and-effect independent of the relation and process of an empirical world.

According to the middle way perspective, *sunyata* is used nominally as *praj-napti*. If we investigate the "core" of all things, we will realize that everything we address is conditioned and has empirical name. This empirical name is provisional concept as our thought-construct for describing the dependent arising of reality. Actually, the word "reality" is derived from the roots "thing" (*res*) and "think" (*revi*). "Reality" means whatever you can think about, you assign a name to it. This understanding of the nominality of reality is perhaps the greatest achievement of the middle way perspective. It transcends the substantialist belief that all the parts of a true statement must be true knowledge corresponding to existent objects. Therefore, our nominal conventions and our conceptual frameworks can never be justified by identifying their correspondence to an independent essence.

Throughout the elaboration of these three core notions, I always try to explore the possibility of their sociological implications. My basic argument is that, the middle way perspective is highly precious and pertinent to the examination of the social world.

My subsequent effort in the second chapter, in addition to the bridging endeavor between the three core notions and the sociological viewpoints in the first chapter, is to articulate three thinking attitudes— non-dualistic, relational and processual— that are inspired by and derived from the previous discussion of the middle way perspective. All the way through this chapter, I attempt to pave the way for discussions of the basic assumption of various methodologies and theories, as well as the ontological reflection of the constitution of society in the social sciences.

The "neither-nor" double negation is a non-dualistic thinking attitude espoused by the middle way perspective in order to deconstruct all essentialist, dualistic clinging. The middle way perspective is ridding us of all kinds of essentialized binary opposition and its conflation. There is no absolute dualism in the actual world of conditional relativity. The non-dualistic thinking denies the essentialist assumption that the principle of binary opposition is substantial and universal prior to the dependent

arising of the concrete, historical and contingent social world. If we stubbornly attach on such dichotomization as substantially real in the social sciences, then there is no end to the construction of the wrong methodologies and theories. The problem with "either-or" way of thinking in the social sciences is that practitioners tend to reify the provisional frameworks and ignore their socially constructed character. The theoretically constructed binary oppositions concerning social relations are just heuristic devices for serving our understanding of the dependent co-arising of the social world. Based on this insight, I consequently am able to criticize different kinds of dualisms in the social sciences.

According to the insight of dependent co-arising, the general feature of the social world is relationality, or relatedness, in which all dualisms are to be denied. This suggests that both the ontological constitution of things and our epistemological schemes are just as relational as everything else. Based on this understanding we can thereby establish a theoretical foundation for using the relational principle of society as a general characteristic, not only of material social phenomena but also of mental experiences. This, the fundamental cognitive switch of theoretical vision from substance to relation, is the core of our argument. We are relational internally and externally so to speak. It is therefore important to investigate more reflexively the relatedness of the social world. The relational thinking, in harmony with the non-dualistic thinking, of the middle way perspective demonstrates a resemblance with the methodological relationalism proposed by several sociologists.

In order to overcome the lapse of placing the primacy of the substance over that of the process, the middle way view of dependent co-arising suggests that all that can be observed to have any reality must be understood as a temporal process rather than a-temporal substance. All social phenomena, be there material or mental, are subject to continuous change. The middle way perspective posits that what we perceive as the world of eternity and stasis is actually the outcome of an incessant dependent arising processes. All entities that fall under the notice of our perception or conception are mentally imputed which are actually in a state of continual flux, even though the verbal designations often find it difficult to describe such movement. The continual flux is fundamentally without fixation. Neither social reality nor individuality is exempted from this principle. Whenever we perceive social reality we should always bear in mind that it is actually the social becoming that constitutes the so-called "social reality."

In general, what I have accomplished in the first two chapters is to articulate evidently the significance of the middle way perspective with regard to the examination and understanding of the social world, and also to highlight its applicability and usefulness to the critical construction of the relational-processual sociology. Since various dualistic, non-relational and non-processual thinking, such as agency/structure, self/society, individualism/ collectivism, positivism/interpretism, have blocked our conceptualization of, and investigation into, the relational process of social becoming, it is necessary to radically empty the inherent existence of any one of them, and simultaneously be aware of the dependent arising and nominal convention of their existence. In other words, what I attempt to do in the first two chapters is to pave the way towards a non-dualistic and relational-processual sociology in the light of the Buddhist middle way perspective.

In the third chapter, I have demonstrated a middle way examination of the methodology of the social sciences. I attempt to critically inspect the substantialist assumption presented by methodological individualism and methodological collectivism and to move beyond the dualistic substantialism in order to put forward a relational-processual methodology.

My criticism of the methodological individualism in the first section is that, according to the middle way perspective, it takes the substantially atomized individual as the unit of analysis, while eliminating the social relatedness within which the individual is actually involved and embedded. For example, the fundamental premise to all forms of rational-choice theory is the assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed. It runs counter to a more multifaceted view of social actors and social co-dependent arising that comprises the interweaving process of meaning, interpretation, emotions, occurrence, and a wide variety of aspects of human social existence. The individual in this approach is perceived as a substance which has its inherent and independent existence. Methodological individualism in the substantialist sense is not able to explain the influence of the relational-processual social context in shaping the individual, not until we recognize the emptiness of its essential attribute.

Methodological collectivism, discussed in the second section, is founded on the assertion that the properties of social wholes or systems cannot be explained in terms of the properties of their individual parts. In other words, the thing-like substance of "the social" exists not in the individual but in society. Methodological collectivists

basically believe that society is a reality independent of individual minds, and that the methodical elimination of the individual factors will enable us to know the social facts as real as things. A "thing" is perceived by methodological collectivists as such mainly because it is obdurate to all variation by mere acts of will, and it is exactly this property of resistance to the action of individual will which characterizes social facts. According to the middle way perspective, this kind of treating social facts as things—which can be grasped by scientific concepts—is without a doubt a substantialist approach; substantialism in a collectivistic sense, which is still non-relational and non-processual. The dependent arising of the social is thereby missing.

In the third section, I try to propose a relational-processual methodology, in order to overcome the fallacy of both individualism and collectivism. The middle way perspective accepts neither of them for their being too substantialistic. The insights of *sunyata* and *pratitya-samutpada* do not commit social theorists to either under- or over-socialized view of the individual. The dichotomized methodological assumption is a reckless distinction that ignores the dynamic relational process of the formation of the individuals and the social phenomena. According to the middle way relational-processual perspective, I suggest, various kinds of social collectivities are not static entities, they are rather the interweaving networks, which are concurrent constraints as well as enablers of human behaviors and thus social analysis must be prepared to understand these meaningful and complex nexuses. All human actions are mediated through some related and complex nexuses working, through which the dependent co-arising of situated subjects and patterns of interaction, groups, institutions, etc. become possible. In general, both social collectivity and individuality are empty of essence and dependently co-arise in terms of dynamic networking or a nexus of interweaving processes.

In order to overcome the substantialism in the forms of objectivism and subjectivism, we need to examine their manifestations as positivism and interpretism in sociology. Thus, in chapter four, I try to elaborate a hermeneutic approach together with the relational-processual perspective with the purpose of transcending the inadequacy of both positivism and interpretism. Moreover, based on this I also argue that the relativist and nihilistic alternative in opposition to substantialism are still problematic and thereby unacceptable.

Positivism, discussed in the first second, argues that all sciences should depend upon the same foundation in the study of facts about the physical world. The most fundamental assumption of positivism is that an orderly external reality exists. By overlooking the differences between human behavior and incidences in nature, the positive science of society entails explanatory schemes of the same logical and methodological form as those recognized in natural science. The positivistic sociology believes that the data of sense experience and logical principle of science are the only object and the utmost criterion of sociological knowledge. They adopted the notions that an external and orderly reality exists, that a universal methodology for all sciences can be found, and that this universal methodology must be based on the applications of formal logic and mathematics. However, the positivistic presumption is non-relational and non-processual and thereby inadequate. It asserts the inherent and independent existence of reality as given and the knowledge with regard to it as verified truth. According to the middle way perspective, all things are empty of inherent and independent existence and arise co-dependently and can only be recognized nominally in a relational-processual flux. In other words, the social world can never be fully conceptualized or quantitatively defined by any scientific statements. Neither can they all be completely observed and verified. Hence, the middle way perspective cannot accept the presupposition of positivistic sociology.

In the second section, I attempt to explore another approach, the interpretive sociology, that wouldn't agree with positivism due to its neglect of various modes of human experience. For interpretive sociologists, the social world is very different from the natural objects of scientific observation because they are full of meaning and in which actors are self-conscious beings with various modes of experience. The interpretist methodology tries to make a more comprehensible understanding of the social world by re-enacting the interior cognitive processes which motivated by and gave meaning to the actors. In other words, the quest for certainty in terms of interpretive understanding of the subject's inner experience is its ultimate goal. However, this kind of seeking for certainty is not much different from positivism's attitude of seeing truth as given. That is, it shares the objectifying attitude with positivism which contradicts the endeavor of doing interpretive understanding. It also goes against the principle of a relational-processual approach, due to its disregard of the continual dynamic flux of mutual embeddedness and interweaving among people. In other words, their approaches are actually non-relational and non-processual and in turn, according to the middle way perspective, lack the insight to *sunyata*, *pratytia-samutpada* and *praj-napti* of the social world.

My third section endeavors to illuminate a vision that could surmount the fallacy of substantialist thinking. In the Western tradition, we see a relational-processual view of *Versthen* in Gadamerian hermeneutics that overcomes individualism, collectivism, positivism and interpretism, and espouses the notion that understanding is a concrete fusing of horizons. In addition, for Gadamer, far from being a fetter on interpretation, tradition and prejudice are precondition of understanding through interpretation. Fore-understanding, or pre-understanding, is more than an objective method; it is the very manner in which understanding takes place. This is where Gadamer chooses to begin the construction of his philosophical hermeneutics in order to liberate the human sciences from the shroud of scientific certainty and the cloak of substantialist romanticism. Gadamer's notion of *Erfahrung*, though translated as "experience" in English, differs from the experiences of the individual subject (*Erlebnis*)—it connotes the manifestation of the relatedness of experience among human beings that is, the *sensus communis* or communal experience. This kind of communal experience is brought into being not in the inner consciousness of the individual mind but in the establishments of tradition and the life of the mutual embeddedness, an eminently relational-processual experience in lifeworld practices. However, there is, no portion of them (neither tradition nor *Erfahrung*) that can exist inherently and independently. In other words, the hermeneutic circle cannot work out without the *madhyamika* insight of *sunyata* and *pratityasamutpada*, that is, the non-dualistic, relational and processual way of thinking the world so to speak. The Buddhist middle way perspective is basically compatible with Gadamer's hermeneutics. Therefore, I attempt to put them together in order to facilitate our further discussion.

Based on the Buddhist middle way perspective and Gadamerian hermeneutics, I seek to criticize the fallacy of relativism and nihilism in the fourth section. According to the principle of *reductio ad absurdum* of *Prasangika madhyamika*, relativism is incoherent since their assumption will also imply the validity of its opposite and it will eventually against its own position. That is because that the basic assumption of relativism must hold something substantial, which is irreducible by, and independent of, other things. Actually, relativism in this sense would also be eventually trapped into nihilism due to their fundamental refutation of the endeavor of trying to attain the fusion of horizons among different traditions and the possibility of improving our ways of mutual understanding and consensus. Relativism of this sort will be destroyed by its own nihilistic tendency. According to the middle way perspective and hermeneutics, it is fundamentally erroneous.

In part three, I attempt to conduct a middle way examination of the theories of society. I first claim to beyond theoretical dichotomization and substantialization. I criticize those sociologists who have been haunted by a variety of conceptual dichotomies in their social theories, such as action/structure, micro/macro, *homo economicus/homo sociologicus*, individualism/collectivism, and so on. My focus locates more on the theoretical pairs like action/structure and subject/object and the theories that intend to bridge or transcend these differentiations. In addition to a critical examination of theoretical dichotomization and substantialization, I put more emphasis on a sympathetic reading of three sociologists—Mead, Elias and Bourdieu—due to their relational-processual insight in their theories.

According to the middle way perspective, the self does not have an "own-being" that exists inherently and independently. In other words, the arising of the self is a process in the relational context. In sociology, Mead, discussed in the first section, also refutes the substantiality of the self and proposes a relational-processual notion of the self. I therefore try to reinterpret Mead in the middle way context in order to demonstrate that sociology is not totally lack of relational-processual insight. In my reinterpretation, the Meadian human self—the dialectic between the "I" and the "Me"—is relational and processual that arises co-dependently in the social context. For Mead, it is through participation in the social act of communication that the individual realizes his/her (physiological and neurological) potential for significantly symbolic behavior. I tend to appreciate this insight according to the middle way perspective. Besides, mind, in Mead's terms, is the individualized locus of the communicational process. Thus, mind is not reducible to the substance, mentally or physically, of the isolated individual, but is an emergent in "the dynamic, ongoing social process" that constitutes human experience

In the second section, I also tend to conduct a sympathetic reading of the relational-processual insight of Elias'. The primary cognitive interest in Elias'sociological analysis is the dynamic *interrelatedness* between people in a variety of ways. His relational-processual perspective examines the plurality of people's decisions, intentions and emerging processes, because the process by which the actions of various human agents, individual and collective, combine and interpenetrate with each other, by definition lies beyond the control of any of the participating actors. Therefore, people are mutually embedded in and shaped by the social figurations, and are continuously in flux in the long-term. Reading Elias in the context of the middle way perspective, we can say that Elias' notion of figuration and

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habitus must be empty of inherent and independent existence and arise co-dependently in the temporal process. Through Elias we detect that in sociology, many concepts or conceptual distinctions are formed in the "process-reduction" manner, such as the differentiation between the "actor" and his/her activity (detected already in *madhyamika)*, between structures and processes, between agency and structure, between objects and relationships. And most of all, the differentiation between "individual" and "society" is deeply ingrained and harden in the methodology and theory of sociology, which are both seen as given and isolated objects. I therefore underscore the match between Elias' view and the middle way perspective.

In the third section, I aim to evaluate Bourdieu's relational view of society through the light of the middle way perspective. Bourdieu was drained of the dichotomization between objectivism (structuralism) and subjectivism (agency) and wanted to build up an integrative (agency-structure) replacement he named "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism." Bourdieu's integrative endeavor is an attempt to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy and provide a framework for understanding the relational processes conditioning social reproduction. He in turn claims to reject substantialism in sociology. His ideas of habitus, field, practice, capital and reproduction are therefore relational not substantial. For Bourdieu, relational thinking allows no substantialist view of the independent existence of things. Bourdieu's relational thinking not only broke away from a methodological or epistemological dualism and substantialism, but he also rejected the ontological dichotomization between object and subject. I therefore find him parallel with the middle way perspective's fundamental non-dualistic, non-substantial thinking.

In part four I have established a middle way examination of the constitution of society, in which, time, space, language, and the social are considered the basic constituent that form the self and society.

In the first section, I first address the characteristic of temporality. I first discuss about Nagarjuna's effort to the examination of the issue of time. Based on the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising, he attempts to show that time (and space as well) does not have its own-being. The middle way perspective of Nagarjuna's criticizes the view of the substantial existence of time. Sociological speaking, time is not a self-existing substratum or ground in which equally independent social phenomena endure or where independent social events occur, and vice versa. And yet, while denying the absolute

existence of time, Nagarjuna does not refute the relative existence of temporal phenomena. His notion of dependent co-arising can assist us realize the fundamental non-dual mutuality of time and phenomenon. Therefore, for him, phenomena are always phenomena-in-flux and time is always involving with flux-in-phenomena. By the same token, the only mode of existence that phenomenon has is a set of relations that occurs in temporal process. Sociologically speaking, there is neither "Time" nor "social entity" that can persist permanently, but only a change of social phenomena over time and a flux of time through social phenomena.

My next topic in this section is about the characteristic of spatiality. For Nagarjuna, the constitution of human beings and human societies are not only temporal, but also spatial. However, space, just like other things, cannot be considered as having its own-being. Yet, while we cannot say that space "is," we must still acknowledge that it nevertheless arises in a particular form, that is, in dependent co-arising. In other words, space has relative spatiality. Sociologically speaking, spatiality is relative to societies and social activities. It is not presented as an absolute place, as something independent, in which things reside. For Nagarjuna, the emptiness negates the identifiable entity of things and space while dependent co-arising acknowledges the relational-processual existence of things and its spatiality. Thus, according to the middle way perspective, we cannot accept an absolutist view of space and things. The emptiness of space is only the cognitive and practical flip side of the dependent co-arising of spatiality. The human cognitive world and spatiality are conventionally created conditioned by our socio-practical experience, which itself is dependent upon the spatial condition.

In the second chapter, I try to tackle the linguistic dimension of the constitution of society. In opposition to realism, Nagarjuna does not think that language can be used to identify something substantial. Language is this sense is reified. From the middle way relational-processual perspective, we know that the inherent and independent existence of our thought is untenable. Unless our thought is empty of any unchanged substance, we can never be able to think dynamically and reflexively in a socio-historical process. By the same token, without the emptiness of language the dependent co-arising of language is not possible. They is why, in the context of Nagarjuna's middle way, these two sentences explain that the terms we use in our language do not refer to entities that exist independently of convention. Sociologically speaking, everything we can express or consider depends upon some socially

constructed convention and, therefore, is empty of inherent and independent existence. What language expresses is only nominal truths.

In the last chapter, I have demonstrated a elaboration of the constitution of the social that indicates the transcendence of the individual-social antinomy. According to Nagarjuna, the self is non-inherent in any sense. Neither can the self have any characteristics of its own nor can it have possessions. We must then be cautious of not constructing the substantial notions of "I," "me" and "mine. Through a middle way examination, we can detect the fallacy of taking the relational-processual self as an absolute existent. We therefore are able to reveal the emptiness, the relative and conditioned nature of the self. Sociologically, we take the relative and conditioned nature of the self as a social construction. The self thus arises dependently upon it. We think, see, hear and feel as a social self. We have then arrived at the truth with respect to the conventional world: that self is empty of inherent and independent existence. However, having denied the inherent and independent existence of the self, we still need to be aware of not clinging to this denial as absolute. In other words, we cannot assert an inherent non-existence. We can only recognize a socially related self.

The self is related to the social. Sociologically speaking, the essence of social entities is not present in the conditions otherwise there will be no dynamic relation and process possible. According to the middle way method of *reductio ad absurdum,* we must deconstruct substantialist view of the social. We should perceive the constitution of the social by means of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal designation. In short, in the complex arising of various social conditions we can find no self-existence of social entities. In other words, what is "the social" is empty of essence, is open to change conditionally. Therefore, without essence, society is variously describable. The plurality of social theories might be attributed to the difference of social imaginaries among different schools whereby their epistemic positions lead to multitudinous ways of specifying "the social." According to the middle way perspective we have articulated earlier, our endeavor to conceive the fundamental non-duality, relationality and processuality should enable us to claim that sociological analysis should not essentialize the distinction between structure and agency, individual and society. We must first empty the inherent and independent existence of each of these concepts and their referents, observe the actual dependent co-arising of the social and the self in the light of a relational-processual perspective.

Some might question: What does one gain from putting both the Buddhist middle way critique of substantialism and nihilism and the relational-processual insight in sociology together? My answer is that although I try to stress the similarity and compatibility between them, but there is something unique in the Buddhist middle way which can alleviate the insufficiency in the relational-processual insight in the social sciences. A deeper understanding of the *sunyata*, *pratitya-samutpada* and *praj-napti* facilitates us to go some way toward a radical debunking of any kind of substantialism and nihilism and then enables us to appreciate a non-dualistic and relational-processual sociology. The middle way deconstructive method (*reductio ad absurdum*) does not allow any form of substantiality to exist. However, the relational-processual approach in the social sciences demonstrated by different authors is not as fundamental as Nagarjuna. Actually none of the authors I discussed really conceptualize a notion that simultaneously embraces relation and process. Hence, I would contend that in most of the relational-processual insights a certain degree of reification or the potential towards substantiality is not eluded.

For example, Gadamer, though alive with relational and processual insight, never eloquently elaborate this notion. Gadamerian hermeneutics, while laying the keystone for a transcendence of the subject/object dualism in the social sciences, that is conducive to a dialogical process of the fusion of horizons, his "hermeneutic turn" still cannot exempt itself from presupposing the telos of consensus, the existence of "hidden meaning" and the authority of tradition. This tendency, to some extent, is in danger of being too conservative and too affirmative, which is sometimes unable to detect the power dimension implicated in the consensus, "hidden meaning" and tradition that may systematically distort the dialogue between two horizons. In other words, the hermeneutic circle cannot work out without the *madhyamika* insight of *sunyata*, *pratityasamutpada* and *praj-napti*, that is, the non-dualistic, relational and processual way of thinking without any exception.

Mead's processual view of the self is significant for the social science for overcoming the deeply ingrained Cartesianism in the discipline. However, when moving toward figuring out a "generalized other" which can best represent the national character of the United States, Mead's endeavor becomes evidently substantialist and lack of flexibility. The "generalized other" turns out to be a reified entity overruling the self. According to the middle way deconstructive method, a constant refutation of substantialism by *reductio ad absurdum* does not allow an application of theory in daily practice to be exempted.

Elias' figurational, or process sociology is brilliant in his articulation of a relational-processual view of sociogensis and psychogensis. His figurational sociology emphasizes that humans form chains of reciprocal relationships through which individuals and society cannot be separated - individuals are mutually embedded together on many levels and in many ways. Human individuals thus can only be understood in their interdependencies with each other, as part of a network of social relations. Besides, without dumping his relational insight, he felt more eager to stress the fundamental processuality of social constitution in historical progression in order to ward off any static or non-processual sociology, which he despised as "process-reduction." What is lacking in Elias' sociology is a fundamental refutation of the concept of figuration and process. The relational-processual view presented by the middle way perspective is always cautious of not being too clinging to the concepts like relation and process themselves. An attachment to the concepts may imply a subtle kind of dualism or even substantialism as examined by Nagarjuna regarding the attachment of "emptiness." By the same token, Nagarjuna would also negate the attachment to the concepts like relation and process. For figurational, or process sociology this level of reflection is important and necessary.

Bourdieu's methodological relationalism does not put equal emphasis on processual thinking that makes him sometime to be tempted by structuralism, which is basically non-processual. In additional, as pointed out earlier, although Bourdieu's central contribution to sociological theory is his attempt to find a middle ground between individual agency and structural determinacy. His concept of habitus, seen as a socially acquired, embodied systems of disposition and/or predisposition, tends to be more like a "deep structure." Despite his endeavor to overcome dualism, his integrative attempt to the study of the correspondence between the mental structure and the social structure seems to more structuralist at the expense of possibility of agency's anti-structure potential. At least in his substantive research, Bourdieu emphasizes more on the structural durability rather than the changeability of the social structure, which is to some extent lack of processual thinking. Therefore, according to his self-professed "methodological relationalism," he stresses more on relational character of the social than the processual dimension of it. In other word, Bourdieu's sociological observation of social inequality is unsatisfactory, which cannot explain the possibility of change.

Generally speaking, Western social sciences lack a fundamental negation of the substantiality of things. The authors who have the relational-processual insight may

be more self-reflexive for not being too substantialist. But according to the middle way perspective, especially the *prasangika* school, their examination is not radical enough. Therefore, I would argue that it is necessary to introduce the middle way perspective into the social sciences, in which the relational-processual approach has already implied but not adequately articulated. The middle way non-dualistic, relational and processual thinking, equipped with the insights of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominality, can add something beneficial that is not in the social sciences yet. The contribution of a Buddhist middle way critical reading of Western social thought is thus demonstrated.

Throughout this dissertation, I always rely on this impetus of critical reading to examine the methodological fallacy and theoretical shortcoming in the social sciences. According to which, the methodological individualism, methodological collectivism, positivism and interpretivism are in different way too substantialistic and too dualistic. While on the other hand, relativism and nihilism cling too much to the refutation of the social. Both extremes are unacceptable.

In comparison with those crude substantialist and nihilistic approaches, I try to sympathize the relational-processual insight in some authors' oeuvres. Simply because the middle way perspective should not costume itself as a glorious system coming from the East, attempting to overthrow the West and substitute it with a totally different alternative. This kind of cultural essentialism and binarism (between East and West) is self-contradictory. The middle way perspective therefore is not a substitute but an addition to the relational-processual insight in sociology.

Furthermore, a dialogue between the horizon of the social sciences and the horizon of Buddhist philosophy is reciprocal. Not only can the social sciences benefit from the insight of the middle way perspective, the soteriology-oriented tradition like Buddhism also can learn a lot from the sociological way of seeing the world, especially the secularized social world. For example, the conditions and the consequences of modernity are so pervasive that have dramatically changed the constitution of the social world globally. This changing process is relational which also influences the development of modern Buddhism. In order to improve its own self-understanding, Buddhist insight must embrace sociological perspective. Besides, since the process of secularization is an undeniable actuality (though not necessarily an all-encompassed phenomenon), it is not adequate to enclose Buddhist study within

the purely "sacred" world. Otherwise, this will illustrate a lack relational thinking concerning its relatedness with the secular world.

Towards a Symptomatic-Sympathetic-Synthetic Reading

The examination of related methodologies and theories in the previous parts was meant to be symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic all at once. Not one of them should be conducted alone, but only in conjunction with the other two. Idyllically, and hermeneutically, these three dimensions should be used together simultaneously for examining any author's works in particular or the social world at large. I believe an open and empathetic reading attitude towards these other's texts and experiences must be at once a fusion of symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic attitudes. After all, reading is a dialogical process leading us toward an illuminating dynamic and a fusion of horizons. Throughout the process, we have critically examined the symptom of substantialist and nihilistic tendencies evident in the texts. But it does not mean that there is nothing to be appreciated or worthy of learning from these various viewpoints. Therefore, a sympathetic attitude is always already implicated and engaged in the act of reading, in addition to a willingness to synthetically embrace everyone's relational and processual insights. In other words, I suggest, that the circularity of human understanding is an unfinished venture, through which we get a better understanding of each other throughout countless dialogues.

However, despite this hermeneutic attitude in the ideal situation, for an actual discursive writing presented in this work, these three manners can only be articulated sequentially in temporal process and thus the order of things in regard to the representation of other's works is inevitably arbitrary and selective in the service of my argumentation. As Gadamer points out that the interpreter has a traditional prejudice on the matter, although it is not dogmatic. Therefore, I must admit that the limit of my reading of every author and text I have encountered has led to a limited and prejudiced viewpoint. There is no "perfect match" between my understandings of those authors and their understandings of themselves. Besides, I don't mean to essentialize Western sociology in general or any sociologist in particular as a unified whole. My interpretation of them could be symptomatically or sympathetically oriented, but it doesn't mean that I don't appreciate the insight of the theories I have criticized or fail to see the shortcoming of the theories I have appreciated. They are not mutually exclusive. After all, interpretation is not dogmatic, at least it should not be. Thus, an attachment of either attitude is prejudicial. Yet, a good reading intention

expressed by myself does not safeguard my reading act to be prejudice-free. But I hope my prejudices with regard to the interpretation of any one of the authors I encountered can be a means to put my prejudices at risk, that is, to examine the limits of my interpretation, and at once open myself towards positive fusion of horizons. I am aware of this process and admit that my interpretation is not final. Different interpretations are still possible.

My reading attitude is in the first place symptomatic, because the middle way perspective cannot accept any assertion of an inherently and independently existent outside "reality," nor an inside punctual "self" or "transcendental condition of possibility." The middle way perspective assumes that truth cannot exist on its own side, neither inwardly, nor outwardly, nor from *a priori*. There is no absolutely substantial characteristic of truth or reality. Neither can there be any *a priori* in a transcendental sense that can be unconditioned, or self-sufficient. In the practical sense, any adoption of one of these substantialist truth-claims, or nihilistic (anti) truth-claims, into real social practice will misguide people toward a deluded and reified direction that would end up with some kind of ignorance or suffering.

From a middle way perspective, the attachment to substantialism, even at an implicit level is symptomatic. Therefore, methodological individualism, methodological collectivism, positivistic sociology and interpretist sociology are all problematic for their substantialist attitudes.

However, a total refutation of truth or any effectiveness of a truth-claim is relativist or nihilistic. Both claims are no different from substantialism in the sense that it is still attached to an unchanged worldview, such as the notion of nothingness. From the middle way perspective, any kind of absolutism, either substantialism or nihilism, is symptomatic for it is by definition fixed and thereby non-vivid and pathological. This symptomatic reading of all kinds of extremism is fundamental in Buddhism. Based on a great compassionate concern, Buddhists try hard to help all living beings to overcome their pathological vexations and habitual obstructions. My reading strategy with regard to the preceding methodologies and theories is symptomatic, because, to some extent, implicitly or explicitly, these viewpoints haven't been freed from their epistemic attachment or, fixations through which the practical consequence could be dangerous, and hence pathological.

It is important to note that the symptomatic reading is self-referential in the sense that my own thesis and antithesis are also positioned and assertive to some degree, and thereby inevitably partial and selective. My thesis should have its own regular check-up concerning its own basic assumptions and its treatment of other's presumptions. In other words, others and I should conduct the continual examinations of my arguments to prevent my own reification and attachment to these ideas. A detachment from extreme viewpoints is an unending endeavor, which applies to the examination of all researchers and their assumptions. Based on this self-reflexive sensitization, the middle way perspective should aim to propose a different symptomatic reading strategy from the Althusserian Freudianism and Marxism, Parsonian Structural-Functionalism, because their "epistemological break" (Althusser's term) or the universally standardized functional prerequisites (Functionalist approach) are still in a sense substantialist and thereby pathological. The middle way symptomatic reading is designated to be non-dualistic, non-substantial and self-reflexive. It attempts to radically "break epistemology" due to their remaining substantialist worldview, rather than just trying to perform an "epistemological break." Besides, differing from functionalism, it conceives a norm-formation process as context-bounded and as a historically specific dependent co-arising, rather than a universally pre-given, ahistorical imperative.

Our symptomatic reading stands firmly within the middle way tradition, in which one crucial aspect of it is that it tends to appear in the space opened up by the insight, which announces a fundamental break away from all preceding absolutism (either substantialism or nihilism). The fundamental goal of the middle way perspective is to dispel the delusory worldview which is the root cause of our absolutistic existence in both the theoretical and practical world. Substantialism and nihilism are deluded due to their lack of the understanding of emptiness, dependent co-arising and nominal convention. Hence, a decisive step of symptomatic reading is not to perfect the epistemology of the social sciences within the substantialist paradigm but to question its fundamental postulate, namely that the social sciences can compete with the sciences of nature by means of establishing an epistemic position (objectively or subjectively) which would help us to find a inherently and independently existent substance underneath the social phenomenon. Instead, it proclaims to view the social world non-dualistically, relationally and processually. In other words, according to the middle way perspective, social phenomena arise co-dependently with no definite self-nature (*svabhava*).

The social imaginary presented by sociological concepts cannot be substantial, but rather are nominal constructs utilized as expedient devices for helping us to better understand the dependent co-arising of our situation and thereby realize the emptiness of it. In other words, they are only means for deconstructing the reification of the human condition, but not the source of its further reification. Let me illustrate this with two Chinese koans:

> Zhaozhou said, " A metal Buddha cannot go through the forge. A clay Buddha could not go through the water. A wooden Buddha cannot go through the fire."

> ---Blue Cliff Record, Case 96[230]

> When Tanka (Tan-hsia T'ien-jan, 738-824) of the T'ang dynasty stopped at Yerinji of the Capital, it was so severely cold that he finally took one of the Buddha-images enshrined there and made a fire with it in order to warm himself. The keeper of the shrine, seeing this, was greatly exercised.

> "How dare you burn up my wooden Buddha?"

> Said Tanka, who looked as if searching for something with his stick in the ashes, "I am gathering the holy *sariras* in the burnt ashes."

> "How," said the keeper, " could you get *sariras* by burning a wooden Buddha?"

> "if there are no *sariras* to be found in it, may I have the remaining two Buddhas for my fire?" retorted Tanka.[231]

The middle way symptomatic inspection is a procedure to gently and neatly dissolve our fixations by revealing that constructed images might be obstacles to enlightenment or liberation if we attach to them as essentially real. However, the middle way also warns that the absence of images may itself be an obstruction, sometimes even a greater one, if we attach to the effort of total refutation of them. The venture of deconstruction is not by any means the end of conventional reality. A

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[230] See *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985, p.254, note 9.
[231] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series), edited by Christmas Humphreys, New York: Grove Press, 1961; first published by Rider, London, 1949, p.330.

complete absence of images and concepts is also distorted view of nihilism (*ucchedavada*). Therefore, a method of deconstruction is found to bring construction back again, but must be practiced in a subtle and critical way that can immune itself from a relapse into the opposite extreme of eternalism (*sasvatavada*). According to the middle way perspective, substantialism mistakes the fundamental openness and dynamics (emptiness and dependent co-arising) of reality by filling it with essences that exists inherently and independently. The middle way symptomatic reading, in turn, attempts to deconstruct this reification by a negation of the two attachments or extremisms (images and no-images), whereas, it is still a critical reconstruction, an affirmation of images-beyond-images.

However, in our ordinary and theoretically informed views of social reality, many of them are realist in their basic presupposition, which misleadingly validate and absolutize the core conceptual dichotomy, such as "this is social entity" and "that isn't social entity." By disclosing its fundamental fallacy, we are able to release ourselves from these fixations. They will then lose their capacity to control our lives. By revealing their fundamental emptiness in real time, we discover that our fixations don't refer to an objective, or even a subjective, essence. Ultimately we discover that our fixations aren't actually the fixations as our deluded viewpoint anticipated. We therefore will understand that a fixation is merely a conceptual imputation on the flux of our experience of the social world. In this light, the middle way symptomatic reading discloses the open and fluid texture of social reality, in which, social images are simultaneously deconstructed and yet left intact.

As a procedure for disclosing fixed belief systems, the middle way symptomatic reading thus proposes a relational-processual view of reality rather than a total nullification of it. In this way, its deconstruct effort systematically demolishes fixed beliefs through a rigorous symptomatic investigation, which is employed profoundly into the realm of grounding un-thought. Moreover, as a radical deconstructive method, the middle way perspective also systematically deconstructs the activity of the attachment to deconstruction. That is, it prevents a self-justification of the symptomatic reading. In other words, we realize that any claim of either existence or non-existence should not be attached as eternal. In that case, all views of existence and non-existence are empty. Therefore, we must always caution ourselves to the danger of attaching to deconstruction and emptiness. In other words, deconstruction might also become an object of misplaced reification. This reified view of

deconstruction will block our theoretical insight towards a better understanding of the dynamic social world. In a symptomatic reading, Nagarjuna says:

> *Sunyata* has been proclaimed by the Victorious Ones as the purgative of viewpoints (desti). Those for whom *sunyata* is a viewpoint are pronounced incurable.[232]

We must know that emptiness as "no-thing" may be mis-captured as "nothing"—which, then, is equal to a "thing." Once we can move beyond this reified dualism, the middle way perspective will realize that the dependent co-arising of "no-thing" is not separated from "things." The great negation is synonymous with a great affirmation. The middle way deconstruction is not different from a critical reconstruction. In this regard, this work is closer to the original Perfect Wisdom (*Prajnaparamita*) tradition. For instance, in the Diamond *Sutra*, *Sakyamuni* Buddha asks his disciple *Subhuti* whether or not he, *Sakyamuni* Buddha, has taught any *dharma*, and *Subhuti* answers " No, indeed, O Lord." Yet, someone in there, and something had been said. Therefore,

> "…those thirty-two marks of the superman which were taught by the *Tathagata*, they are really no-marks. Therefore they are called 'the thirty-two marks of the superman'".[233]

As *Nagarjuna* notes:

> The *Tathagata* is not the (aggregation of the) *skandha* nor is [he] different from the *skadhas*. He is not the *skandhas* nor are the *skandhas* in him. As he cannot possess the *skandhas*, what actually is he?[234]

The answer will be corresponded to the middle way perspective:

> As the *Tathagata* is empty of inherent existence, it cannot be asserted that, after liberation, the Buddha either exists or does not exist.[235]

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[232] *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, 13:8. 1970.Quoted in the translation by Kenneth Inada, Nagarjuna. Tokyo: Hokuseido, p.132

[233] *Vairacchedikaprajnaparamita-sutra*, 13d. Quoted in the translation by Edward Conze, Buddhist Wisdom Books, London: Allen and Unwin, 1958, p.52.

[234] *Mulamadhyamikakarika*, 22:1. Quoted in the translation by Kenneth Inada, *Nagarjuna*, Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1970, p. 132.

Accordingly, we can say that the concept or theory is a provisional designation or fudge-term (*prapanca*), which must be used in order to communicate. But we must constantly examine and deconstruct its own possible reification, or else, one cannot attain a better understanding of the social world.

The symptomatic reading is a one-sided exaggeration if it does not subsume sympathetic understanding. A sympathetic reading attempts to dig beneath the epistemological enterprise itself, in order to reveal its ontological conditions of dependent co-arising. The ontological make-up of things is emptiness so to speak. Thus, a sympathetic reading is not a reflection on the inner essence of authors or their texts, but an explication of their socio-historical dependent co-arising. They are similar to what Gadamer calls "traditions" or "horizons" or what Bourdieu describes as "fields." Grounded upon which, these authors and social actors can think, act and feel. In other words, sympathetic reading is not merely an empathetic reliving of the other's intentions or thinking, but also its un-thought, namely, horizon or field. In *What is called thinking?* , Heidegger states:

> To acknowledge and respect consists in letting every thinker's thought come to us as something in each case unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible – and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought. What is un-thought in a thinker's thought is no lack inherent in his thought. What is un-thought is there in each case only as the un-thought. The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it. The unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow.[236]

The Heideggerian unthought is actually the condition of possibility of thought. It is no different from the Buddhist notion of emptiness and dependent co-arising. The nature or functioning of this condition affects the nature of what shall be thought. Sympathetic understanding in turn is not purely a psychological notion of how to gain access to another's mind, like a reproduction of another mental life so to speak. That, as inspired by Dilthey or some interpretative sociologists, has always been a problem among the social sciences ranging from psychology, sociology to history. What we are concerned about is not just the subject matter to which it turns, but the horizon of thinking by which the subject matter will be organized, arranged or oriented. In other words, we aspire a relational process of hermeneutical understanding that overcomes

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[235] Svabhavatasca sunye smimscinta naivopapadyate/ param nirodhad bhavati buddho na bhavatiti va// in Mulamadhyamikakarika 22:14.

[236] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

individualism, collectivism, positivism and interpretism, and espouses the notion that understanding is a concrete fusing of horizons.

Therefore, the attitude of a sympathetic reading is not the grasping of an inherently and independently existent social fact, which exists outside of our mind. It is rather an understanding of and engaging with the condition of possibility of social becoming. Therefore, to understand a text, I must stress, is not to find a frozen (a-temporal) point of truth about an author's and social actor's intention or an independent (atomistic) truth unit of specific thought, but to unfold the possibility of becoming revealed from within the social world. Thus, sympathetic reading has always been emphatic in its work of understanding. The middle way perspective is not a simple rejection of all traditional scholarship and rigor. It is an insightful compassion, or a compassionate insight, which, by discarding the subject/object dualism of substantialism and nihilism, proclaims that mutually embedded human beings share some kind of a non-dual, pre-differentiated, primordial sense of communitas and togetherness. It differs from the reified and homogenized state of "the social" as we have discussed previously. This interconnection between "the self" and "others" is the condition of possibility of the process of understanding. Therefore, understanding is possible in a mutually implicated and dialogical process.

Based on this condition, our sympathetic reading attempts to appreciate the traditional rigor on the ontological level even if the ultimate effect is to show that such rigor is never as absolute, given, static or homogeneous as it claims to be. While in a cutting way, symptomatic reading discloses the fundamental fallacy of substantialism and nihilism in the social sciences a sympathetic reading tends to understand their root problem and turn to appreciate the relational-processual potential implicated in the social sciences. To be more specific, I respect all the theories and thoughts that I have encountered and believe that their implication for a relational-processual approach is always open. In some occasions, I tend to criticize some authors or texts for their being too extreme, too substantialist or nihilistic. It might have posed an impression that I am attempting to be revolutionary while simultaneously stereotyping or stigmatizing every assumption established in the social theories, and then try to invent a novel and "flawless" alternative for social theory. However, this is not my initial attempt. Yet, due to my own one-sided exaggeration of the substantialist or nihilistic components of certain social theories, my representation of some authors' visions might appear to be unfair. Thus, I have to admit that my treatment of some theories, such as rational-choice theory, Durkheimian positivism, Schutzian interpretism, and

so forth, is quite a bit symptomatically oriented and thereby short of sympathetic understanding. I meant to do so, simply because this is only a writing strategy, or a theoretical argumentation which, by performing an one-sided exaggeration of the flaw of a putative extremism, I attempt to contrast and articulate a more acceptable middle path in the social science with the facilitation of the Buddhist middle way perspective.

Sympathetically speaking, if we situate our discourse in the historical context of the continuation-through-transformation of social theories, every theory would have its merit with regard to its effort to dialectically overcome the absolutism, or metaphysics, of previous ones. Accordingly, we can say that Comte was a "destroyer of myth," who tried "to deal with problems of this kind, a new type of scientific specialist is required, entrusted with the investigation of long-term social processes like the increasing differentiation of scientific work and its social driving forces." [237] Moreover, Durkheim is a relationalist thinker who provided an early example of an ontological position of social relations to defend the rules of a sociological method and to justify them in contrast to the individualist approach asserted by the psychological, economically atomistic and philosophical speculations of his time. Furthermore, Parsonian structural-functionalism also has the great insight that some neo-functionalists would find his theory insightful and useful for further articulation, and they thereby develop their own synthetic theories by standing on Parson's shoulders.[238] I am fully aware of this part of the insightful development of these theories and I cherish their efforts to make functionalist thinking more relational and processual. However, for articulating my argument clearly as a skillful means to elaborate the middle way perspective, I can only temporarily put aside the relational-processual potential (a not-yet momentum so to speak) of those theories and assuming that their un-thought, the condition of possibility of thought, is still misguided. Again, this examination is not final.

Due to the limits of my own condition of possibility of thinking, my sympathetic reading in this dissertation originates with pre-understanding, or even prejudgment coming from my relatively specific background knowledge. Thus, they cannot avoid being selective and partial. I therefore tend to favor more on the thinkers who have explicitly or sophisticatedly endeavored to make their theories to be relational or processual. I tend to praise not only their manifestation of relational-porcessual insight, but also footing, or grounding on the plausible position. Philosophers and

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[237] See Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology*? p. 50. Columbia University Press: New York. 1978.
[238] Alexander, Jeffrey C., 1985. *Neofunctionalism*. Sage., Beverly Hills.

sociologists such as Hang-Georg Gadamer, W. James, C.S. Peirce, J. Dewey, A.N. Whitehead, H. Cooley, G. H. Mead, N. Elias, P. Bourdieu, A. Giddens, P. Sztompka, M. Emirbayer, M. Foucault, J. Derrida, G. Deleuze, Bataille and so forth, are thinkers with a relational-processual insight. But I chose to illustrate mainly Gadamer, Mead, Elias and Bourdieu's insights, for their affinity to my argument.

When engaging a symptomatic debunking of the substantialist and nihilist part of certain social theories and a sympathetic appreciation of some relational-processual social thoughts, I have also implied another reading attitude, which is the synthesis of the different relational-processual insights in every reading act concomitantly. However, the one-dimensionality of discursive language and the linear tendency of thesis analysis inevitably trichotomize and chronologize such a kenotic "trinity" (of symptomatic, sympathetic and synthetic reading acts). That is why, I think, the synthetic reading becomes so important for engaging a healing hermeneutics for fusing together tentatively varied worldviews, or expanding our evaluative framework towards a better understanding of each other. The middle way examination of the constitution of society is meant to be synthetic. I combined Nagarjuna's neither-nor argument concerning temporality, spatiality, linguisticality, the self and the social with different sociologist' relational-processual insights.

The middle way perspective demonstrates a healing potential by conducting a symptomatic deconstruction of substantialism and nihilism, and a sympathetic understanding into the grounding dependent co-arising of things, and is thereby actively engaging in a healing effort for establishing a synthetic reconstruction. It is a dialogical process that makes the middle way perspective vivid and communicable with current social theories. This is my main goal. The middle way perspective can never create a brand new social theory out of nothing. With its openness to the other's insight it remains un-reified and un-annihilated. If not so, then it will be self-contradictory.

The synthetic reading will be a combinatory effort for embracing different theories as mentioned above, that I consider beneficial for the relational-processual imagination of the social world. I, in turn, have reexamined some philosophical and sociological works and embraced their merits in the light of the middle way perspective. What I have demonstrated in this dissertation is an attempt to consider the possible "middle way" way break from substantialism and nihilism by means of a critical reconstruction of the relational-processual insight in sociology.

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