

THE POSSIBILITY OF SOCIAL THEORY

Vytautas Magnus University

Small Hall, Daukanto street 28.

Kaunas, Lithuania

March 1, 2012

Introduction

Statement of the current mass confusion concerning the status of social theory, ranging from quantitative positivism, through foundational reductionisms (economic, genetic, theological, and metaphysical), all the way to “cultural unconscious” of postmodern ilk. Can this confusion be resolved by one or another trend that can offer a “global social theory?”

Articulating the issues

The problem of the status of “theory:” in terms of modern and postmodern multi-discursivity, “theory” is one among many other “stories” and resultantly cannot be universal. Just as there is no philosophy except as one among numerous other Western stories that is irrelevant to other stories not only for the “others” but also for the West. If there are different societies (and cultures) possessing their own modes of understanding, can these societies produce their own theories, and whether such theories encompass their own societies or comprise one, and hence not an all explanatory factor of these societies. In this sense, such a theory cannot be adequate on both counts – as local and as global.

Articulating the arguments for a concept of “generality” such that generality is prior to universality and particularity. These arguments could lead to neither a global-universal, nor local-particular domain from which a social “theory” could emerge. At times, this “intermediary” domain was called the “lived world” whose concrete vectors of interconnected significations seemed to open up a contact between different societies.

Society-Culture-Civilization

If there is a central issue, it might look as follows: In the prevalence of “culturalisms” and multi culturalisms, a question arises whether culture shapes society and hence its social theories, or whether culture is an aspect of a society such that the latter may have various cultures. If society is more basic than culture, then the next issue to be resolved is this: there are diverse societies such that some of them belong to one and others to another civilization. This would also suggest that cultures too belong to different civilizations and may be incompatible and even antagonistic. Thus, if a social theory is to be adequate, must it be explicated in terms of a civilization to which it belongs, or can it be more encompassing than any civilization. This inquiry has two possible directions: 1. A specific civilization with its own history is its own inherent “theory” or 2. A comparative approach ought to disclose a set of principles that articulate diverse civilizations without being a part of one or another civilization. For social theory, at this level, the question is: what would be such an approach and what would be the sources of its factors: eclectic borrowing from diverse civilizations or a discovery within civilizations equivalent features in all of them.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SOCIAL THEORY: PROGRAM

March 1, 2012

11:00 Welcoming address: Gintautas Mazeikis (or a chosen VDU representative)

11:15 Opening address: Issues in Social theory, Algis Mickunas, Vytautas Magnus University

11:30 Local Social Theory, John Murphy, Miami University

12:15 Contemporary Philosophical Anthropology on Postsecular Rebellion of New Communities, Gintautas Mazeikis, Vytautas Magnus University

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Are we Fated to Endlessly Fight: The Role of Human Reflection on Social Darwinism, Eric Kramer Oklahoma University

15:15 Lifeworld and Intersubjectivity, Burt Hopkins, Seattle University

16:00 Ideals and bracketing of reality. Phenomenological interpretations of Don Quixote., D. Jonkus, Vytautas Magnus University

16:45 Social Theory from Within, Joseph Pilotta, Ohio State University.

17:30 Sociology of Normativity, Martin Gak, European College of Liberal Arts, Berlin