

**Buch's Historical Sociology Thesis:  
From Sociology of Knowledge to Sociology of Ideology and Networks**

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STAGE ONE OF THE ARGUMENT

Proposition 1: Knowledge is method, but works with certain flexibilities –

- 1.a. Risk-taking incremental process (fallabilistic);
- 1.b. Revisibility (science)

Proposition 2: From Proposition 1, it follows that knowledge works on the implementation of principles or axioms in degrees and with amalgamation, never as pure ideology.

Proposition 3: From Proposition 1 and 2, the process of knowledge across intellectual traditions for millennia works in the degrees and with amalgamation from principles or axioms and which are thus methodological. Four are basic:

- 3.a. Methodological truism – propositions are statements of truth value (i.e. endless epistemological theories and debate on ‘truth’; the alternative is the impossible – for human thought – self-refuting global skepticism in its purity; hence a basis or boundary for Proposition 1);
- 3.b. Methodological skepticism (or academic skepticism) – all propositions are open to challenge (Socrates);
- 3.c. Methodological formation (‘ideas’, ‘propositions’, ‘syllogisms’, ‘epistemic ground or cycles’,) – all propositions are related in form (Plato and Aristotle; rationalist and idealist traditions); and here the formation leads to two large sets of problematic questions of
  - [3.c.i.] monism versus pluralism (‘the one and the many’);
  - [3.c.ii.] mathematical logic or calculating or mechanical thinking versus informal logic or processing or organic thinking.
- 3.d. Methodological naturalism – all propositions are related in essence or substance (Aristotle; empirical and realist traditions);

To these four basic epistemic methodologies, three more approaches have to be added on the basis that the challenges to propositions (what is said to be true and knowable and those claims can be

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meta-logically justify) includes the questions of is knowledge i) meaningful, ii) workable, and iii) good. Hence three more methodologies:

- 3.e. Methodological cynicism (language and ontology) – Most propositions are not expressed well (sufficiently full and with clarity) and the meaning conveyed has to be understood;
- 3.f. Methodological pragmatism (technology, ontology and semiotic) – Most propositions are related to particular sets of purposes (meanings), relative to its use;
- 3.g. Methodological ethics (applied, but also normative ethics and meta-ethics are necessary in the epistemic method) – Most propositions have value judgements and those judgements are related to i) purposeful practice (applied ethics), ii) expectations of 'the ought', 'mission', 'goals' (and so forth, normative ethics), and iii) justification of the practice and expectation (meta-ethics; in particular, what are value judgements?).

Proposition 4: From Proposition 1, 2, and 3, in the different and possible amalgamations of the methodologies, three further epistemic questions of time pattern and sequencing emerge and possible solutions are contentious:

- 4.a. Question of order or chaos, involving many questions on causal relations and chance or luck;
- 4.b. Question of process, involving theories of uniformitarianism or gradualism, catastrophism, revolution, and punctuated equilibrium;
- 4.c. Question of predication, involving the avoidance of danger and risk analysis.

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## STAGE TWO OF THE ARGUMENT

Building from stage one...

Proposition 5: Ideas are still important in knowledge production, but they are also in a binary tension between how we understand what are real (facts) and how we understand the meanings of what are real (values). The fact-value distinction or problem is contentious. The solution I am arguing in this thesis generally is a compatibilist's one across the fields, influenced by Wilfrid Sellars' synoptic vision of "manifest image" and the "scientific image" of the world (a bi-focal model), Susan Haack's

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foundherentism, and Bernard Williams' 'thick concepts'. In terms of broad cultural ideological movements in the last century, a compatibilist's thesis departs company with –

- [5.a.] 1) mid-twentieth century radical behaviourism that denies consciousness as a formative entity against modern theorists that holds to a variants of property dualism, allowing consciousness to be understood as completely brain dependent and also integrally the person – beyond its methodological status the behaviourist ends up denying an 'integral conception' of person.
- [5.b.] 2) alleged and real scientism of mid-twentieth century rationalists' science popularizers who argue for the unique status of scientific knowledge. Although scientism is an epistemic problem (the nature of uniqueness), it is too often gets confused as a straw-man with the generally rejected logical positivist's argument that all propositions in non-mathematical expression is nonsense, i.e. has no sense. Most empiricist-driven scientists or science popularizers accused of scientism are, in fact, compatibilist of some kind, in the main –
  - [5.b.i.] to hold a two-model conception of knowledge, such as Stephen Jay Gould's non-overlapping magisterial, or,
  - [5.b.ii.] incorporate an innocent or minimalist conception of mystical process – even Carl Sagan had, and Neil deGrasse Tyson has, a deep reverence for wonderment, and furthermore,
  - [5.b.iii.] the polemics of alleged scientism is about organised religion, not notions of spirituality, and most intelligent devout believers also share the very same cynicism towards organised religion;
- [5.c.] 3) radical postmodern arguments, which end up as variants of solipsism, and whose advocates push the idea of fragmentation as if it could be a permanent solution.

Proposition 6: Following Proposition 5, this sociological thesis rests upon, or linked into, broad compatibilist arguments on many levels without the need for generalising either for creative tension or resolution. There is space within the thesis for establishing further propositions where there can be both, contextually, peaceful tension and partial resolutions. This will be important further in the argument where broad ideological and specific ethical propositions, with both reason and passion, have to be analytically taken apart and synthetically assembled. Whether the propositions are better conservatively re-assembled as they were, or radically reformed, are contextually historical questions. From this is a counter-argument from those who reject binary thought, which is –

- 6.a. the conceptual binary– reason-passion, consciousness-brain function, male-female, organic-mechanic, and so forth – is not an epistemic problem from a compatibilist stance, where a number of potential solutions can be found: i) holding to variations within the binary, ii) holding to sameness within the binary, and iii) resolving tension by moving to a

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synthesis of a third (e.g. traditional Christian or secular Hegelian 'trinity' or 'triad'), in which case binary thought is essential for the resolution.

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### STAGE THREE OF THE ARGUMENT

Building from stage two...

Proposition 7: Conflict is inevitable, even as, at a point in time, resolution is available; that is, the resolution of conflict presupposes the existence of conflict. Much can be said on a range of issues in conflict studies, but two basic observations are made here in support of the proposition, but only in passing –

- 7.a. there is the broad psychological disposition in our humanity to struggle against a perceived foe;
- 7.b. where there, in the contrary, beliefs based on perfect peace and harmony have fatalistic notions of 'struggle'; for example, in religious and secular doctrines of submission, assimilation, and surrender – the Borg Creed, "resistance is futile", that is, the resolution of the struggle presupposed the existence of the conflict.

Proposition 8: On the basis of Proposition 7, the temptation is identify a conflict in terms of 'Our Enemies' those life-forms that threaten conflict in a presumed state of perfect peace and harmony. This is an error. There are a number of important elements here –

- 8.a. The threat is also seen in ideological terms rather than from the life-forms. What is occurring here is a process of objectification that allows the threat to be transferred from agents to ideas. This process aids the de-emotionalising of the threat or conflict;
- 8.b. Although this helps to deescalate the threat or conflict, it is often unhelpful in understanding how to i) resolve conflict and ii) neutralise the threat;
  - [8.b.i.] The reason for the misunderstanding, and thereby existing with the unresolved conflict or continuing threat, is the failure to identify ourselves as part of the conflict and threat; and this is because –
  - [8.b.ii.] Our disposition of a 'perceived foe' (Proposition 7.a) often creates the blind-spot in the mirror to ourselves; and this is due to the fact of –

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- [8.b.iii.] Binary thought – reason-passion, consciousness-brain function, male-female, organic-mechanic, and so forth – is the conflict within ourselves projected onto 'the other', however, this must not be taken as denying the external threat. Rather what is argued in the proposition is a compatibilist approach to internalist-externalist problem, a dynamic understanding that threats and conflicts have both related internal and external elements.

Proposition 9: Following from Proposition 7 and 8, the error we faced with, which does not allow the means to i) resolve conflict and ii) neutralise the threat, is the creation of the monolithic enemy, singular in focus, without regard to compromising parts and without the understanding of our own internal connection to the objectified threatening enemy. The unanalytical 'enemy' can be personalised, as a leader of an entity that is seen as threatening, but can also be understood as a system, an ideological system.

- 9.a. In recent times, we have seen politicians set-out ideological system as the unanalytical 'enemy'. It is claimed that the other side of politics is being 'ideological' and therefore their policies can be dismissed on this account. The error made is to perceive the threat of an ideological system in unanalytical general terms. A few clarifying points need to be made –
  - [9.a.i.] Historically, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, as delivered by a state or terrorist organisation, were our collective enemy and might still be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
  - [9.a.ii.] As creations of the monolithic enemy, the approach did not i) resolve conflict and ii) neutralise the threat of these ideological systems, and most persons involved remained ignorant of what exactly is the nature of the threat;
  - [9.a.iii.] The threat exists because we have systems of ideas that are fundamentally opposed to our collective human principles;
  - [9.a.iv.] Those collective human principles are what I call 'civic ideologies' (Proposition 10);
  - [9.a.v.] Those ideological systems which are truly threatening, e.g. Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, have to be seen as having elements of 'civic ideologies', but process through a purist desire to create a monolithic system to oppose the unanalytical and monolithically enemy. Therefore the 'civic ideologies' and their values become twisted and entangled. The arguments of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism are built on our own internal desires for things such as stability, peace, harmony, fairness, equality and freedom.
  - [9.a.vi.] If we don't see the mirroring effect of the ideological systems that threaten us, we are likely to become a copy of the monolithic enemy, e.g. the American anti-communist paranoia of the 1950s that threaten and undermine American democracy.
  - [9.a.vii.] The thesis at this point suggests that part of the solution to conflict and neutralising a threat is intellectual humility –

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- No particular resolution or counter-measure can be singled out as irreproachable in the host of ideologies; all are problematic at various points, and all fallible and unable to create any utopia, and all with a measure of truth and measure of hope, albeit twisted and entwined truth and hope.

Proposition 10: Further to Proposition 7, 8 and 9, the resolution of conflict and the neutralising of a threat turns on the basic and internalised principles that evolving humanity holds dearly. These are elements within 'civic ideologies'. Civic' means here the desire for a pathway to a harmonious and peaceful world 'city' or cities. The literature on 'cultural civilisation' is large and stretches back to Augustine, Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates in western traditions, but there are 'other', 'eastern', 'non-western' (all general terms totally inadequate) traditions which illuminate or testify to important understandings of civilization.

- 10.a. Descriptions of those basic humanist principles can vary, but it is suggested here that chief among them are – civility, liberty, equality, and the interconnectedness and respect for all life forms (irrespective of the necessity in our speciesism; that is, irrespective of any 'alien' lifeforms, the aforementioned principles are logically and biologically human values).
  - [10.a.i.] This is a humanist doctrine but one widely shared in different versions of humanism, from different secular and religious traditions. Many further arguments can be made on the nature of humanity, including ideas of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race, and if indeed there is nature, however, the argument here is inclusively a humanist thesis.
- 10.b. Alternative description of basic humanist principles could be, "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness", and notions of "unalienable rights", but this would open up legitimate debates about politics and ethics in pro-life, libertarian, and hedonist positions too early, before there is the opportunity to set out the thesis in full. Outlining several inclusive humanist 'basic principles', without closing off the set (leaving it sufficiently open for inclusion and debate), is enough groundwork, or enough connections, to support the proposition, irrespective of legitimate debates that takes us too far in too many directions.

#### STAGE FOUR OF THE ARGUMENT

Building from stage three...

Proposition 11: As a matter of historical sociology for contemporary times, I propose two ideological threats, not to promote a binary argument, but as a skeptical argument about how we –

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the general citizenry – are being played by devious politicians, and that a way out of the conflict and threat is the analytics I described in the previous stages.

Proposition 12: In our contemporary times, there are historical descriptions for two ideological threats which have evolved in the past two centuries. The evolution occurred within legitimate ideological traditions (see Jürgen Habermas) formulated primarily in the British and American networks of cultural and political theories. These ideological traditions are generally 'good' on humanist criteria of ethical judgement. In this judgement, though, there is also recognition of both ethnocentrism and the Borg-like behaviour of cultural assimilation, in both directions. These are basic and contradictory elements problematic for many advocates of many civic ideologies.

Proposition 13: Expanding Proposition 12, the history of American politics and culture has been more largely shaped by the populist-progressivist debates of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, where the progressivist movement was a code for political and cultural elitism. The story is not new as the theme goes back to ancient Greco-Roman literature, the key text being Plato's 'Republic', and indeed feeds into the conceptual argument, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between 'The Republic' and 'Democracy'. Furthermore, it is not singularly a problem of Americanisation. In the British Tory-Conservative Parties, Whig-Liberal Parties, and the Reformist's Chartist Movement, and Fabian Socialist Movement and British Marxism, we see different alliances of interests, but as a result of a battle of a paternalistic conservatism or liberalism or socialism that held to a 'high culture' against a kind of young-mass-modern-generation conservatism ('Young England') or liberalism or socialism that was always for 'The People', with the strange qualification that they were only 'ordinary men and women'. Do we preserved the old treasures or go with the new? The debates on the British political landscape, along with the traditionalist verses modernist threads in British and Continental cultural Romanticism, no doubt shaped the younger American nation when Britain was at the height of its imperial power – in contradiction to the nonsense of the exceptionalist thesis.

Proposition 14: Following the explanation of Propositions 12 and 13, and for the sake of a clean cut description, I will representatively describe the legitimate broad ideological traditions where a threat may exist, as follows:

- 14.a. 'Conservative-Liberal-Progressivism' – the ideological circle of paternalism, Whiggish Progress, and 'high culture'. These ideas don't always sit together in every grouping, but they describe well the uncomfortable Conservative-Liberal alliance and the high-minded versions of socialism.
- 14.b. 'Conservative-Libertarian-Populism' – the ideological circle of the free and unshackled individual, the devout folk traditions, and mass popular culture. Again these ideas don't

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always sit together in every grouping, and in particular 'folks' and mass populists are strange bedfellows. And the fascists and anti-intellectual socialists are confusingly shouting the same messages at each other, as they promote their own very twisted cultural wars.

- 14.c. There are no ideological system were everyone falls neatly into the defined category. Venn diagrams also demonstrate the consistent thinking of persons caught in the crossovers. Among those who may fall out of this binary grouping, are those devious pragmatic politicians where it is all a game to them to get political advantage for themselves, and not a program or manifesto for a better society.

Proposition 15: With the description of Proposition 14, no grouping here is without legitimate causes and grievances, but it is obviously that there is something terribly wrong in both groupings. I am proposing, following the argument in stages one and two, that the bare facts of an ideological system are not enough, nor are simple valuations within an ideological system. What is missing is an evaluation of the facts and values as they are integrally and personally acted upon, from individuals and collectives. Following Bernard Williams, we can investigate thick concepts where we consider the ethical action in the ideology.

Proposition 16: Following the lengthy descriptions and explanations set out in stages three and four, the conclusion I put forth is as follows:

- 16.a. Our true threat today is i) an ignorant and politically-charged populism and ii) a heartless and narrow-minded progressivism.

Proposition 17: Following from Proposition 17, persons should not be our enemies, if we can help to do otherwise, and it is rather the unethical motivations and short-sighted views that are promulgated. Thick concepts in ethical understanding are a way of unlocking the elitist-populist problem. In the conclusion statement above I could have used other adjectives to describe the twisted and entangled ideological systems. However, my historical conclusion for our contemporary times is this:

- 17.a. The problem in populism and progressivism is neither the causes nor the grievances. It is the personable mixture of reason and passions which extend out to the extreme.
  - [17.a.i.] In the case of populism, we still have a population, whether from choice or lack of opportunity, which is ignorant of the complexity that frustrates their lives. It becomes a larger problem when 'common' leaders among the population, along with opportunist politicians, politically-charge the masses into electoral mobilisation riding on simple slogans for change. True, many reforms for emancipation have been



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won taking this approach. However, it seems more common in the twentieth century that the approach has ended in mass violence with little very political gain, and long-reigns of dictatorships or incompetent government.

- [17.a.ii.] Progressivism can paradoxically be caught in the populist winds for reforms, but it is a top-down process, and usually upsets 'the common folk' with a self-righteous cultural moralism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century and these early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, progressivists have, at least, been 'high-minded' and taken risks in social experimentation. Some of those experiments have been terrible sociological disasters, the American prohibition of the trade and sale of alcohol is the prime case. However, except for puritanical libertarians, there is an acceptance in society of progressivist ideas. The trend in the society is to abandon smoking in public places. There has never been a time when public health (and how to pay for it) has worried the population to the extent it is today. Public health is one issue where the ethical maxim for caring is obvious. The danger for progressivists is narrow-mindedness, when in a militant and puritan spirit, they become obsessed with the one issue. The popular backlash over the misconceived grievances from alleged "identity politics" (is not civilisation, nationalism, statehood, and 'the city' also forms of identity politics?) is due to a fragmentation into singular narrow-mindedness. What is missing is empathy for other people's concerns outside of the campaign agenda, lost in a heartless militancy for needing to move the times on.

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In summary, Buch's Historical Sociology Thesis:

1. A singular system of ideology, *per se*, is not the problem.
2. Systems of ideas need to be understood in connecting our own ideas and values (internal) to the external threat, and perceiving ourselves in the problem.
3. Ideas which integrally combine fact and value are important in this process of understanding.
4. The problem is what threatens our inclusively humanist basic principles ('humanist' in that everyone who is reading this right now is inescapably human).
5. What threatens those principles will be ideological amalgamation with twists and entanglements of what we ourselves value; it is not life-forms, nor a personification of the system into a simplistic monolithic enemy.
6. The threat is only understood by analysing historical context, in regards to basic principles of humanity, perennial and evolving.
7. With the historical understanding of necessary and good alliances and compromises, and the bad (or evil) twists and entanglements of traditions, the two broad ideological threats that

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has developed in the two centuries, in the United States and Britain, and globally exported, can be described as 'Conservative-Liberal-Progressivism' and 'Conservative-Libertarian-Populism'.

8. With an understanding of thick concepts in ethical motivation, the two ideological-alliance systems threaten basic principles of humanity. Our true enemies are an ignorant and politically-charged populism and a heartless and narrow-minded progressivism. The enemy is ourselves divided by political forces that are not interested in the resolution of conflict and removing the threat.