

STRUCTURIST APPROACHES TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

**An Examination of Some Key Issues in the Methodologies
of Structural History and a Defence of Structurism
as the Basis for Historical Science**

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This dissertation is about how the historical processes of structural change in economies and societies are being conceptualised and explained and about how the main concepts and forms of explanation could be improved. The starting point is an awareness that there are major methodological and conceptual weaknesses in the explanations currently provided by many historians of economic and social structures. Empirical weaknesses in explanations will always be with us in the sense that more information about present and past economies and societies is constantly becoming available as a result of research and the process of social change itself. But methodological and conceptual weaknesses may be susceptible to permanent improvement as a result of analytical thought, including examinations of conceptual systems, of the logic of enquiry and reasoning employed by particular sciences, including structural history, and of how some sciences have become more advanced than others. In particular, the crucial process of forming a coherent *domain* of scientific enquiry for social structural history must be examined.

The extended articulation and defence of historical science in this dissertation tries to design and situate its fortifications so as to deflect the attacks of advocates of hermeneutical relativism, post-structuralism, and "common sense" historiography. The fortifications are built on a prominent outcrop of the strategic territory of analytical philosophy of science, and they are constructed out of materials gathered from scientific realism. To the advocates of hermeneutical relativism and post-structuralist theory arguments for a *science* of history are now atavistic and naïve, and to the "common sense" practitioners of traditional interpretive history they are irrelevant. Conceptualising and trying to *discover* the *real hidden structures* of society and the *real processes* of social structural change are unfashionable and outmoded to all these opponents. But I persist in holding that the histories of economies and societies, like the histories of the earth and the biosphere, proceed independently of beliefs, concepts, theories, ideologies, and philosophies. Theorists and philosophers only try to conceptualise and interpret the world (or even just each other's imaginative theoretical creations), the point is to *explain* the origins and nature of the real structures of the world and their transformations.

Herein I examine the underlying individualist and holist methodologies (or which are often only unexamined assumptions) for approaching the explanation of the history of economic and social structures. I argue that there exists a third alternative to individualism and holism - what I call "*methodological structurism*". Like the other two, this third methodology is interconnected with a concept of structure and a concept of structural change. But unlike the other methodologies, it has not been well articulated nor extensively defended. Methodological structurism, I shall argue, now exists quite widely as an unexamined assumption embedded in the explanations of many historians. I shall try to articulate it and show why it is the most appropriate methodology for approaching the explanation of structural history.

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**STRUCTURIST APPROACHES TO ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL HISTORY**

Certificate

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Alan Christopher Lloyd

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The Significance of Science

" To those attempting to understand the knowledge-seeking and knowledge-acquiring enterprise - to understand how we should go about trying to get knowledge, and what it is that we have if we get it - one of the major lessons of science in the twentieth century is this:

The results of scientific investigation could not have been anticipated by common sense, by the suggestions of everyday experience, or by pure reason.

I will call this the *Principle of Rejection of Anticipation of Nature*....

The full significance of the principle is a product of scientific enquiry, and especially of the results of that enquiry in this century; it is not an *a priori* stricture, laid down, for example, by the nature of enquiry or scientific method itself....The evidence in its favor is indeed overwhelming; even a brief survey of just some of the more familiar such evidence can only lead to its acceptance.... Nor is such evidence limited to the physical sciences. Who could have anticipated the complexity of the processes of life - of heredity and development, or of the nervous and immune systems?...

But if so many of our contemporary scientific beliefs could not have been anticipated by common sense, the suggestions of everyday experience, or pure reason, then how *have* we managed to think of them and come to adopt them?... That understanding is gained through a second great lesson of modern science, one which furnishes profound insight into not only the knowledge-seeking but also the knowledge-acquiring aspect of the scientific enterprise.

This positive lesson of modern science stems from the fact that the sorts of considerations that have led us to alter our beliefs about nature, at least when those considerations are ones we call 'rational' or 'based on evidence', have themselves been scientific ones. For twentieth-century science, even more than its predecessors, has shown the possibility of formulating our beliefs in ways that make it possible to subject them to scientific scrutiny, and thereby to see how we might modify or reject and replace them if necessary.... It is thus through this incorporation of beliefs into the scientific process that it has become possible to modify or reject so many beliefs which had previously seemed unassailable, and to arrive at so many beliefs of modern science which could not otherwise have been anticipated - and ... to have done these things for good reasons. This record of achievement provides the second major lesson of modern science, a lesson which can be formulated as a principle:

Every aspect of our beliefs ought, wherever possible, to be formulated, and to be brought into relation to well-founded beliefs, in such a way that it will be possible to test that aspect.

In short, this second lesson of modern science tells us to internalize all aspects of our beliefs into the scientific process. For that reason, I will call it the *Principle of Scientific Internalization*, or, more briefly, the *Principle of Internalization*. It is a *normative* principle; and its value, its necessity, as a policy, a guiding principle, of science is something that has itself been learned through the scientific process, through a record of achievement that led to its adoption.

In connection with the two lessons or principles, it is important to realise that radical changes in the fabric of science have not been restricted to alterations in our substantive beliefs about how things are. They have also extended to the methods and rules of reasoning by which we arrive at those beliefs, and the aims we have in seeking them.

Dudley Shapere, 'Method in the Philosophy of Science and Epistemology: How to Inquire about Inquiry and Knowledge', (1987), pp. 1-2.