Again, please forgive the predictability. I am hardly going to answer this chapter’s title question negatively. Clearly, I would not have brought you this far to conclude that we do not need CR after all.

The point of this chapter is to bring everything together, to see how CR compares in terms of similarities and differences with various other theoretical and philosophical positions in sociology. My hope is that even if you are un-persuaded by what I have said so far about CR, the discussion here will at least help you better navigate through the thicket of philosophical commitments across sociological perspectives.

I speak of philosophical commitments, and hopefully by this time it is clear we cannot escape them. We have them and they influence us, whether we recognize them or not. Such being the case, as we sociologists counsel others, so should we think critically ourselves. We should make sure that the positions to which we are philosophically committed are the those that are most defensible.

Although much good social science can still come from faulty philosophical premises, it will not be the best social science it could be. With faulty philosophical premises, moreover, much that might be potentially good social science will not even be entertained. Under the long dominant positivism, for example, ethnography has been devalued and discouraged. Under CR, it is not. So there is a pragmatic payoff here. Like the pragmatists, we in CR – or at least I – do not believe in philosophizing without practical point. However long our sojourn in philosophy may last, our work there should all ultimately relate back to some practical problem of life. In this case, the practical problem is how we best go about doing social science – and how, even more pertinently – we avoid practicing a sham discipline, one that looks like science but is not.

I promised that in this chapter there would be a handy chart, and there it is as Table 7.1. It will facilitate our task of examining similarities and differences across theoretical positions. First, I need to explain
a bit what you are seeing, and the first thing to say is that the chart is sort of a mixed bag as it includes both theoretical and metatheoretical positions. The top four positions are philosophical metatheories; the bottom nine are more standard theoretical perspectives in sociology.

Why the mixture? It is true that, in comparison with the metatheoretical positions, it may be less fair to expect the standard sociological perspectives to have explicit commitments on all philosophical concerns. Must standard network theory or Bourdieu, for example, have explicit positions on truth? As far as I know, they do not. At the same time, as they conduct their research and present their results, they must be operating with some idea of truth. Is that idea positivist, postmodern, or what? It is helpful to know which standard sociological perspectives are in need of explicit answers to which questions. For those questions for which the sociological perspectives do have explicit answers, it is also helpful to know where the various answers fall philosophically.

The chart is a mixed bag in two other regards. First, postmodernists would rightly accuse it of essentialism. In more modernist terms, the philosophical and theoretical positions listed ignore or collapse various internal differences within each. Who, for example, are the interpretivists? Here, I have collapsed Symbolic Interactionists, cultural sociologists, hermeneuticists, and others who subscribe to a Verstehen approach to sociology. Do they all agree on everything? Surely not.

Not even do we critical realists all agree on a number of the philosophical matters that run across the columns of the chart. Nor likewise is there complete agreement among the pragmatists or even among Symbolic Interactionists.

So are those X’s and dashes not meaningless? No, the positions indicated are not meaningless, but neither should the chart be reified. Consider the chart rather a conversation piece, a place to begin reflection on the different positions represented. For the most part, the X’s and dashes reflect what I fallibly consider the main line for each perspective. As we discuss the chart, I will try to reference alternate lines.

Speaking of the X’s and dashes, they represent a second way in which the chart is a mixed bag. Both because of the plethora of internal divisions and because of nuanced responses to the listing of philosophical issues, it is not so easy to construct such a chart that has any practical use. To do so, I employed two devices. First, I constructed the
Table 7.1 *Theoretical perspectives by theoretical commitments*

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<th>Agents</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Intensive</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
<th>Metatheory</th>
<th>Truth (non-relativist)</th>
<th>Value orientation</th>
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| Positivism                 | –       | –         | –         | X         | –          | X                      | –                 |
| Critical realism           | X       | X         | X         | X         | X          | X                      | X                 |
| Postmodernism/poststructuralism/ Discourse theory* | – | – | X | – | – | X | X |

| Pragmatism                 | X       | ?         | X         | –         | X          | ?                      | X                 |
| Interpretivism             | X       | –         | X         | –         | –          | –                      | ?                 |
| Social constructionism    | –       | –         | X         | –         | –          | –                      | –                 |
| Analytical sociology      | X       | –         | X         | X         | –          | X                      | –                 |
| Relational sociology      | –       | X         | X         | –         | –          | –                      | –                 |
| Practice theory            | –       | –         | X         | –         | –          | –                      | –                 |
| ANT                        | X       | X         | X         | –         | –          | –                      | –                 |
| Standard network theory    | –       | X         | –         | X         | –          | X                      | –                 |
| Marxism / Frankfurt School| X       | X         | X         | ?         | ?          | X                      | X                 |
| Bourdieu                   | –       | ?         | X         | X         | –          | X                      | –                 |

X Explicitly endorses the category.
– indicates either no explicit position or no support.
* Discourse theory different from discourse analysis.
? Clearly divergent lines within perspective.
headings of philosophical issues to represent explicit endorsements of a position. So, for example, the Agents column asks whether the perspectives represented down the rows explicitly endorse humanist accounts of consciously centered agents, what postmodernists disparage as the Cartesian cogito. Similarly, the Truth column does not ask whether the different philosophical perspectives have an explicit position on truth but whether they endorse a non-relativist conception of truth. The Intensive methods column asks whether intensive research methods are endorsed and the Value orientation column whether the perspective departs from value neutrality and the fact/value distinction. And so on.

Formulating the issues in this tendentious way permitted a second device that makes for a clearer chart. It permitted me to collapse lack of any explicit position with explicit opposition to the position represented by the column heading. Both are equally represented by the dashes, which is why I say they too represent a mixed bag.

Is that bag not untenably large? I appeal to the pragmatists among us. The chart is meant to be a tool, a helpful map. With too many symbols across the page, its utility is diminished. It gets harder to read and absorb. So I opted for simplicity and clarity at the expense of precision – which is always a matter of intents and purposes. And the chart is to be accompanied by this text. So we will make the distinction glossed by the dashes, and all will be well – or as John Levi Martin might say, well enough.

The X’s too, finally, represent a mixture. Different perspectives may endorse the position of the column heading but in different ways. Such difference shows up most obviously in the commitment to a non-relativist truth shared by both positivism and CR. Positivism holds an epistemic and CR an alethic conception of truth, the two conceptions being quite different. Similarly, although positivism and CR both endorse extensive methods of research, those methods function very differently for the two. Rejecting the covering law model of causal explanation, CR never regards a regularity, however stable, as an explanation in itself. For CR, there is always a need for an explanatory mechanism, involving some kind of causal powers. There are other such differences masked by the common crosses that we also will need to distinguish in our discussion.

I used question marks to designate where perspectives have more than one strong line on the position but where at least one endorses and one opposes it.
Interpreting the chart

Now that the meaning of the chart should be clear, we can begin discussing it. Let us start with the chart’s features that are most striking overall. The first striking feature is that only CR has X’s entered across all categories. Was that pattern deliberately designed to make CR look uniquely good? Not consciously. Certainly, the chart is designed to highlight the similarities and differences between CR and the other perspectives. Whether that design also makes CR look uniquely good depends on whether it is in fact good to have an X in all columns. If so, then, however value-oriented the design, the design does in fact illuminate an objective difference that is also objectively good. Whether CR comes out looking uniquely good is for the reader to decide in the course of our discussion.

One implication of the X’s for CR across all categories is that at some level, CR shares something with each of all the other perspectives. That quality means that CR at least has some potential for unifying sociological practice, although much depends on whether what CR shares with each perspective is in all cases worth sharing. Again, that remains for you to decide.

The second striking feature of the chart taken as a whole is that Marxism and the Frankfurt School seem very closely to coincide with CR. Like CR, they have no dashes but all X’s or at least question marks under every category. This pattern is unsurprising. CR was born in a milieu of radical politics and many of its originators – although not all – saw it as the philosophy of science implicit in Marx’s work. There are of course differences between standard Marxian approaches and the distinctive views of the Frankfurt School, but on the issues arrayed in the chart they mostly agree if not always in the same way.

A surprise to me personally when I created this chart is how closely Bourdieu aligns with CR. At first, I did not have Bourdieu listed, and he is the only individual there. At first, I had collapsed Bourdieu in with practice theory, and an argument can be made for doing so. Upon reflection, I considered Bourdieu important enough to break out separately and to consider him himself as opposed to the way Americans have appropriated him. So with regard to him, keep in mind that it is Bourdieu himself I will be considering and not Bourdieu’s American followers who fall more under practice theory and are placed there.
Let us now look more closely at how the different perspectives approach the different issues listed across the top of the chart. We begin with agency.

**Agents**

The *Agents* column asks whether the perspectives listed down the rows endorse something like the Cartesian subject – that is, a substantial or ontologically particular center of conscious experience.\(^1\) Certainly, I have argued that CR does endorse such a subject. In this respect, I referred to CR as a humanism.

Just as clearly, poststructuralism does not endorse anything like such a subject. The Cartesian cogito is in fact poststructuralism’s coinage to dismiss essentialism in the domain of subjectivity. For the postmodernists and poststructuralists and for postmodernist/poststructuralist discourse theorists, there are no centered persons but only, as with Quine’s gavagai, person slices or person phases, or, like the virtual particles of a physical vacuum, subject positions intermittently *interpolated* into fleeting existence by language.\(^2\) Bourdieu as well, it seems to me, resists the Cartesian image, which is one of the features of Bourdieu’s sociology I – and Archer – strongly oppose.

I put an X for humanism under Marxism, despite the fact that Louis Althusser’s French structuralist version expressly considered Marxism an anti-humanism. Although some critical realists are attracted to Althusser, I consider his line rather a proto-postmodernist abomination.\(^3\) It is unsurprising to me that most still living, former Althusserian Marxists left the Marxist fold completely to become full-fledged postmodernists, or poststructuralists as they now prefer to be called. In its main lines, Marxism is humanist not Lacanian. For its part, the

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\(^1\) Again without any necessary implication of Cartesian disembodiment, which is not endorsed by CR.


Frankfurt School likewise was and continues to be under Habermas humanist in orientation.

For their own different reasons, both relational sociology and standard network theory likewise deny centered agents. Both are relationally reductionist. American relational sociology, we saw, opposes any substances. All substances – their word for ontological particulars – are to be dissolved into yet other relations. Somehow, there will be relations without relata. In place of agents, American relational sociology admits only “agentic orientations” which visit actors, who are ontologically distinct from these visitations.

Although network theory is not all alike, much of it suffers from what Christian Smith calls a “missing persons” problem. According to Barry Wellman, one of the key founders of standard network theory, behavior in network theory “is interpreted in terms of structural constraints on activity, rather than in terms of inner forces within units (e.g., ‘socialization into norms’) that impel behavior in a voluntaristic, sometimes teleological push toward a desired goal.” Thus, in contrast with relational sociology, standard network theory does not so much deny the existence of inner forces like motives; instead, in Durkheimian fashion, standard network theory simply relegates agency entirely to psychology.

Network theory thus becomes a version of Structural Sociology, which imagines that structural explanations can subsist apart from human agency. To the extent that network theorists limit themselves to the constraints that various network arrangements pose to action, the enterprise may be successful. Without appeal to human agents and their motives, however, network theory can explain neither the reproduction nor the transformation of network relations.

Practice theory, equally, as we have seen, would like to do without agents who have anything in their heads. Instead, practice theorists

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7 Smith, What is a Person?.

Do we need critical realism?
think – or at least say they think – that structures and culture both can be found entirely embodied in material behavior. To the extent that it pursues this course, practice theory becomes a form of sociological behaviorism.

For its part, ANT does not deny intentional human agency with the implication behind it of centered agents. ANT simply thinks that too much ado is made of this distinction vis-à-vis non-human and even non-conscious agency that does not function in an intentional matter. Whether or not ANT’s contention is fruitful or illuminating, as pragmatists would put it, is a separate question. Technically, however, ANT does not deny human agents.

Nor is human agency denied by analytical sociology. On the contrary, to the extent that it is built around rational choice theory, analytical sociology presupposes a very definite model of centered consciousness. Certainly, from the CR perspective, analytical sociology’s conception of the human agent is crude and narrow, overly deterministic and overly infused with a logic of utility maximization that underplays the role of quantitatively incommensurable goods. Still, whatever its weaknesses, it is a coherent, consciously centered human agent that analytical sociology endorses.

I did not put an X under agency for social constructionism only because I am unsure there is a main line with an explicit position on the matter. Certainly, in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s classic statement of the position, conscious agents are strongly implied. Berger and Luckmann were, after all, coming from the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, for whom conscious agency was central.

On the other hand, social constructionism has moved far since Berger and Luckmann, often, to Berger’s consternation, adopting a postmodern sensibility, so that human agency itself as in performative orientations is represented as mere appearance. In other applications, as in the social studies of science or knowledge (SSK), the whole issue of agency may be marginal. There is, however, no reason in principle for agency to be denied by social constructionism per se.

What about positivism? Strictly speaking, for high positivists like David Hume, there are no coherent selves, just bundles of traits or perceptions that co-occur in consciousness. A committed Humean like

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Earl Babbie, who, we saw, at least once denied the existence of unobservables like love, would presumably for the same reason deny the existence of selves. Sociology, however, has few such out-and-out positivists but instead sociologists who only more or less conform to positivist principles.

There is no reason in principle why positivistically oriented sociologists must deny the existence of a human self, but that self will not do much. As ANT suggests, once there is adopted some version of the positivist covering law model of causality, all causal power is leached out from the things of the world and deposited instead in the putative laws. Thus, even should positivists admit the existence of selves, at most, positivist analyses will simply correlate what they consider events – prevailing social conditions, mental states, and behaviors. As again Christian Smith observes, positivist discourse “suggests that variables, not persons, are the real social agents or actors. Persons, if anything, are simply the background medium or vehicles through which variables act or operate.”  

We come to pragmatism and interpretivism. It seems clear that, like CR, pragmatism is a humanism strongly committed to consciously centered agents. In Experience and Nature, Dewey sets up experience and experiencing consciousness as the foundation of philosophy. William James similarly focused on experience and consciousness. CR and the pragmatists, then, are allies in this regard.

Allies, similarly, I would say in this regard, are the Symbolic Interactionists. Yes, there is a tendency for Mead and others to represent consciousness more as a relation than a centered particular, which Margaret Archer and Christian Smith both find disturbing. I am inclined to be more accepting. In the sociological lay of the land, it seems to me that the Symbolic Interactionists clearly mean to affirm consciously centered agency.

Clearly, as well, the variety of perspectives I am referencing under the label of interpretivists – Weberians, hermeneuticians, phenomenologists, 

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9 Smith, What is a Person?, p. 285.
and so forth – all equally endorse a notion of consciously centered agents. The matter is so clear in fact as to warrant no further comment.

**Objective human relations**

Clearly, as this book contains an entire chapter on the subject, CR certainly endorses objective relations among social positions – human relations like competition, dependency, power, inequality, and the like. Together, these are what CR thinks of as social structure. The same would be true for Marxian perspectives, including the Frankfurt School.

Positivist sociology also certainly endorses a conception of objective social structure, but in its conception, social structure does not consist so much of human relations that connect individuals to each other but rather relations among social facts. These may be causal relations, like the relation Durkheim posited between size and differentiation or more functional relations, but in any case, they generally obtain over the heads of individuals and thus are understood to operate independent of human agency.

Insofar as postmodernists, poststructuralists, and postmodernist or poststructuralist discourse theorists profess to disbelieve in anything ontologically objective, so do they disbelieve in objective social relations. For them, all social relations are discursive and therefore subjective. These approaches – the so-called new materialists aside – fully embracing what CR considers the epistemic fallacy, do not allow for anything extra-discursive.

Also ignoring the extra-discursive are interpretivism and standard social constructionism. Admittedly, from a CR perspective as well, social structural relations are human constructions. They derive from human behaviors and possibly from human constitutive rules. But, for CR, such social structures need not be directly created discursively to exist. Nor do their existence and consequence necessarily require anyone’s recognition. In this sense, they are extra-discursive. To the extent that interpretivism and standard social constructionism do not recognize the extra-discursive, they also do not recognize extra-discursive human relations.

For differing reasons, neither analytical sociology nor practice theory acknowledges objective human relations; analytical sociology because it is committed to methodological individualism and practice
theory because it is committed to a form of behaviorist reductionism that privileges only practice.

In contrast, relational sociology, standard network theory, and ANT all, like CR, believe in objective social relations. Those on which network theory focuses are a bit narrow – i.e., almost exclusively network ties or flows, but they are, nevertheless, ontologically objective.

I put a question mark under Bourdieu, because as I have remarked in a number of places in this book, I think there are two of him. The Bourdieu of fields believes in objective social relations, although they seem to be very limited – in contrast with Marx – to relations of power and status. On the other hand, there is the more Heideggerian Bourdieu who opposes the subject–object distinction, precluding any notion of classically objective social structure. This would also be the Bourdieu who via an internalized – and hence ultimately subjective – habitus putatively overcomes the structure–agency dichotomy.

What about pragmatism? I put a question mark there too. The reason is that the pragmatists seem all over the map on this one, without what I can see as a main line. In Dimitri Shalin’s view, pragmatism also challenges the subject–object dichotomy, which seems to preclude ontologically objective social relations. Also coming from a pragmatist tradition, John Levi Martin tells me that he and his line of

12 It has been my view for some time now that Bourdieu is American sociology’s Marx substitute, safely diverting us from political economy to cultural areas of concern. When I look at the sharply upward trajectory of Bourdieu citations that Phil Gorski records, it seems to me likely to coincide with a sharp downturn in Marx citations. See Philip Gorski (2013) *Bourdieu and Historical Sociology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press). Gorski himself suggests Marxian theory as a major rival to Bourdieu. To my mind, in this comparison, Gorski dismisses Marx too quickly as tied to working class dynamics. To me, rather, capitalist competition rather than power – although that too – is the real pivotal mechanism for Marx. There is in Bourdieu precious little about capitalist competition, which has, accordingly faded from the attention of American sociology. Economic sociology in particular seems to want little to do with it. See comments on this point by Richard Swedberg (2005) “Markets in Society,” pp. 233–253 in Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (eds.), *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

it tends more toward nominalism. On the other hand, when I look at William James, I find the following:

The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves. . . . The great obstacle to radical empiricism in the contemporary mind is the rooted rationalist belief that experience as immediately given is all disjunction and no conjunction, and that to make one world out of this separateness, a higher unifying agency must be there.14

I don’t know, but the above exposition hardly sounds to me like either nominalism or anything that departs from the subject–object distinction. Moreover, it appears a strong endorsement of ontologically objective relationality. Hence, my question mark for pragmatism under this category.

Intensive versus extensive methods

One of the strengths of CR, I have been arguing, is its explicit endorsement of both intensive and extensive methods of research. That strength, I went on to argue, gives it the potential to unify the discipline. With the exception of Bourdieu himself, who actually employed both kinds of methods, all other perspectives either explicitly endorse only one type of method but not the other or do not explicitly address the matter at all. Positivism, of course, endorses only extensive methods, while the standard anti-positivist traditions—interpretivism and postmodernism—favor only intensive methods. Standard network theory as a kind of positivist structural sociology also endorses mostly extensive methods. Although analytical sociology does not say anything explicit on the matter, it does seem at least compatible with either type of method. Social constructionism, ANT, and relational sociology seem to be more associated with intensive methods, although I can imagine at least ANT and relational sociology employing extensive methods as well. In the absence, however, of explicit statements addressing the matter, I entered dashes for them under this category.

What methods are sanctioned by pragmatism? To the extent that pragmatism is associated most with Symbolic Interactionism, we might

suggest it sanctions intensive methods. What about extensive methods? As I find no explicit statement within pragmatist writings that speak to that question, I entered a dash for it under extensive methods.

Marxian research has been more associated with intensive methods in general and history in particular, but there is no principled reason that analytical statistics also cannot be used to make Marxian points. The same holds for the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, given their strong tendencies, I entered only a question mark for these perspectives under this category. Practitioners of these perspectives might thus benefit from a CR take on analytical statistics and its differences from the positivist account of those methods.

Metatheory

I have been calling metatheory the language of inter-paradigm dialogue. It is not so much a distinct language as a register, a theoretical posture that reflects conceptually on theory. It is the theory of theory and as such an analytical level removed from theory.

Put alternately, metatheory is inquiry into the philosophical grounding of our theories, an examination of their most basic philosophical assumptions. It is essentially philosophy of social science. As such, metatheory is anathema to empiricists. From its beginning, empiricist positivism privileged the empirical over the conceptual and accordingly rejected metaphysics as virtually meaningless assertions. Positivism in general therefore is hostile to metatheory.

As a discipline virtually born of positivism, the hostility to philosophy is deeply engrained in sociology. Along with psychology, philosophy is one of sociology’s others. It is as it were one of the disciplines against which sociology distinguishes its own identity. To embrace metatheory then is to threaten disciplinary boundaries; it is almost disciplinary treason.

It is no wonder then that CR is the only perspective on the chart where I could confidently place an X. Certainly, as I just explained, positivism would not receive an X. It actually should receive an anti-X. Similarly, those perspectives that are positivist in nature – analytical sociology and standard network theory – likewise receive no X’s.

By now, it may be less surprising than it might have seemed at first that the avowedly anti-positivist perspectives likewise receive no X’s.
for metatheory. That is because perspectives like postmodernism are empiricist as well. Like positivism, postmodernism rejected metaphysics and embraced just the surface of things. Principled superficiality was, after all, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism.

Social constructionism likewise has its positivist roots. In the original statement of the position, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann tried to export philosophical matters – specifically whether there is a real reality – to philosophy, i.e., the discipline. The philosophical question of reality, they maintained, was not the business of sociology. More recently, Harry Collins and Steven Yearley had maintained that the social construction of science should be considered more or less a positivist enterprise, immune to reflexive social constructionism trained on itself. Although some social constructionists may embrace metatheory, my sense is that its appreciation is still largely missing from this tradition.

I again placed a question mark under metatheory for Marxism and the Frankfurt School. Both perspectives have strong philosophical commitments and both encourage philosophical inquiry. But these perspectives do not entirely coincide with the discipline of sociology, and, aside from their specifically CR adherents, it is not clear how many other sociologists within these folds actually do metatheoretical analysis. My sense is that in America it is not many. Thus, while again there is no principled reason for Marxism or critical theory to exclude metatheory as a research agenda, I still would not describe their sociological versions as so far supportive of it. I did enter an X for Bourdieu under this category, largely because Wacquant and Bourdieu’s invitation to a reflexive sociology at least sounds like a bid for philosophical self-examination.

Certainly, for many of the perspectives listed, the originating manifestos were actually metatheoretical documents. Herbert Blumer’s early articulation of Symbolic Interactionism attacked positivist

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16 Harry Collins and Steven Yearley (1992) “Epistemological Chicken,” pp. 301–326 in Andrew Pickering (ed.), *Practice and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press). Collins has now backed off some from this position. He at least himself reflects considerably on the philosophical implications of his approach.
sociology as “variable analysis.” Mustafa Emirbayer’s “Manifesto for 
A Relational Sociology” amounted in part to a philosophical critique of 
the metaphysics of substance. And in their originating statements, 
analytical sociology and standard network theory as well launched 
critiques of other perspectives. 

For a perspective to receive an X for metatheory, however, it was 
not enough for the perspective to have been born of a metatheoretical 
statement. It must also encourage metatheoretical, inter-paradigm 
dialogue as part of its research agenda. None of the perspectives 
I just mentioned does so. The intention rather of the originating 
statements, once the new perspective was so articulated, was for 
followers simply to conduct a new form of normal science within 
the new perspective’s new parameters. Once born, the inter-paradigm 
dialogue and the metatheory of the originating statement was sup-
tended to end. 

What makes CR different? Well, to be fair, in contrast with the 
sociological perspectives I have been talking about, CR is not a socio-
logical theory but a philosophical perspective. Its function is not to 
promote any particular theoretical perspective but to specify what 
makes for productive scientific activity. From that perspective, it coun-
sels confronting rather than ignoring important scientific differences 
where they exist. If that requires largely conceptual rather empirical 
analysis, then, from the CR perspective, so be it. 

Pragmatism too seems to encourage metatheoretical argument 
across paradigms. Certainly John Levi Martin engages in it and seems 
to encourage it in others. Dimitri Shalin as well explicitly defends it. 
Asking whether metaphysical issues should be left to philosophers, 
Shalin cites Kuhn to the effect that all scientific theories contain meta-
physical assumptions that need to be scrutinized as part of the scientific 
business. In that connection, Shalin cites as well mathematician 
and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead: “If science is not to generate 
into a medley of ad hoc hypotheses, it must become philosophical 
and must enter into a thorough criticism of its own foundations.” 
Of course, a medley of ad hoc hypotheses is how many would prefer 
sociology to be. 

18 Dimitri Shalin (1986) “Pragmatism and Social Interactionism,” American 
19 Cited by Shalin, ibid., p. 9.
Truth

Ah, truth. Truth has to do not just with truth but also with our access to objective reality, once again the extra-discursive. And once again it is no surprise to find no X’s for postmodernism and its aligned perspectives or for social constructionism and interpretivism. In their main lines, these anti-positivist perspectives all tend toward relativism.20

Postmodernist approaches in fact tend to consider truth a device of power. Foucault said as much, drawing attention to regimes of truth.21 Of course, as I have said all along, to be intelligible, that very claim can only be evaluated as either true or false. Even so, there is merit to examining what Foucault calls regimes of truth, but in doing so, analysts, to make whatever statements they make, still need to reserve their own take on the truth apart from whatever regimes they examine.

To challenge regimes of truth is to engage in ideology critique, something that was done by Marxists and critical theorists long before Foucault. It was not as if Foucault invented the enterprise. What was new –or at least new in the contemporary scene – with Foucault (or at least his epigoni) was the neo-Nietzschean assertion that power was all that truth was about. That claim, I have maintained, is just incoherent.

Some views listed on the chart like relational sociology, ANT, and practice theory, simply offer no explicit statement on truth. We might make inferences based on their positivist or anti-positivist leanings, but in these cases I did not consider the leanings strong enough to be sure. In the absence of anything firmer, I entered dashes. Conversely, I did consider standard network theory and analytical sociology positivist enough to align them with that philosophical perspective.

Positivism, like CR, definitely does believe in truth and in its main line tends to be realist about at least what can be observed. The main difference here is that positivism, supporting an epistemic account of truth, is foundationalist in its orientation, whereas CR, holding to an alethic account of truth, is explicitly fallibilist in orientation.

Marxian perspectives in general and the Frankfurt School in particular believe in truth and in a strong extra-discursive or materialist element. Certainly, the Marxian concepts of ideology and false

20 We did see, however, that Herbert Blumer at least believed in truth and reality.
consciousness, implicitly shared by the Frankfurt School, make little sense without correlative concepts of truth and true interests. As I argued at the very beginning, moreover, what postmodernist critiques seemed to forget, if there is no truth, then moral critique completely loses its bite, becoming as a Foucauldian analysis would have it, just another, manipulative manifestation of power. Unless what is criticized is truly objectionable, there is no reason for anyone to heed the critique. There is no reason to pay any attention to an unpleasant, unflattering view that has no more validity than a self-congratulatory one.

Both in its early and later Habermasian phase, the Frankfurt School may have had its own distinct, Hegelian account of truth, but it shares with Marxian perspectives in general an underlying commitment to objective reality. It thus was not difficult to place an X in this box. Bourdieu may have a conception of truth that informs his sociology, but at the very least it is not clear. I therefore entered a dash here for him.

I again entered a question mark for pragmatism under truth. Once again that was because I detect three separate lines. One line again comes from Dimitri Shalin, who strongly disputes the subject–object distinction and therefore objective reality in the classical ontological sense. His view, following Mead, is that the world as we encounter it is always in part the creation of our interpretations of it, implying he says, “the possibility of multiple realities, or to use James’s favorite expression, ‘the pluralistic universe,’ comprising many worlds, each one rational in its own way, each reflecting alternate lines of action, ends, and situations.”\textsuperscript{22} Such a world, Shalin goes on to say, “is not objective in the traditional sense – it has no being in itself; it is not a world of independent realities such as might be known by some ideal absolute subject.”\textsuperscript{23}

In \textit{How to Make Our Ideas Clear}, on the other hand, as Shalin admits, Charles Sanders Peirce offered a more classically objective view of truth and reality, depending on triangulation in science to arrive at consensus:

This [scientific] activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a fore-ordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 11. \hfill \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 13.
opinion. This great hope is embodied in the conception of truth and reality. The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality.\textsuperscript{24}

In contrast with CR’s alethic view of truth, Peirce’s ideal consensus theory of truth is, like Habermas’s ideal speech situation, epistemic. It is nevertheless realist. Interestingly, although Shalin observes that among the pragmatists William James had the most difficulty distancing himself from charges of subjectivism, James actually embraces explicitly, like CR, the correspondence theory of truth:

“Truth,” I there say, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their agreement, as falsity means their disagreement, with reality. Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course.\textsuperscript{25}

Like CR, James is explicitly saying that correspondence with reality is the meaning – not necessarily the criterion – of truth. From there, of course, James goes on to specify more pragmatic criteria of truth. He asks what is the “cash value” of truth in pragmatic terms. One answer he gives is not far from what a critical realist would say:

TRUE IDEAS ARE THOSE THAT WE CAN ASSIMILATE, VALIDATE, CORROBORATE, AND VERIFY. FALSE IDEAS ARE THOSE THAT WE CANNOT. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that therefore is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known as. (Capitals in original)\textsuperscript{26}

A critical realist would largely agree. In \textit{Experience and Nature}, Dewey as well seems to want a distinction between subject and object, arguing that “we believe many things not because the things are so, but because we have become habituated through the weight of authority, by imitation, prestige, instruction, the unconscious effect of language, etc.”\textsuperscript{27}

The distinction Dewey makes here between what is so and what we think is so is exactly the work done by our concepts of truth and reality. Suggested in fact is the correspondence theory, and Dewey goes on to identify mind-independent, objective reality in a manner CR likewise would affirm:


\textsuperscript{25} James, \textit{The Meaning of Truth}.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

Even in such a brief statement as that just quoted, there is compelled recognition of an object of experience which is infinitely other and more than what is asserted to be alone experienced. There is the chair which is looked at; the chair displaying certain colors, the light in which they are displayed; the angle of vision implying reference to an organism that possesses an optical apparatus. Reference to these things is compulsory, because otherwise there would be no meaning assignable to the sense qualities which are, nevertheless, affirmed to be the sole data experienced.\(^28\)

Again, no critical realist would disagree. Nor would any critical realist disagree with what Dewey goes on to assert: “the primacy and ultimacy of the material.”\(^29\)

If Peirce, James, and Dewey reflect a more realist, second stream of thought in pragmatism, John Levi Martin represents yet a third alternative. Martin reflects the tradition we more usually associate with pragmatism: That truth refers more to the productive results of practice; that in more mundane contexts, what we mean by true is what repays our practical efforts.

Critical realists would not dispute that what Martin mentions is an aspect of truth or, more properly, a consequence of truth. I say more properly because as realists, critical realists would ask of Martin why it is that some activities repay our efforts, our suggested answer being that the beliefs on which those activities rest are true – or at least true enough. “True enough” might well satisfy Martin.

Here and now, however, is not the place to haggle out all these differences. The point here was to explain the question mark under truth for pragmatism. I presume that objective has been accomplished.\(^30\)

**Value orientation**

We come finally to value orientation, which we should be able to cover fairly quickly. Positivism of course, which strongly upholds the fact/value distinction, completely opposes any kind of value orientation in

\(^28\) Ibid., pp. 17–18.

\(^29\) Ibid., p. 18.

\(^30\) I have neglected here the neopragmatism of Richard Rorty, of which CR – and Bhaskar in particular – is highly critical. The various positions it encompasses – the superfluity of truth, the denial of centered consciousness, our imprisonment in language, and so on – have been covered here as they relate to other perspectives. For a full critique of Rorty himself, see Roy Bhaskar (1989) *Reclaiming Reality* (New York: Verso).
research. Similarly, for that reason, equally opposed to value orientations would be all perspectives aligned with positivism. Here, I would include analytical sociology and standard network theory. Although not necessarily positivist, standard social constructionism as well. Peter Berger, for example, always tried to hew toward value-free sociology. I would also place ANT in that category. At least I see no social cause that ANT particularly champions. I similarly see no encompassing cause – beyond the promulgation of an odd view of culture – that is endorsed by practice theory. Ditto for relational sociology. Individually, relational sociologists may have a value orientation, but as far as I can see, the perspective as a whole does not.

Just as clearly, both postmodernism and CR, being strongly anti-positivist and strongly opposed to the fact/value distinction, just as strongly support value orientations in research. Postmodernism and its allied perspectives are closely associated with the value orientations represented by the politics of identity, most especially the LGBTQ movement. Similarly, CR is strongly supportive of value-oriented research, as is Marxism and the Frankfurt School. Pragmatism, too, as Shalin argues, was associated with progressive politics and therefore endorsed, if just as a matter of pragmatics, value orientations. I include Bourdieu here as well, as his own work was a challenge to institutionalized power in the cultural sphere.

It may seem surprising to see a question mark under value orientation for interpretivism, but remember this category is a bit of a mixed bag. It was that arch-interpretivist, Max Weber, who penned our most important statement of value neutrality in social research. Similarly, as Shalin argues, I think correctly, Symbolic Interactionism has not generally exhibited any strong value orientation. Why then the question mark? Because there is some evidence of value orientation in this tradition. I think especially of Howard Becker’s *Outsiders* or, later, of Rick Fantasia’s *Cultures of Solidarity*. And as Shalin goes on to argue, there is no reason why Symbolic Interactionism ought not to be more value-oriented.

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31 See, for example, Peter Berger (2011) *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore* (New York: Prometheus).


33 Shalin, “Pragmatism and Social Interactionism.”
But must I become a critical realist?

“Okay, fine,” you say. “I agree with X’s everywhere that CR has them. All across the board. But must I become a critical realist?” No, clearly, you need not. Of course, if you agree with all the X’s where CR has them and, moreover, agree with the line CR takes where those X’s are placed, then are you not already a critical realist?

“But I do not want to identify myself as such.” Okay. Is that because you must be free of all labels? Would you at least label yourself a sociologist?

Perhaps it is just philosophical labels you eschew. That predilection is understandable. I have been saying all along that philosophy is one of sociology’s others. So as a sociologist, it is quite understandable that you might resist identifying with any specific philosophy of science. You are being true to your kind.

Remember though that CR is not a sociological theory. No one is asking you to do what might be called CR research. What you are being asked to do is what Bourdieu asks you to do: Pay at least some attention to the philosophical grounding of your research, to what ontology you assume, what views of causality you hold, and so on. And to continually reflect on those matters in a manner that might be described as fallibilist or open to correction.

When you engage in such critical reflection, where do your answers locate you? Are you a positivist, a pragmatist, a poststructuralist, what? In the landscape I have elsewhere called critical space, the issue concerns self-positioning. Positioning ourself in a critical space of arguments and counterarguments and constantly requiring ourselves to defend or modify that position is what we sociologists mean by critical thinking. And to do that, it helps, however tentatively we may hold it, to articulate for ourselves what our current position actually is. Given the complexity of the issues, it is always legitimate to answer “none of the above” or “nowhere yet,” but if we are committed to critical thinking, we do not forget the yet and keep trying to place ourselves somewhere.34

34 That is, somewhere defensible.