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*Metatheorizing in Sociology*, by George Ritzer. (1991) Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books. 362 pages.

George Ritzer argues that sociological theory is at a major crossroad. Sociology, as a discipline, is increasingly receptive to theoretical diversity (1990). What is absent to date, though, is an effort to explore and analyze this diversity. In other words, diversity can become self-perpetuating in the absence of some integrating force. As such, Ritzer's objective in *Metatheorizing in Sociology* (1991) is to present a grand theory of metatheory, or an overarching continuum within which to place theoretical work. Ritzer values diversity, but also recognizes the importance of order and organization. His argument is that a conceptual map of sociological theory will synthesize diverse efforts, highlighting theoretical overlap and absences.

This objective is not without its critics. Turner (1991) and Skocpol (1986) view metatheory as too abstract and lacking real-world application. Collins (1986) argues that metatheory achieves no new creative end; it merely re-evaluates existing theoretical work. In response to these and other (1990) criticisms, Ritzer emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of metatheory, when viewed from the purpose of the end product. By defining types of metatheory, Ritzer shows that only some metatheoretical work is abstract and a review of extant works increases understanding, and thus application to current issues, as well as providing theoretical cohesion. In this light, Ritzer even highlights the metatheoretical work of metatheory critics.

Ritzer states that there are three types of metatheory. First, metatheory can be conducted to increase the understanding of sociological theory. Factors pertinent to the comprehension of theory include the history and personality of the theorist, and the position of a particular theory relative to other theoretical work, both concurrent and historical. In other words, it is important to understand the theorist's goal, how their personal history influenced their work, and the extent to which their theory parallels or advances other theoretical knowledge. Further, a clear understanding of theory requires its placement within a larger societal context, both in terms of theory in other disciplines and the social world in general. Critics of this approach point out the dependence of the metatheorist on the work of others and the confining effect of theory-framing. Ritzer counters that all sociological research uses a building-block approach, and that categorization of theory provides opportunity for direction and comparison of future work.

Collins' (1989) analysis of Mead's theoretical work is an example of this type of metatheory. Collins reviews Mead's ideas, but also attempts to compare/contrast them with the work of others, such as Durkheim and Goffman. He also considers Mead's background, his family connections, his religious beliefs, and his intellectual connections. Within the macro context, Collins notes the influence of the political climate and changes occurring in the

American university system, as well as the interdisciplinary arena of Mead's theories.

Secondly, metatheory can lead to the development of new theories. According to Ritzer, such work has been practiced by both classical and current theorists, but it has only recently been given a name. For example, Marx fashioned his views from analysis/ critique of the work of other thinkers. Even *Capital*, an empirical work, includes metatheorizing, which provides the base from which Marx constructed his own theory. Ritzer is critical of this type of metatheory, considering it too frequently be divorced from real world applications. He suggests that future theory development should focus on explicit analyses, and be systematic and goal-oriented.

Third, metatheory can lead to global theories, with a goal of offering explanation for sociological theory, sociology, or the social sciences. Ritzer views this type of metatheory as less constructive for sociology as a discipline. Inherently the development of a global theory assumes the inappropriateness of other global theories. Further, there is the tendency to assume a less complex social world than actually exists. Ritzer considers this work to have limited, but some, value to the discipline. As the discipline becomes increasingly fragmented Ritzer contends that some focus on the bigger picture is necessary.

While these distinctions provide a valuable way of defining/clarifying theory, there seems to be a great deal of overlap between the three categories, particularly the first two. For this author, while theoretical analysis to gain increased understanding is a distinct type of metatheory, it is also a precursor to theory-building and the development of an overarching perspective. Additionally, when considering new theory development, two distinctions seem appropriate: theory analysis as a base from which to build or as a critique of existing theory where new theory is presented.

Ritzer's objective is to call attention to an integrated sociological paradigm, which he argues has always existed in sociology. This paradigm focuses on the continuums of global/individual and institutions/values. Because the analysis is dynamic, the goal is to understand the interrelationship between the sociological imagination (the global/individual link) and institutions and the social constructions which impact them, at all levels. Ritzer argues that an exemplar for this integrated paradigm can be found in the work of Marx, which takes levels of society into consideration. The key to viewing Marx's work as such is his dialectic process of interpreting interrelationships.

As support for his integrated model, Ritzer traces theoretical changes and developments over the last forty years. Sociological theory of the 1970s, in response to the macro-level focus of the 1960s, was dominated by micro-level work, such as exchange theory and ethnomethodology. The 1980s heralded the appearance of the micro-macro theoretical link. The major problem, though, has been that theorists' tend to emphasize their point of familiarity, be it either a micro- or macro-level base of knowledge, resulting in an unbalanced micro-macro theoretical perspective. A solution, Ritzer suggests, is to focus on the

dialectical relationship between the two, applying both temporal and spatial variables.

Theory in the 1990s, Ritzer hypothesizes, will emphasize application of multiple theories, or the emergence of theoretical eclecticism. The focus will be on integration or synthesis of theory, both within sociology and between disciplines. Further, Ritzer believes the discipline would benefit from work which integrates metatheory developed for clarification, extension, and integration, as discussed initially.

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