

## **Kim Myung-Hee, *The Possibility of Integrated Human Sciences***

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The author's questioning starts off from the series of suicides committed by Ssangyong Motors workers since 2009. She argues that "If the issue of suicide in Korean society is considered a problem of both Korean capitalism and social solidarity and morals, then we have to forge a social theory that is based on our reality." (p. 10) Based on such recognition, the author then identifies two tasks to be performed in her book. "First, I shall seek to manifest and rectify the structure and the error of the dichotomous interpretation that has been imposed on Marx and Durkheim. Second, by critically looking into the rational core shared by the social science methodologies of Marx and Durkheim and the theoretical and practical prospects built upon it, I shall search for a theory capable of effectively intervening into social suffering, i.e., the possibility of a naturalist social science." (p. 24; 106)

### **1. The Dilemma of Dualist Interpretation of Marx and Durkheim**

First, the author divides the existing interpretation on Marx and Durkheim into two – positivism (hyper-naturalism) and anti-positivism (anti-naturalism), and understands the two as sharing a dualist ontology such as humans/nature and

idea/material. This dualist ontology combines with dichotomies like theory/experience, theory/history, theory/practice and fact/value, forming a mutually reciprocal structure that strengthens and reproduces each other. Also, such dichotomous meta-assumption has a deeper root in the dualist bias that designates one side to be objective and the other subjective. She interprets this kind of bias to have come from empirical ontology or ‘empirical’ realism, on which the idea of positivist science is based.

Here, by resolving the perspective of positivist science, the author proposes that an approach that avoids a positivist interpretation of Marx and Durkheim. She opts for a critical realist view of science as a new social science philosophy that avoids positivism and seeks to better understand the realist view of science of Marx and Durkheim (p. 60). Specifically, the author explains the social ontology of Marx and Durkheim regarding the relationship between humans and nature as ‘anti-reductionist stratification theory’ (p. 107), and reviews their ‘scientific method’ using their main publications, *Capital* and *Suicide*, as texts, based on the theoretical explanation consisting of ‘description – retrodution – elimination – differentiation (revision)’ and the model of practical and historical explanation consisting of ‘dissection – redescription – retrodiction – elimination – differentiation (revision)’. In particular, the author considers “the core idea of my book to be explanatory critique” (p. 94) that deconstructs the dichotomy of fact and value, which is lurking beneath the dichotomous vicious cycle.

“The most serious problem imposed on the interpretation of Marx and Durkheim’s view of science by the positivist perspective of science regarding the role and status of social science is the binomial opposition set up between science and critique, and fact and value. The hegemony of ‘value-neutral social science’ has become ... the scientific norm of researchers, thereby causing a dilemma of interpretation where one cannot fully approach the attempts of Marx and Durkheim to integrate theory and practice, fact and value, and scientific explanation and moral critique. In other words, in the void of an appropriate concept to read such attempts, the value-neutral thesis of mainstream social science intervened as the third factor that distorted the interpretation of researchers. A structure of vicious cycle where one

cannot escape the reification of dichotomies was created as a result.” (p. 61)

## 2. Revisiting Marx and Durkheim Via Critical Realism and *The Possibility of Integrated Human Sciences*

In Chapter 4, the author reviews Marx and Durkheim from an ontological level. In regard to Marx, she finds anti-reductionist human naturalism or critical naturalism at the same time going beyond the theory of nature/humans in Marx’s concept of species-essence (*Gattungswesen*), which captures the emergent characteristics of humans. In the case of Durkheim, she extracts ‘sociological naturalism’ based on ‘relational social realism’. The author explains that the perspectives of Marx and Durkheim, who rejected the binomial opposition between idealism and materialism, were premised on the theory of stratification of the world as proposed by critical realism and the synchronic emergent powers of materialism. Therefore, she argues that the ontology of the two scholars can be understood more richly through these theories. Both have “the position that nature is not merely a passive object of sensation separate from humans but forms a relationship of praxis where it is causally mutually dependent with humans. They both also share the premises of scientific materialism that it is science that mediates the rational and the inevitable.” In short, the philosophical premises of Marx and Durkheim are not just unrelated to empirical ontology but can be better understood from the perspective of critical naturalism (p. 162).

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the “methodologies” of *Capital* and *Suicide* respectively and organize them according to the development of ‘explanatory critique’. They consist of the author’s new reading of Marx and Durkheim across 150 pages of extensive detailed discussion explaining their social realism, explanatory methodology and practical social theory, and thus cannot be summarized convincingly here. She argues that Marx and Durkheim, in the process of resolving the post-Kantian dilemma and the dualist biases of nature and humans,

idealism and materialism, and Kantian moral theory and utilitarianism of economics, had established a social science methodology. Marx, who considered the achievements of the natural science revolution to be an important theoretical resource, formalized the process as ‘history science’ and ‘human naturalism’ while Durkheim as “moral science” and “sociological naturalism”. She points out that the ontological contemplation of the two on social strata - the object of social science – was a decisive moment in integrating natural and social sciences and transitioning toward critical naturalism that recognizes the difference between the two (p. 468). She also emphasizes that the methodologies of Marx and Durkheim share similar structures of interpretation, and similar premises and methodological principles of naturalist social science, and that the social science methodologies of Marx and Durkheim were not static models but had, in both cases, attempted to understand and explain the transition from one social form to another, and that such attempt had its ontological foundation in the historicity of modern society. She also argues that both Marx and Durkheim considered the existing social system to be unique and transitional (in the process of transitioning) social forms. Marx’s mode of production and Durkheim’s model of division of labor had established, as the historical and scientific premise of a political economic critique, the emergent characteristics of a human-society relationship that had newly emerged from the historical horizon of the modern society, according to the author. “Eventually, the relational social paradigm and the transformational social activity model of Marx and Durkheim shared the logic of a dynamic development of history and that of a dynamic development of science.” (p. 464)

Chapter 7, based on previous discussions, reviews the ‘dilemma of Marx and Durkheim’ or the ‘dilemma of Marxism and sociology’, and searches for the ‘possibility of integrated human sciences’. First of all, the author contends that the ‘dilemma of Marx and Durkheim’ is fundamentally caused by the dichotomous framework of interpretation of modern social theory, which was unable to understand the critical naturalism and the relational social realism of the two scholars. On the other hand, the ‘dilemma of Marxism and sociology’, which juxtaposes sociology and Marxism, is the result of the hyper-naturalist reading of

Marx's historical materialism and the ensuing anti-naturalist interpretation of Durkheim's 'idea community'. In particular, this dilemma, according to the author, has led to the loss of prospect for an integrated science as a process of dividing and reintegrating academic disciplines and produced the ideological effect of reproducing the unjust division among disciplines and intellectual division of labor.

At this juncture, the author claims the possibility of integrated sciences by seeking integrated sciences through Marx's 'unification of various sciences' and by citing Durkheim's integrated scientific approach of various disciplines based on division of individual disciplines and detailed research. In fact, the analyses in chapters 5 and 6 on *Capital* and *Suicide* show that they were not merely investigations into 'economic facts' or 'moral ideas' but that they were, in fact, the basis and examples of integrated scientific thinking. According to the author, in the sense that "*Capital's* individual agents who are captured within the false consciousness of commodity fetishism cannot be separated from the activist agents who commit suicide in *Suicide*", "the model of explanatory critique of Marx and Durkheim, understood in a mutually complementary way, enhances the possibility of naturalism in two ways. Marx and Durkheim's explanatory critique both reached the goal of (1) an explanation that depends on emergence and (2) political and institutional praxis that can subjugate the blinded and amoral power of objects under the rational and collective control of socialized humans." (p. 507)

In short, the author, with regard to scientific social research that diagnoses and proposes a cure for social suffering of our society, proposes the use of Marx and Durkheim as resources to be taken up as the task of integrated sciences, since they propose rich ontological insight and appropriate social science methodologies on things that are social on top of a consistent meta-theoretical foundation composed of critical realism. This task will open a new horizon toward an alternative consilience (?) that newly reintegrates the divisions between natural science, humanities and social science (p. 541).

### 3. Possibility of 'Integrated Sciences' and Clarity of Description

One question that constantly came into my mind as I was reading this book was, 'Why are Marx's and Durkheim's methodologies discussed together?' Taking into mind that the book started off from the contemplation that "If the issue of suicide in Korean society is considered a problem of both Korean capitalism, and social solidarity and morals, then we have to forge a social theory that is based on our reality," then one can assume that the author was trying to approach the issue of capitalism through Marx and the issue of solidarity and morals through Durkheim. Indeed, the author says:

"The science of *Capital* and *Suicide* is positioned to become the foundation of an alternative scientific social research that can replace today's mainstream social science paradigm on the level of both theory and meta-theory. On the level of theory, the political economic critique of *Capital* ... provides us with a still-valid accurate explanation of the structure and dynamics characteristic of a capitalist society whereas *Suicide*'s critique of laissez-faire allows us to get an insight into how uncontrolled capitalist economics lead to reproduction of abnormality in social life and crisis of morality (mentality), at the level of relations. On the level of meta-theory, the explanatory critique of the two reintegrates the divided ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology (ethics) while allowing one to realize that explanations that faithfully adhere to just reality can have a causal effect of critiquing existing theories at the same time critiquing social relations. All in all, what their explanatory critique tells us is the fact that the more 'scientific' social research is, the more capability a theory has to effectively intervene in social suffering of our society." (p. 509)

In other words, as a way of understanding Korean society, she is seeking 'integrated sciences' – on one hand, she uses the concept of 'relations of production' in Marx's theoretical system in regard to 'economic facts' or the economic level of a capitalist society, and on the other, she is approaching from the concept of 'moral structure' in Durkheim's theoretical system in regard to 'moral ideas' or

the level of morals and solidarity. These two sides are inseparably intertwined. And on the meta-theoretical level, the two can be characterized as performing an explanatory critique that integrates ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. Therefore, it is possible to integrate the two, she argues.

Of course, as a critic, I have no objections to the author's interpretation on the methodologies of Marx and Durkheim including social ontology, explanatory methodology and practical social theory etc.. And I can resonate to the attempt to bring the two together to investigate both the economic level and the moral level. However, it is hard for me to accept her approach of putting the explanatory critique of *Capital* and that of *Suicide* parallel to one another, on the 'theoretical' level. Simply put, this kind of approach merely stops at proposing separate structures, each with unique properties and powers, falling short of 'integrating' the economic level and the moral level of a capitalist society. In other words, this book was unable to go beyond 'reinterpreting Marx and Durkheim' toward 'deconstructing and constructing' them. Although it proves the possibility of integrating Marx and Durkheim on a methodological level, I believe it was unable to provide the details of that possibility on the theoretical level. Even in chapter 7, it is evident that Marx and Durkheim or Marxism and sociology are not really integrated but rather are positioned in a parallel, whereby the discussion on the methodological and theoretical levels are integrated for each of the two. The author also admits, "It was surprisingly difficult to find the route that appropriately links the social theories of Marx and Durkheim." (p. 10) This seems to be the inevitable result of a strategy circulating within Marx and Durkheim separately.

Rather, I believe that integrated sciences are only possible when Marx and Durkheim are deconstructed at the same time a model of a societal world is constructed by the author. The author has to propose his or her own model or picture of the (capitalist) societal world and bring in the concepts and theories of Marx and Durkheim in the process of explaining the structures, characteristics and powers that are within the different levels or dimensions of that model or picture. At this point, it would be appropriate for integration to take place through the

method of elevating from the abstract to the specific, as was emphasized by Marx as a method of investigation and description. Durkheim did not explicitly mention a particular method of investigation and description, however, it is possible to confirm the use of such a method in his actual research.

However, the ‘parallel reinterpretation’ strategy shows a far larger weakness in that many parts in the discussions contained in this book on Marx and Durkheim were complex and confusing for readers to understand. The following excerpt is an example.

“The alienation of theory from reality and the alienation of methodology from theory are realities that have been inverted – the responsibility for which lies in the fact that Marxism and sociology were excessively seen as confrontational. Sociologists in the UK and US ignored Marxism in the name of ideology, only selectively accommodating humanist Marxism. On the other hand, the antagonism sociology has of Marxism is linked to the attitude of Marxism itself toward sociology. One of the criticisms on Durkheim is his conservatism. This is related to Durkheim being designated as one of the scholars who had provided the main theoretical foundation of functionalism, at a time when the dichotomy of functionalism versus conflict theory prevailed within the field of social science in the US during the 1950’s and 60’s. Thus, the normative aim of Durkheim’s sociology was considered to be integration and stability rather than conflict and change, which led him to be recognized for a long time as being ideologically conservative. Also, from Marx’s perspective, the non-materialist epistemology and the negative perspective toward socialist revolution that were innate in Durkheim’s sociology were enough for him to be categorized as a conservative.” (pp. 19-20)

These sentences encompass various testimonies that require explanation and argumentation for each of the differing areas, levels and contents. Just the phrase “realities that have been inverted – the responsibility for which lies in the fact that Marxism and sociology were excessively seen as confrontational” requires further explanation. Questions such as ‘(1) Is reality really inverted, and if so, in



what way? (2) Were Marxism and sociology really confrontational, and even if they were, was the confrontation unnecessary? (3) Is the confrontation responsible for the inverted reality, and if so, how?’ need to be answered and explained. However, the author continuously makes claims, both on explicit and implicit levels, that are difficult to logically link and does so without proper argumentation. For a reader who finds each of these claims questionable, it is difficult to continue to read the book. Audacious and provocative claims that cannot be seen to be logically elaborate or clear can be found frequently, sometimes redundantly, throughout the book.

“If Marx’s idea of the law of value is interpreted as hyper-naturalism, then the political and moral mechanisms within Marx’s theoretical system cannot obtain any kind of causal explanatory status. As Anderson has pointed out, the non-existence of a political theory, characteristic of later Marx, logically leads to economic determinism or economic fatalism innate in Marx’s economic theory, which in turn means that there is no longer any rationale to richly developing a political theory.” (p. 478)

This kind of confusion and complexity can be understood to have originated from the fact that the discussion on meta-theory itself is abstract and speculative. The author points out that “The fundamental effort to resolve the crisis of social science and search for a social theory based on reality of Korea needs to start from reflection upon scientific methodology” and emphasizes “Understanding the social science methodology of Marx and Durkheim is directly related to reflection upon the scientificity of Korean social science and its crisis.” However, there is a large gap between the two. The author tries to connect the two with the question ‘What is and should social science be and how it be performed?’ in face of the serious and tragic ‘social problems’ that the Korean society faces, however, there are several layers of linkages and interfering factors between the two. In short, the production of a ‘theory’ that is used to explain social reality and the extraction and reconstruction of methodology or metatheory that acts upon the production of classical theories work on different levels and are of different nature.

This is not to say that the two are unrelated. All social science investigations require axiological, ontological, epistemological and methodological premises, which means determining and understanding more appropriate and accurate premises are essential for a more scientific investigation. However, being aware or having that kind of premise does not guarantee that a scientific research will be implemented based on it or will be the result. It is merely a preliminary investigation. Rather, the issue here is actually implementing the investigation, which she fully recognizes when she says, “Only an explanation that is faithful to social suffering can critique existing theories at the same time critique social relations. In other words, only then can the causal effect of an explanatory critique reach sufficient level of efficacy.” (p. 509)

Furthermore, I believe that the author’s unique style of developing her thoughts and writing while simultaneously capturing as many topics as possible also had a certain effect. Such form of writing often ends up being unkind. Writing is a way of inviting a reader to the author’s circuit of thought. Logical leaps and transitions in the text cause a reader to be taken back or become confused, forcing him or her to fill the logical gap with wavering and uncertain assumptions. In particular, ‘metatheories’, unlike ‘theories’ that deal with social realities of the familiar everyday life, tend to develop at an abstract logical level beyond reality, therefore, it is difficult for readers to track the transitions and fill the gaps. It is unfamiliar and incomprehensible. As a reader, it was difficult for me to accurately unravel and understand many of the author’s statements. There are numerous people who consider the form of narrative to be a minor issue, which I do not think is the case for this author. However, the devil’s in the detail. If the smaller narratives are not organized clearly and acutely, then the larger narrative cannot be articulated convincingly enough. I want to remind ourselves that even on a metatheory level, explanatory critique is the result of a scientific investigation that is firmly based on appropriate premises and assumptions. In particular, I believe that an intellectual worker needs to work not with the hammer but a pick.

Even so, I believe the value of this book is quite worth emphasizing because it advocates the idea of integrated sciences that confront social suffering while raising the issue of the scientificity of social science, in an era when social science seems to be focusing only on superficial and fragmented things while overlooking history and society, when interest in social science is in fact diminishing. In particular, the examples of the homeless and the Sewol trauma that the author explains prove that she was performing a clear and elaborate job at the level of theoretical investigation and that integrated sciences are indeed possible. Such achievements form the basis on which one can hope for further achievements from the author in the form of follow-up research that are firmly based on the philosophical premises and assumptions of critical realism (going beyond Marx and Durkheim).