

ARTICLE

The impact of philosophical and theoretical/epistemological productions on the constitution of the discipline

El impacto de las producciones filosóficas y teórico/epistemológicas en la constitución de la disciplina

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Abstract

This article aims to work on the relationship between philosophy and epistemology with social work, assuming a genealogical reading of its evolution that will allow us to highlight the points of contact and the divergences. A critical analysis of the current positions on Mary Richmond's productions is presented, reflecting on her influences, her contributions and her positions, asking ourselves what is the connection between these interpretative views and the more positivist / functionalist epistemic positions of the social work, or even those oriented towards Marxism / dialectics, insofar as these two approaches have been, in different periods, hegemonic in the profession / discipline? To elaborate on this discussion, we refer to another disciplinary field: Ferdinand de Saussure's contributions to structural linguistics, alongside psychoanalysis.

Keywords:
epistemology;
social work;
review; positivism;
Marxism;
interpretation

These perspectives allow us to consider language as an ordering principle and to show the emergence and relevance of the interpretive approach. We propose this reading precisely because we consider the difficulty social work has had to be included in this perspective, despite the ingrained technical-instrumental and theoretical-epistemic traditions that advocate or promote the importance of interpretation. The end of the text opens up new questions, rather than formally elaborated answers. The opening and closing point, in a spiral, is reflexivity and criticism.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo trabajar la relación de la filosofía y la epistemología con el trabajo social, asumiendo una lectura genealógica de su devenir que nos permitirá poner en evidencia sus puntos de contacto y sus divergencias. Se presenta un análisis crítico de las posiciones más actuales sobre las producciones de Mary Richmond, reflexionando respecto de sus influencias, sus aportes y sus posicionamientos, preguntándonos ¿cuál es la conexión entre estas miradas, interpretativas, y las posiciones epistémicas más positivistas/funcionalistas del trabajo social, o incluso las orientadas hacia el marxismo/dialéctica, en tanto que estos dos enfoques han sido, en períodos diferentes, hegemónicos en la profesión/disciplina? Para elaborar esta discusión, hacemos referencia a otro campo disciplinar: los aportes de Ferdinand de Saussure para la lingüística estructural, y, por otro lado, el psicoanálisis. Estas perspectivas nos permiten considerar al lenguaje como principio ordenador y evidenciar la emergencia y actualidad del enfoque interpretativo. Planteamos esta lectura justamente porque consideramos que al trabajo social le ha costado, y le cuesta, incluirse en esta perspectiva, pese a las arraigadas tradiciones tanto técnico-instrumentales como teórico-epistémicas que abogan o promulgan la importancia de la interpretación. El final del texto abre a nuevas interrogantes, antes que a respuestas formalmente elaboradas. El punto de apertura y cierre, en espiral, es la reflexividad y la crítica.

Palabras clave:
epistemología;
trabajo social;
crítica;
positivismo;
marxismo;
interpretación



Introduction

We think of social work as a politically oriented profession, that is, with objectives and mission based on rights, in accompanying the processes of construction and / or defense of citizenship in the broadest sense². This perspective is accompanied by the understanding that politics is the questioning of established institutions in pursuit of the strengthening of new ones through the exercise of individual and collective autonomy.

This line of thought is complemented by the conceptualization that, since 2010, we have through epistemology understood it as a political act of exercise of criticism, understanding the latter - criticism - as the questioning of collectively admitted representations (González-Saibene, 2011). Both conceptions - critical and political - are articulated in the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis via his posthumous book, *Ciudadanos Sin Brújula* (2000), although in his work they do not always appear with the same emphasis or in the same sense.

Along these lines, we also think of the profession / discipline as the result of a permanent movement of socio-historical construction. That is to say, the social produces subjects that carry it and that in turn produce it, in certain moments and situations. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, 2003, p. 13).

This leads us to identify the epistemic place or approach from which we speak, that is, critical thinking, which is not necessarily or exclusively Marxist / dialectical / Hegelian (which has been deepened by the Frankfurt School and its Critical Theory³) but is more specifically nourished by the interpretative approach, in its poststructuralist and hermeneutical aspects.⁴ With certain critical thinking there is no 'the' truth. There are no true and unique positions, but hegemonic ones. Therefore, what is developed in this article is part of a series of postulates emerging from productions of more than thirty years of teaching and research in undergraduate and graduate studies in Argentine and foreign universities, added to more than twenty years of practice in the field, which

² In Argentina, the Federal Law of Social Work n° 27072 (2014) understands by social work "the profession based on practice and an academic discipline that promotes change and social development, social cohesion, and strengthening and liberation of people. The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are fundamental to social work". We include all of this when working on the broad concept of citizenship in this text.

³ Today there is a refreshing call, in the events of Social Sciences in general, towards THE Critical Theories.

⁴ Although following J. Derrida (1995) when he pronounces the "Specters of Marx", we will assume that Specters was the first title that Marx thought of for his Manifesto, a term recovered by Derrida in said text to account for a critique of Marx's heritage in contemporary times, sustained criticism from his particular philosophical theory: deconstruction. The "Specters of Marx" is not exactly a book about Marx; it is a reading of Marx in the context of the defeat of those who proclaimed themselves and were accepted as his heirs, along with the geopolitical triumph of his enemy, economic and political liberalism.

gave us the benefit of interacting theory / practice⁵ in a constant and productive way.

We also want to establish that we work from ruptures. And this is essential to consider as we dedicate ourselves to the analysis of the fundamentals and developments of the profession. We do so from what is known as French epistemology, understanding from this perspective the contributions of Gastón Bachelard (1979; 1984), a French physicist and philosopher who left us with discontinuous thought. To speak of ruptures is to say that a theoretical perspective or a disciplinary field is broken from an obstacle, and this warrants a constant epistemological vigilance, in order to avoid the deformations that obstacles impose on us or that make them appear as barriers impossible to franchise.

Some necessary conceptualizations

Bachelard (1984) understood the epistemological obstacle as the resistance or inertia of thought to thought. The problem of scientific knowledge must be posed in terms of obstacles. It is possible to know something by going against a previous knowledge. The epistemological rupture occurs at the moment in which a science is constituted by cutting or breaking with its prehistory and with its ideological environment, and in that sense, it is not an instant break or an absolute novelty that makes a clean sweep from that above, but of a complex process in the course of which an unprecedented order of knowledge is constituted. It is a fact simultaneously of partial recovery of the past and of unpublished creation. Every epistemological rupture is, thus, a point or threshold of no-return.

Epistemological vigilance, on the other hand, is the reflective attitude that leads us to apprehend the logic of error in order to build the logic of scientific discovery. Whether as a polemic against error or as an effort to submit the approximate truths of science and its methods, science employs a methodical review. In this way, we can free ourselves from ideologies, beliefs, opinions, and immediate certainties, demanding the establishment of intersubjective control (Bachelard, 1979; 1984).

A first example that Bachelard (1984) describes tells us about a primary obstacle, that of opinion. This process of ideological centring is taken up, exemplifying it, by Sigmund Freud in the reminder of the three narcissistic wounds or affronts of humanity - in his

⁵We use the bar as a tension; just as in dialectics the poles of an equation are distinguished by their contradictory essence, of mutual insight and generation of movement and struggle (the "motor of history").

case, European - (Freud, 1979).⁶

In a movement coinciding with the contributions of Bachelard, but almost three decades later, Thomas Kuhn (2004), an American physicist, historian and philosopher, showed the revolutionary character of the progress of science which he presents as an open scheme. Foresight → normal science (paradigm) → crisis → revolution → new paradigm → new normal science → crisis → revolution → new paradigm → new normal science → new crisis. This discontinuism is the revolutionary character of scientific knowledge: a revolution supposes the abandonment of a scientific structure and its replacement by another, incompatible with the previous one.

In the same text, Kuhn introduces the concept of paradigm, in its broadest sense. We will point it out and accompany it with some other conceptualizations that, we understand, broaden its focus. A paradigm is constituted, says the author, by the general theoretical assumptions, the laws and techniques for its application adopted by the members of a certain scientific community. It is a constellation that globally contains laws, theories, applications and instruments, a model that generates a particular tradition in scientific research with explicit rules for the enigmas of normal science. A mature science is governed by a single paradigm (or disciplinary matrix); there are paradigmatic sciences: the formal and factual natural ones; there are pre-paradigmatic sciences: social (Kuhn, 2004).

For other authors, the concept encompasses elements that go beyond the specific field of scientific research, insofar as they are broad and general conceptions about reality and about man himself, the methods that should be used to approach it, and the legitimate ways of posing these issues. They are sets that contain conscious elements and unconscious aspects that are prior to the development of the effective and particular investigations that are carried out, germinal soil from which theories and research designs grow (Lores Arnaiz, 1986).

⁶ Nicolás Copernicus: The Earth is not the center of the Universe. In this first point, Freud talks about how man believed that the Earth, his home, was at the center of the universe, and that the rest of the stars moved around it describing orbits. Nicolás Copernicus, in the 16th century, showed the world how the Earth was not the center of the universe, but, like other planets, revolved around the Sun. In this way, the self-love of the human being met its first affront, the cosmological one.

Charles Darwin: man is one more animal. In the second point, Freud exposes how man, throughout history, has shown himself superior to other animals, believing himself different and interposing a gulf between animals and human beings. Darwin, in the 19th century, showed the world his theory of evolution, making man no more than any other animal. And not only that, but the man we know is not even the pinnacle of evolution. This led to the second affront that damages human narcissism, the biological one.

Sigmund Freud: we do not own ourselves. In the third point, Freud comments how man, despite having been severely wounded twice by Copernicus and Darwin, still considers himself master of himself. Descartes had formulated in the seventeenth century his "cogito, ergo sum", "I think, therefore I am". His own conscience, his internal perception of which he owns, allows him to make decisions that harmonize with his needs, leaving aside any decision that is not in accordance with it. Psychoanalysis once again hurt the human being by showing that a person is not even the owner of his own "house". Freud confronts Descartes by imposing his "where I think, I am not." With which we come to the third affront, the psychological one.

As conceptions of the world, of man and of social structure, they feed both the emergence or adoption of a certain theory, as well as the acceptance or rejection of certain models, techniques and ways of practicing research, since they constitute the legitimation of specific methodologies, by guiding the understanding of problems that require explanation, investigation or intervention. The sciences, therefore, are divided by competing paradigms and the social sciences in particular. There are no true paradigms but hegemonic ones.

Much earlier, Freud (1986) had presented the category of *Weltanschauung* or worldview, as an intellectual construction that solves in a unitary way all the problems of our existence from a supreme hypothesis. Within it, no question remains open and everything that interests us finds its precise place.

The emergence in 20th century philosophical thought of language, as a constitution not only of subjects but of epistemological conceptions, and its recognition as such, was brought to the fore by the so-called linguistic turn of the mid-20th century. There, the fall of the Enlightenment paradigm, the paradigm of modernity, produced from the breach of its promises is revealed, and the preponderance of the interpretive approach is configured, fundamentally in the academic and intellectual fields.

What is understood by the paradigm crisis of the 20th century? In a synthetic way, it is called the lack of response to the problems of knowledge by the classical approaches, sustained in all-embracing macro-theories (Sartori, 1988). With the "death" of the great stories comes the irruption of postmodernity, a condition defined by Lyotard (1993) as scepticism in the face of metanarratives. From the crisis of the two great stories, the positivist paradigm contains elements of its own assumptions: ahistoricity, desubjectivity; the crisis of the Marxist paradigm is revealed from the positivist reductions of Marxism and the fall of real socialism, among others.⁷

In short, this crisis of the hegemonic paradigms is, finally, the crisis of the Enlightenment, the crisis of rationality, the crisis of modernity and its project of imposing reason as a transcendental norm on society. The promises of modernity - belief in the natural goodness of man, the pursuit of happiness, optimism, secularism, and its fundamental assumption, rationalism - are contested by the increasing deterioration in humanity's quality of life, as well as by huge scientific and technological developments.

⁷ Colleague Consuelo Quiroga (1991) published a book, based on two articles published in the magazine *Acción Crítica de ALAETS-CELATS*, *La invasión positivista en el Marxismo*, in which she clearly argues this situation.

The answer, in the hands of ascendant postmodernity, is a 'no to the real', in pursuit of a 'yes to discourses on the real'. This gives rise to the emergence of interpretive paradigms: hermeneutics, poststructuralism, constructivism; great thinkers like Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva; to the reappearance of a hermeneutic of the subject, to intersubjectivity as a principle and to language as an articulating axis, based on the postulations of Ferdinand de Saussure (1945) and his principle that language is identical to a formal system, that is, a combination of signs, thus inaugurating structural linguistics.

Authors such as Irene Vasilachis de Gialdino (2007) speak of three paradigms: positivist, materialist-historical and interpretive; we prefer to break down the latter into its different versions mentioned, hence the plural indicated.

The final years of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century give prominence to the category of complexity (Morin, 1997) to think about reality, investigate it and intervene in it. However, in these new decades of the century, the manifestation of novel approaches to social work - decoloniality (Mignolo) and postcolonialism (Dussel, Quijano), gender and diversities (Segato), feminism/s (Butler), among many other perspectives - enables the categorical irruption of the colonization of subjectivity: Foucault, Guattari, and lately the Argentine Nora Merlin (2017), opening new perspectives of analysis to reflect on the discipline.⁸

Epistemologizing social work

Modernity promised us improvement of the quality of life through reason and, although the enormous advance of science and technology during the 20th century and the current one cannot be denied, neither can we fail to recognize the enormous wells of inequality that the order is going through. This situation affects social work as a profession and directly intervenes in some of the effects and manifestations of conflicts - class - that are in their genesis and are becoming more complex in today's social world.

Inequality is sustained on the basis of political and economic elements, hence the importance of thinking of social work as a politically oriented profession. We could indicate that the political capacity to question the established institutions is accompanied by the postulates of Vicente Faleiros (1986), when he maintains the need for the articulation of the instituted, in order to modify the institutional discourse.

⁸ All the material formulated in the last pages, of notable relevance, would merit an epistemological seminar of at least one semester. The limits of a post of this type prevent a better solution.



Bourdieu (2010) said that the knowledge of domination is a weapon against domination. From a critical perspective, thinking about the foundations and development of social work, that is, doing epistemology, puts us in a position to know our past, analyse our present and, minimally, give an account of our potentialities in the future. In this section we will point out the particularities of different epistemological perspectives and their theoretical bodies, insisting on the actuality of some of them.

What is the connection between interpretive views and the more positivist / functionalist epistemic positions of social work, or even those oriented towards Marxism / dialectics, while these last two approaches have been, in different periods, hegemonic in the profession / discipline? We will review two breaks in the socio-historical, theoretical and epistemological evolution of these traditions.

When talking about breaks in our profession / discipline, one immediately thinks of the reconceptualization movement. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, Mary Richmond consolidated a substantial rupture when, promoting the institutionalization of the profession, she generated a methodically organized space for reflection, aimed at recovering the elements that characterized the way in which social workers - then "visitors" - acted, with the aim of pointing out an established modality of intervention that was systematized in two fundamental works: *Social Diagnosis* of 1917 (2005) and *What is social case work?* of 1922 (1982).

At that time, the well-known process of diagnosis and treatment consolidated, in the manner of the hegemonic professions - medicine and psychiatry - a set of guidelines for the "doing" of social work that, recovered from the experience of thousands of social workers and systematically ordered by Richmond, became models of professional thought and practice. More than a hundred years ago, she bequeathed on us how to make a social diagnosis in her famous 1917 book, and it is precisely in this document that we recognize those traits that allowed the supporters of reconceptualisation to sustain (Lima, 1983; Escalada, 1986; among others) the positivist / inductivist / experimental nature of the proposal, which, as a quick and inconclusive point, can be summarized in the weight of the evidence, the processes oriented in particular cases to general laws or, failing that, from hypotheses to particular cases.

In her next book, from 1922, *What is Social Case Work?* Mary Richmond sets out clearly and simply the objectives of this so-called method for the specific treatment process. The text establishes that the objective of this proposal is "to develop the personality of the clients" (1982, p. 67) in order to achieve their adaptation to the social

environment. And despite the attempts of fellow researchers of the pioneers of social work⁹, in the sense of endowing the category with a politically reformist content in light of the prevailing pragmatism in the United States at the time, we argue, as Umberto Eco (1990) would say, that there is a text to be considered.

The reading carried out by Bibiana Travi (2007; 2011; 2017) and Viviana Ibáñez (2011; 2012) focuses on Mary Richmond and the influence she received from pragmatism, a classically American movement that considers the useful as the true: pragmatism depends on the facts and of the concrete, it observes the truth as it occurs in particular cases to generalise (James in Braunstein et al, 1986). Some of these thinkers were C. Peirce, W. James, J. Dewey. The incidence, always according to these authors, of the movement called symbolic interactionism, heir to the Chicago School, to which Cooley, Mead and others belonged, is also visualized, cited by Richmond in various parts of their production. We have called this perspective 'the American side', or direct path, that shapes Richmond's thought.

American perspective -direct way

Pragmatism (Abbagnano, 1998) is a doctrine developed by 19th-20th century American philosophers, according to which the truth test of a proposition is its practical utility. The purpose of thought is to guide action, and the effect of an idea is more important than its origin. According to this approach, no object or concept has inherent validity or is important. Its significance is found only in the practical effects resulting from its use or application. The truth of an idea or object, therefore, can be measured by scientific investigation of its usefulness.

John Dewey, a philosopher who helped develop the pragmatic stream, was also a psychologist and educator, and was deeply interested in reforming educational theory and practice. He contrasted his educational principles in laboratory schools with an experimental nature. The educational principles proposed learning through alternative educational activities (art, ethics, democracy) to the established curricular content. He considered that education should not only be a preparation for future life but should provide and have full meaning in its very development and fulfilment. We understand that Mary Richmond's conception of social work, as a type of informal education, comes from this influence. A similar conception of pragmatism is that of Williams

⁹ We respect and admire the production of these colleagues in the recovery of life and work of the pioneers, as well as the advances for the incipient profession; research that they have been developing for many years, with important results for the construction of this disciplinary archeology. Our point of view is basically epistemological, in the most absolute sense that we give the term, and promotes the opening of debates that avoid that constant in social work that is to turn all theoretical production into fashion and dogma, depriving it of its reflective possibilities, for hence, criticism.

James, also a psychologist. His fundamental thesis consisted of reducing truth to usefulness and reality to spirit. As is clear from the texts, the truth is something that happens to an idea in the course of its verification.

In relation to symbolic interactionism, we follow Hans Joas (1995) who points out that this concept was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1938, in an article on social psychology in the magazine *Hombre y Sociedad*, to refer to this line of sociological and psychosociological research. Its main object of study is the interaction processes - social action, characterized by a reciprocal orientation - underlining the symbolic nature of social action.

Symbolic interactionism is the continuation of certain developments in the thought and work of the heterogeneous interdisciplinary group of theorists, social researchers, and social reformers at the University of Chicago, who exerted a determining influence on American sociology between 1890 and 1940, precisely during the period of institutionalization of our discipline. The Chicago School can be described, according to Hans Joas (1995), as the combination between a pragmatic philosophy, the attempt to give a reformist political orientation to the possibilities of democracy in the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization, and the effort to turn sociology into an empirical science.

From our point of view, in the approach of Travi (2007; 2011; 2017) and Ibáñez (2011; 2012) there is an overvaluation of reformism, progressivism and democratism that this position and its authors claim. Therefore, from our approach, we do not assign substantive value to pragmatism, as we consider that it has limitations in its postulations, fundamentally referring to its own conditions of possibility (utility as the only truth; the centrality given to practical action; its absolute empiricism), although we recognize that the possibility of including it in educational processes, as was done by Mary Richmond, has been fruitful to consolidate what Weber at the same time, but in Europe, called *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001).

From this relationship we recover what is revealed. That is, elements attributable to a much more comprehensive proposal with respect to its first and undisputed positivist position. This second proposal is related to a more comprehensive approach, heir to the positions of the Sciences of the Spirit that, in their confrontation - and defeat - against the Natural Sciences of the late nineteenth century, were overshadowed and out of the field of prevailing theoretical-academic visualization.

From this analysis of the foundations and developments of the discipline, in this first great rupture, we consider that Mary Richmond recovers the understanding of tradition, insofar as she maintains that, in the treatment process, two types of techniques must be developed: actions and the understandings; both raised directly with the client and indirectly with the environment related or close to it. Where does Mary Richmond - or rather, the thousands of social workers whose work the Richmonian proposal nurtured - extract this double tendency to operate with understandings and actions?

The simple and even obvious first answer, which prevailed for decades in social work, sustained the influence of the aforementioned hegemonic professions, medicine and, in particular, psychiatry. Both were the fundamental development field of social work in its early stages of institutionalization, disciplines from which arose, surely, the famous sequence Diagnosis and Treatment. Another response, very consolidated and more understanding, was to maintain a humanist stance typical of the professional work of social work. It is a response that today, with the advancement and deepening of disciplinary knowledge, is insufficient for thinking about these developments and deepening their foundations, that is, to epistemologise the discipline / profession.

That reference to Weber puts us in another place to think about the influence indirectly operated in the production of Mary Richmond and that we have already exposed in previous paragraphs. That other place can be called the indirect or European way. We cannot help but consider that, with the training that this author demonstrates in her texts, with the mention of theories, methodologies and authors that she displays in her production, it is not impossible that she was aware, if not directly of the authors fundamental, at least of the most important disseminators of the works of Dilthey and Weber. The first in particular, since Dilthey was the one who at the end of the 19th century taught us that understanding was putting oneself in the place of the other, thus establishing understanding as a method of knowledge. With this he proposed a methodological question differentiated from the proposals of the Natural Sciences, which anchored their base, from Comte onwards, in the experimental method, in particular with its inductivist variant, represented at the end of the 19th century by Durkheim and that monument to the inductive method that is *The Suicide* (1982).¹⁰

The Sciences of the Spirit, from the hand of Dilthey and Weber, at the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, are concerned with methodologically deepening subjectivities; know, understand what happens to the other. How can this

¹⁰ Let us clarify that, since the 1930s, the validity of the Vienna Circle and the neopositivism derived from it altered the course of Cartesian reflexive philosophy and introduced analytical philosophy, promoting the emergence of the hypothetical deductive method.



trend be explained in the production of Richmond? We are talking about a trend that, as we understand it, did not try to think about research by mixing two irreducible approaches with each other, but rather its objective was to think about the ways of intervening, proposing the inductive / deductive mode as an instance of knowledge, and a treatment model sustained in understanding.

European perspective -indirect way

The so-called Complaint -or War- of Methods, Methodenstreit, which took place in Germany around 1883, marks the climate of the late 19th century, a confrontation during which the Naturwissenschaften or Sciences of Nature, a classical Galilean science, nomothetic¹¹, referenced in the experimental method and sustained in the principle of explanation -erklären- typical of the mathematical and physical method, confronts the Geisteswissenschaften, Sciences of the Spirit, of history and of man, postulants of a sui generis, ideographic method¹², focused on understanding / interpreting -verstehen- the method of historical science.

The first marks a naturalistic approach, as an effort to reduce becoming to universal laws that subsume the particular in the universal; it abides by the judgments of reality. The second represents a tradition nurtured in the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher of the early nineteenth century - interpretation of the sacred texts then became, with this author, universal hermeneutics. The hermeneutical task is to bring to light the hidden meaning, the sense. It is about transcribing the individual, without dissolving it in some conceptual mediation, and implies a valorization. The historian Johann Gustav Droysen introduced the distinction (von Wright, 1979) between the two categories.

Wilhelm Dilthey was a nineteenth century thinker, philosopher and psychologist, student of the hermeneutics, which fought the dominance exercised in the field of knowledge by objective natural sciences. He intended to establish a subjective current of the Sciences of the Spirit, as a methodologically differentiated discipline from the Sciences of Nature. These subjective human studies (including law, religion, art, and history) had to focus on historical, social and human realities. Dilthey reasoned that all knowledge must be analysed in light of the history; without this perspective knowledge can only be partial.

In his fundamental work, Introduction to spiritual sciences (1986), his concern was to provide the human sciences with a solid scientific base and to develop a method that

¹¹Those that have as their object logical laws, that seek to study causal and invariable processes, that try to objectively establish some universal law.

¹²Its object is the study of changing events; they are studies dedicated to understanding the individual and unique particularities of the objects of study.

would make it possible to achieve objectively valid interpretations, that is, to confer legitimacy as an objective science to the knowledge of the historically conditioned. For this, the method was that of understanding life through itself: self-awareness, understanding of the appearance and genesis of scientific consciousness through an analysis of the essence of self-knowledge, but through the objectifications of life. Hermeneutics implied understanding the other through its manifestations, the reconstruction of that interiority. Basically, the idea of Dilthey was the idea of the social researcher who puts himself in the place that reproduces the place of the investigated subjects.

On the other hand, Max Weber, German philosopher, historian, economist and political scientist, who was considered one of the founders of modern sociology and public administration, made sense of antipositivistic hermeneutics. In methodological terms (1982; 2001), he opposed the use of abstract reasoning, always preferring an empirical and historical investigation. His works began the anti-positivist revolution in the social sciences, which marked the difference between these and the natural sciences due to the social actions of men. The ideal types, their methodological product, are a conceptual instrument used to learn the essential features of certain social phenomena, the content of which depends on the way in which it is positioned, on what vital position, what worldview, what culture, what ideas the subject keeps in front of the phenomenon. In the real world it is difficult to find a pure ideal type, but this is not a problem since the main value of the concept is its heuristic ability, that is, its ability to generate new ideas.

The key to understanding the process of analysis of social reality was the idea that sociology should have an interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) of the social action, staying within the traditional hermeneutics; understanding social action as all subjectively significant behaviour, that is, having meaning for the subject who performs it. For there to be an action, the subject has to understand and recognize the reason or reasons for his/her behaviour. Without subjectively recognized motive, there is no action. Understanding, then, was for Weber to try to reconstruct the motive or motives that a subject had to act. And thus, the ideal types are methodologically raised.

A digression is necessary here. There is a tendency, omnipresent in social work, to investigate with so-called qualitative methods or designs, their origin being unknown. When doing an in-depth interview, when working with key informants or with life stories, even with focus groups, what is sought is to know in depth those subjectivities put into investigation: how the other thinks, why they manifest or act in such a way. In the intervention, when we do interviews, these are knowledge modalities derived from comprehensive positioning, aimed at delving into the other. This was already raised by Mary Richmond, when indicating the moments oriented to the achievement of a subsequent treatment to a social diagnosis.

Following Federico Schuster (1995), this problem - to understand is to reconstruct in the consciousness of the researcher the consciousness of the other - encounters three important leaps or moments: the first is Dilthey's, the second is Weber's and the third is that of Alfred Schütz, who was the introducer of phenomenological approaches in social sciences.

For Schütz (1974), the subject who lives in the social world is determined by his biography and his immediate experience. The biographical configuration refers to the fact that each individual is situated in a particular way in the world, since all his experience is unique. Their parents, the upbringing and education received, the interests, desires and motives, all are elements that contribute to the formation of unique personalities. Immediate personal experience is related with the perspective from which the subject apprehends reality, and the understanding is made in relation to the position he occupies in the world. The space and the time in which the individual passes determine their experiences.

The configuration of the subject is also related to intersubjectivity, which constitutes a characteristic of the social world. That the subject can perceive reality by putting himself in the place of the other is what allows common sense to recognize others as analogous to the self. It is in intersubjectivity where we can perceive certain phenomena that escape the knowledge of the self, since the subject cannot perceive his immediate experience, but he does perceive those of others, insofar as they are given to him as aspects of the social world. In other words, the subject perceives his actions, because he can perceive the actions and actions of others.

It is possible to understand actions, says Schütz, who from Weberian concepts advances the idea of an observational understanding, which is what we exercise on a daily basis in our relationships with others, objectifying what is observed and giving it an interpretation, but without risking an interpretation of what the actor tries to mean. Motivational understanding implies a knowledge of the actor, his configuration and the meaning that he could give to his action, so that the observation gives rise to an interpretation that attributes motives to the action.

Schütz thinks that any methodology is admissible for this. But to access the perspective of the other, quantitative techniques are not enough and it will be his disciples who will develop qualitative techniques in a very powerful way, as the most appropriate way to effectively reconstruct the perspective of the other. This idea of interpreted reality is an element that comes from the understanding tradition. "Schütz is one of those that contributes the most to clarifying it ..." (Schuster, 1995, p.31).

Returning to Dilthey and Weber, those initial authors of this understanding position - later specified by Alfred Schütz and his disciples -, we cannot help but consider that Mary Richmond had some approaches to this perspective. We have not done enough research, but it is a hypothesis generated from the knowledge of those two authors and the careful and oriented reading of the two founding texts of Mary Richmond.

As we have already mentioned in previous paragraphs, the use of interviews, both as a means of accessing the diagnosis of the situation of the other - the client - (those measures aimed at understanding, recovering sense, to know what is happening to him), and the effect "from mentality to mentality" advocated to modify "personality" by actions and understandings, are clear indications of that epistemic integrality that we attribute to the production of this author... Are these influences of the attention and treatment of psychiatry added to a rational response, in light of the contributions of what we call the European side?

When we intervene in social work, we seek to understand the situation, to know in depth the intersubjectivities put into play by various actors, in order to accompany the processes of access to rights, and therefore, the exercise - and enjoyment - of citizenship. On that side, we hypothesize that we must point out the antecedents of Mary Richmond's proposal, since that is where the most important value of her proposals seems to lie. We maintain that Richmond did not do an investigation in the terms in which we know this process, nor did she pretend to establish any general theory about the social question of the time. Its objective was to systematize an intervention proposal, with marked elements typical of the dominant method at the time: the experimental in its inductivist version. In this way, he recovered a significant number of completed interventions, from which he established two fundamental instances: diagnosis and treatment; a process that, over time and put into practice, represented what we do now: know, plan, execute and evaluate. In other words, and as can be seen from our approach in other publications (González Saibene, 2015), an instance of knowledge in which we borrow the tools of social research (Urrutia, 1983) and an instance of strategic planning, which includes the formulation of objectives, the development of programs and / or projects, and evaluation.

We are here in the presence of what is known as the method (or methodology, although those two concepts are not exactly homologous) of social planning, which is not the exclusive property of social work, but an established modality for field work, administrative and / or institutional, of any social and / or political operator. This statement does not detract from the proposal, it only tries to critically clear the condition of exclusivity or methodological property. A tour of political science or popular education texts will inevitably allow us to find this proposal in any of its forms of



presentation. If we turn to the text by Ezequiel Ander-Egg (1982), he already incorporated these instances as a way of updating the classical sequence inherited from medicine and psychiatry.

Let's go back to Mary Richmond. The author maintains that social diagnosis is a process that is never definitively finished (note the topicality of her thinking, since only a few decades later Popper (1991) is going to establish knowledge as provisionally true), and that, from it, a treatment can be established. But how is a diagnosis made in social work? Basically, from the study of particular cases a general formulation is proposed or, what is more frequent, a hypothesis is worked on to be tested in these particular cases. We are in the strict presence of the inductive method in the first case, and its deductive variant in the second. These are two forms adopted by the experimental method, typical of the natural sciences and of the classical sociology of 20th century positivism.

Mary Richmond and her colleagues, were, like us today, "children of the time", responding to a "climate of the time." The hegemonic line of thought of those times was the one that she bequeathed to us via her texts. Would it have been striking if Mary Richmond raised something of a different order? Yes, and it does. The comprehensive look that she promotes is the element that can be highlighted as remarkable, as she managed with her proposal to evade the most extreme positions, which from the aforementioned "complaint of methods" of the late nineteenth century, tried to sweep away any attempt of maintenance or visibility of a thought that sustains the principles of the sciences of the spirit, psychology, philosophy, history, that is, of understanding as a form of knowledge (and action).

Positivism and the strong exclusion from the scientific world of everything related to the subjective and ideological field - although it establishes a normative character - permeated the space for the production and reproduction of knowledge and its various forms of knowledge in the field of social intervention. As a typical example of this tendency, in psychology, the Dilthean proposals (and even psychoanalysis) were replaced by the formulations of behaviourism of Watson (1913), who, in his firm intention to maintain discipline in the field of academia, established a content and a sustained method in the observation of behaviours. This allowed for quantification. Another reference from the same disciplinary field is that of psychoanalysis, which, in the hands of Sigmund's daughter, Anna Freud, took this theoretical body, according to her biographers, to well-ventilated, well-lit places, removing the unconscious from the centre of the discipline - an obscure and empirically unobservable environment- in order to place the weight of therapeutic possibility on consciousness.



These are two clear examples - with authors also incorporated by Mary Richmond in her classic 1922 text - of how the natural sciences swept away the spiritual sciences. And with great success, although without being able to fulfil the promises of modernity, as they were presented to us. Inequality in all its forms and manifestations, and its consequence, poverty and exclusion, were imposed as a fundamental condition of the capitalist mode of production.

A kind of conclusion ... new questions

Mary Richmond formulates her proposal in *Social Diagnosis* organizing it in four consecutive moments: 1) interviews with the client, 2) interviews with the family environment, 3) use of other sources 4) weighting of all the data obtained. This last point is what today, in social research, we call data interpretation. It means that the data, as Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron (1975) say, do not speak to us directly, but rather need to be constructed, read, interpreted.

If this is so, why in social work, where Bourdieu is read so much, was there, until very recently, no interest in the interpretive approach? Why couldn't we introduce this last critical approach that also includes Marxism in its various aspects? We are not posing here a question of an ideological political type, but rather we are asking a question in epistemic terms.

Although we cannot fail to highlight the positivist / functionalist / inductivist influence in the classical or traditional contributions of the profession, we also have to identify that the other rupture, that of reconceptualization, much more worked on by the professional / disciplinary collective, is the one that put us in that critical place. A reconceptualizing rupture, this time, conditioned or produced by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the less restricted entry of Marxist material, producing there what, according to Mercedes Escalada (1986) was a counter-ideological reaction, since it was an attempt to get out of a particular ideology to enter another equally particular ideology. This by formulating transformation objectives that far exceeded the concrete possibilities of social interventions.

Despite this, it must be recognized that it was this movement that introduced us to what we now understand and assume as social work: the accompaniment of the population in the effective exercise of their rights and citizenship.

But this does not prevent us from rethinking, in epistemological terms, the reconceptualization's proposals for intervention modalities, which could not avoid that inductivist linearity, the empiricist influence, and even the sensualist influence of Hume

and the experimental method. Its motives were different: all theory is ideological was its proposal, and its response was to deny the theory (which came from the northern hemisphere). Mercedes Escalada (1986), Leila Lima and Roberto Rodríguez (1983) in their respective texts and articles provide a full foundation for the above.

The influence of one of Mao's philosophical theses, *On Practice* (1984) and the scant knowledge, by colleagues of reconceptualization, of Marxist texts in particular and of dialectics in general, along with the terrible translations did the rest. The fall of the democratic regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America, where the movement was originally manifested, prevented this process from advancing by reversing this strong tendency to replace one ideology with another, improving its theoretical and strategic productions and consolidating a process that, we insist, introduce us more quickly to a social work concerned - and fundamentally occupied - no longer in producing the adaptation of the clients in a stable and harmonious society as proposed by Richmond in 1922, but in the recognition of the social conflict and in the need to accompany the populations in vulnerable situations in the achievement, already mentioned, of their rights, in pursuit of the expansion of citizenship.

Today, we face the apothegm that "all theory is ideological" not with the abandonment of theories, but with the support of a critical and reflective look, an informed and highly educated attitude, and a founded intervention, that is, well argued - as Alberto Parisi insisted on raising, in 1994, in Santiago de Chile. Accompanying the population in the decision-making process regarding their rights and exercising them, in the recognition of their own knowledge and possibilities, is the fundamental act that characterizes us, through the establishment of our theoretical and strategic instruments.

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