Theoretical Treasure Untapped: Sociology’s Neglect of Friedrich Nietzsche

Meghan Butcher
Howard Bahr

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub

Part of the Sociology Commons

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/151
Research Questions

Q1: How might Nietzsche’s work benefit sociology?
Q2: To what extent is Nietzsche already represented in sociological literature?
Q3: What are the options and opportunities?
Q4: How does sociological usage compare with that of other disciplines?
Q5: How have sociologists responded to Antonio’s plea to consider Nietzsche a founder?
Q6: How many sociologists consider Nietzsche a founder, and what does this imply for the discipline?
Q7: What are our options and opportunities to incorporate Nietzsche into sociological discourse?

Methods

Q1- Literature review of potential benefits of incorporating Nietzsche into mainstream sociological discourse
Q2- Literature review and analysis: We reviewed all English language articles on sociology published in ISI Web of Science from 1950-2008, with comparisons to other theorists (Table 2).
Q3- Article count: Tally from citations in ISI Web of Science, 2003-2008, with comparisons to other theorists (Table 2).
Q4- Article count: Tally from citations in ISI Web of Science, 1974-2009, by discipline (Table 3).
Q5- Literature review and analysis: Using coding of selected works (Human All Too Human (HTH, Gay Science (GS), and Genealogy of Morals (GM)).

Findings

Q1- Nietzsche is the last bridge between positivism and existentialism” (Kauffmann 1968, 18)

- “Properly understood, Nietzsche’s conception of power may represent one of the few great philosophic ideas of all time” (Kauffmann 1974, xvi)
- “The honesty of a contemporary scholar…can be measured by the position he takes vis-à-vis Nietzsche and Marx (Max Weber, cited in Antonio, 1995: 3)
- “Inclusion of Nietzsche among the founders would enhance the discipline’s historical sense as it rethinks its foundations and practices at the end of the postwar era.” (Antonio 1995, 35)
Q2- “Nietzsche is glaringly absent from sociological discourse. In the United States, he is left out entirely, and elsewhere he is seldom discussed” (Antonio 1995, 3)


Q3- Our Web of Science results show that Nietzsche was a topic in only 7 articles as compared to 374 for Weber, 238 for Marx, and 172 for Durkheim. This means that there had to be 44 articles published in sociological journals to yield 1 Weber article, 70 for 1 Marx article, 97 for 1 Durkheim article, and 2408 for 1 Nietzsche article. It is clear that while some sociologists consider Nietzsche a founder, topical articles about him are published in nowhere near the rate for articles on theorists now accepted as canonical.

Table 1. Theorists Present in Sociological Literature: Citations in American Journal of Sociology Accessed on JSTOR (Aspers 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simmel</td>
<td>1895-1950/1951-1990</td>
<td>105/138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nietzsche</td>
<td>1895-1950/1951-1990</td>
<td>48/12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Number and Percent of Sociological Articles, 2003-2008, by Theorist (theorist coded as topic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weber</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marx</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durkheim</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nietzsche</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Articles on Nietzsche by Discipline, 1974-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings (continued)

Q4- Within sociology Nietzsche is far less frequently mentioned than other founding theorists such as Weber, Marx, Durkheim, or Simmel. The disciplines of Philosophy, Ethics, and Political Science use him more frequently.

Q5- Options and Opportunities

Grand theory: Nietzsche is a consistent and continuing challenge to the modernist secularizing tradition of Comte, Durkheim, and Weber, who believed “that rationalization unleashes social forces of universal significance, which, if properly directed, would liberate and nurture human particularity. By contrast, Nietzsche equated rationalization with cultural homogenization and liquidation of particularity. He saw ‘decadence’ where classical theorists saw progress.” (Antonio 1995, 6)

Middle-range theory: One need not adopt the holistic view that requires one to know all his works to understand any of them. He writes to the individual, and is more particularist than generalist. His works teem with illuminating insights that provoke further inquiry. In Aspers’ (2007, 496) words, “Nietzsche’s approach . . . is more like a toolkit that facilitates further questioning . . . than a ready-made theory.” Consider these examples, each heavy with potential propositions and testable hypotheses.

Illustrative Quotations: Theory and Methodology

In reality there is no relationship nor friendship nor even enmity between religion and real science: they live on different stars” (HTH 80).

“A seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing” (GM 255).

“Cause and effect: such a duality probably never exists; in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces” (GS: P. 173).

Illustrative Quotations: Social control, crime and punishment

“Our crime against criminals is that we treat them like scoundrels” (HTH 56).

“In truth, however, the evil instincts are expedient, species-preserving, and indispensable to as high a degree as the good ones; their function is merely different.” (GS 79)

“It is a serious mistake to study the penal code of a people as if it gave expression to the national character. The laws do not betray what a people are but rather what seems to them foreign, strange, uncanny, outlandish” (GS 109).

Illustrative Quotations: Stratification

“One hurts those whom one wants to feel one’s power, for pain is a much more efficient means to that end than pleasure; pain always raises the question about its origin while pleasure is inclined to stop with itself” (GS 86).

“‘What distinguishes the common type is that it never loses sight of its advantage . . . Compared to them, the higher type is more unreasonable, for those who are noble, magnanimous, and self-sacrificial do succumb to their instincts, and when they are at their best, their reason pauses.” (GS 777)

“Oddly, submission to powerful, frightening, even terrible persons, like tyrants and generals, is not experienced as nearly so painful as is this submission to unknown and uninteresting people, which is what all the luminaries of industry are.” (GS 107)