AN EXERCISE IN HEGELIAN INQUIRY

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INTRODUCTION

One of the objectives of experiential learning techniques is to enable the student to see and experience “what is going on” in a particular situation. That is, the specific facts of the case are of less importance than the actions, and causes of the actions, that evolve. Of major importance in this respect are the world views, or collection of attitudes, opinions and beliefs about reality, held by participants or actors.

What is the relationship between a person’s world view and the actions and reactions that result? What is the nature of the assumptions made by a person holding a particular world view? What are the policy implications of the assumptions and world views?

C. West Churchman has dealt at some length with this concept of world view. In his The Design of Inquiring Systems, he discusses the perceptor’s image of the world - Weltanschauung. [2, p. 169-179] This Weltanschauung determines the use that an individual will make of a particular item of information; it provides the context in which the information will be interpreted. Different individuals with different world views will, accordingly, make different uses of the same piece of information. This fact provides the basis for Churchman’s Hegelian inquiries and for our adaptation of it to classroom use.

A number of methods have been developed to encourage students to examine their own values or value orientations in varying contexts. There also exists, in the literature, a wide variety of loosely related models or sets of explanations as to why things happen the way they do in business organizations. For the purposes of classroom explication and discussion, there needs to be a connection between the two. This connection is not always easily made. That is, once the student has given some thought to is or her own values in a given context, it is often difficult to bridge the gap to understanding how an existing model would apply in the same context, and to appreciating the implications of this particular viewpoint. For example, suppose the student completes a Rokeach-type value ranking form. Then a discussion of Theory X-Theory Y, or System 1-System 4 ensues. A case or incident is then analyzed. Can the student make the connection between the assumptions of the theory and the act? Can he or she make the further connection between the theoretical assessment of the act and his own value assessment?

One of the difficulties that users of the case approach have experienced is in making this sort of connection. The discussion frequently gets bogged down in ambiguous interpretations of cause and effect, in conflicting policy inferences, without there being a strong sense of ~ Two or more sides may develop, neither side recognizing that the same facts are being used by both sides in support of their position. In Churchman's use of Hegelian terminology, a thesis and antithesis develop. But does this dialectical process result in a richer synthesis? Churchman attempted to design a dialectical experience, involving the hawk and dove interpretations of the following: in 1966, 90% of the federal expenditure for research and development went to national defense related projects. The exact nature of the experiment is not of primary interest here. His conclusion is: "verification" of the value of the dialectical experience is not the establishment of an optimal solution, but is rather the creation of a more knowledgeable process in which the opposing parties are made more aware of each other's Weltanschauungen. As Churchman says, this becomes a plausible argument if it is accepted that increased sensitivity to issues and increased awareness and perception are benefits of the conflict of ideas.

We have attempted to adapt this notion of "Hegelian Inquiry" to classroom use. Two different approaches are discussed below. The first is a part of a learning package on international investment that we prepared for the Consortium on International Studies Education [4]. A sample sheet from the learning package is included as the Appendix. The second approach is simply a further application to the case method that we are currently experimenting with.

THEORIES OF FOREIGN INVESTMENTS

We had two objectives in mind in writing the learning package. The first was to provide an introductory perspective on the basic economic motivations underlying international investment. Secondly, we wanted to demonstrate that sometimes conflicting explanations for investment emanate from different views of the world's economy. These differences in theoretical positions lead to markedly different views on policy. The package proceeds through a series of experiential activities designed to acquaint the learner with three representative theories of foreign investment. The Hegelian Inquiry exercise comes as the last activity in the package. In it, we ask the students to explain each of a series of "facts" as they think the proponents of each of the three theories would do [see Appendix]. The discussion which follows proceeds from their "explanations" to the assumptions underlying the three theories. The next step then is to make the connection between the assumptions and the policy implications which flow from the "explanations" and assumptions. If all goes smoothly, the final step is to make the connection between the individual students world view with respect to foreign investment (a rough attempt is made at establishing this early in the package) and the discussion which has ensued.

The package has been field tested by a number of associates, with greater success than we had anticipated.

The last step is perhaps the most difficult to make. It would be presumptuous to suggest that a “richer synthesis”, Hegel’s fusing of thesis and antithesis, develops as a result of our discussions. However, animated discussion and clarification does seem to result from the activity. Students do seem to benefit from the exercise of making the connection between theory and use of data, and between use of data and policy. At times, students who have been unwilling to engage in classroom discussions find themselves drawn into the conflict.

ORGANIZATION BEHAVIOR

The second use involves an attempt to use the dialectical inquirer with case material. This approach is being tested in a case course on human behavior in business organizations. The format is essentially the same as that outlined above, with the exception that the datum is derived from a case under discussion.

For the purposes of illustration, assume that the students have completed a number of value scale instruments related to individual and organizational characteristics. The method is presented here using the “Dashman Company” case [3, p.3], a short incident in which the Vice-President of Purchasing attempts, with little success, to centralize the purchasing function. In this example, the datum to be explained could be defined as “the specific actions taken by the purchasing V.P.”. For this example, assume that the case is being discussed in the context of Likert’s System 1 - System 4 model. After studying the case, the student is asked to “explain” the action from the standpoint of a System 1 manager, then from the standpoint of a System 4 manager. These are then read and discussed, with the discussion aimed at determining the assumptions in each case which lead to the explanation. The next step is to proceed from the assumptions to the policy explanations. Given that the act is “explained” in a certain way, what conclusions can be drawn about the results? What are the policy implications of these conclusions? How do the implications of the System 1 explanation compare with those of System 4? Finally, (the “big leap”) how do the students relate their own world view to the implications brought out in the discussion? Is there any opportunity for a richer synthesis?

Our experience with this second body of material is still limited. If the discussions prove as useful as has been the case with the learning package material, there are a number of other types of experiential exercises with which we hope to experiment.

CONCLUSION

Our world view tends to determine how data is accepted, understood and used in our explanations of reality and arguments about policy. The dialectic is not a means of determining the optimal alternative. When opposing parties realize that the same pieces of data are being used in support of mutually exclusive positions, the way is open to examine the underlying assumptions. Ideally, one hopes for a richer synthesis to result. Short of that, a more knowledgeable process may result as the opposing parties become more aware of each other's Weltanschauungen. In our experience this sort of exercise contributes to clarification in the conflict of ideas.

REFERENCES

1. Boulding, Kenneth E., The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1956).

2. Churchman, C. West, The Design of Inquiring Systems: Basic Concepts of Systems and Organization, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971).

3. Lawrence, Paul R. et. al., Organizational Behavior and Administration, (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1976).

4. Miller, Robert R. and John A. Kilpatrick, Private International Investment, (New York: Consortium for International Studies Education, 1976).

APPENDIX

Read the example below, and then attempt to produce similar explanations of the other pieces of data from the standpoint of each of the three theories.

Method by Which Theories Would Explain or Use Datum

Datum	Theory I	Theory II	Theory III
Example: Between 1960 and 1970, the share of income going to the wealthiest 5% grew in many LDCs* while the share going to the poorest 40% declined (149)**	Example: While the percent share received by the lower 40% may have declined, the total grew, so that the 40% were actually, in absolute terms, better off.	Example: This condition is a result of population pressure and political weakness, and would have been even worse without MNCs.	Example: This shows that MNC investment is an investment of exploitation.
In a recent year, the comparative wage rates in the electronics industry were: U.S. $3.13/hr. Hong Kong .27/hr. (127)**			
Of 717 new manufacturing subsidiaries established by MNCs in Latin America, 46% were established by buying out local firms. (139)**			
In the last four years, 34 LDCs* have taken either action to take over or force out U.S. based MNCs. (188)**			

* Less Developed Countries

**( ) Bracketed number refers to page in Barnet and Muller, Global Reach, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).