MORE ON MODELS AND MUDDLES IN THE SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE *SOCIOLGICAL FALLACY RECONSIDERED*

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ABSTRACT
It is argued that the explicit use of social science models, even so-called cross-cultural models, does not necessarily help to eliminate anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations of New Testament texts. A historical approach (aim of interpretation) that does not assume commensurability between different cultures, which emphasises the native's point of view, has more potential in this respect. Models used not as iron matrices but as heuristic tools promoting the dialogical interaction between model and data, carry some safeguards against the sociological fallacy against which certain scholars have warned.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the assumptions¹ emphasised in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament and its world is that in an interpretive activity there is no choice in whether models are used or not (see Malina 1981:11-18, 1983a:14; Elliott 1986:6; Rohrbaugh 1987:23; Holmberg 1990:13-14; Meeks 1983:5). Many scholars support Carney, who argues that 'we do not have the choice of whether we will use models or not. Our choice, rather, lies in deciding whether to use them consciously or unconsciously' (1975:5).

More than a decade ago, however, Judge (see 1980) warned against the sociological fallacy in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament. His objection was that social models defined in terms of other cultures are imported into the world of the New Testament. Five years later Stowers expressed the reservation that 'certain tendencies of the new movement call for critical scrutiny. In the

¹ This is a revised version of a paper delivered at an NTSSA subgroup meeting in Pretoria on 1990-10-30. The other part of that paper, as revised, is an attempt at defining the social-scientific approach (see Craffert 1991). A special word of thanks goes to my colleagues Pieter Botha and Danie Goosen who made some helpful comments.

A second important assumption is that any communication can be properly only understood within the social and cultural codes in which it originated. The aim of interpretation logically follows: to reduce socially anachronistic and ethnocentric readings of New Testament texts (see Craffert 1991:123).
use of social-scientific models, the new approach too readily assumes commensurability between ancient and modern societies and ancient and modern thought' (1985:150). He suggested that the 'debate in the philosophy of science, and a parallel debate in the philosophy of history, should warn us to be skeptical about the applicability of modern models to antiquity' (1985:151). One of the methodological issues they have proposed is the need not for models but for correct ways of using models in a social-scientific approach.

The thesis of this study is that the explicit use of models, even so-called cross-cultural models, does not necessarily reduce anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations. If the use of models is unavoidable, the end result will be determined by their epistemological grounding, theoretical articulation and methodological implementation. Although the aim of this article is primarily methodological, it should be remembered that methodology is always embedded in philosophy (see Dallmayr & McCarthy 1977:77-78; Mouton 1984); more specifically, any particular social-scientific methodology is embedded in a philosophy of history and a theory of science. In short, one’s methodology is predetermined by the aim of interpretation which is, at bottom, a philosophical choice. Despite the impressive track record of what is today referred to as the social-scientific interpretation of the New Testament, the time has come to take stock of its methodological sophistication and development over the past two decades.

2 THE AIM OF INTERPRETATION: HISTORICAL OR NON-HISTORICAL

It is not easy to find an appropriate set of concepts for a typology of social theories and methodologies. Following the social scientist Unger, Powell identifies three types of social theories: naturalist, deep structure social theories, and anti-necessitarian viewpoints (see 1989:28-31). Stowers prefers three positions, namely functionalism, strict intentionalism, and mediationism (see

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2 By methodological considerations is meant the principles underlying, fundamental to and implicit in scientific inquiry (see Mabry 1984:145-152).

3 Regarding the philosophy of history, my position is that history and the social sciences should be seen as dialogical rather than antithetical disciplines. Furthermore, the move towards an interdisciplinary approach, which provides an alternative set of assumptions and theoretical principles, should be encouraged when defining the social-scientific approach to the New Testament (see Craffert 1991).

4 Holmberg, in a recent publication, sets out to 'reflect critically on the value of this type of approach (sociological approach) by looking at the actual methodological development of New Testament sociology and by assessing its limits and benefits' (1990:vii). It should be noted that he wilfully excluded cultural anthropological studies by concentrating on sociology and the New Testament. As will become clear, the methodological discussion in this study focuses more particularly on social-scientific methods, since cultural anthropology and history contribute to the enterprise in equal measure.
while Haralambos (see 1980:18) distinguishes between positivism and phenomenology. The difficulty of finding an appropriate set of concepts to describe the different positions is highlighted by the variety of proposals which reflect more or less the same deficiency: they mix up concepts from different conceptual spheres. For example, functionalism as a methodological perspective within the social sciences is coupled with strict intentionalism which is really an epistemological category. Since positivism is such a biased and contentious term, not to mention the variety of meanings in which it is used (see Mouton 1987:1), it will be avoided as far as possible.

Broadly speaking, however, these expressions — although they do not share the same terms, or even concepts from the same conceptual sphere — describe the same identifiable categories. Rather than identifying three positions in a linear order, I consider the debate to be a struggle at the antipositivist end where a variety of positions can be identified - of which a historical and a non-historical position form the extremes on a continuum which runs vertically at the antipositivist end of the horizontal spectrum. The positions on the second continuum are all in one way or another a reaction to the positivist position they wish to supersede but by the same token they are related to it.5 Regarding the use of models, it is suggested that the nonhistorical approach closely resembles the positivist approach.

The alternatives on the second continuum are a science generated by historical concerns or one generated by nonhistorical concerns; the concepts historical and nonhistorical will be used to designate the two categories. With regard to methodologies, the different concerns give way to different theories of science: broadly speaking, the alternatives are between an experimental science approximating the natural sciences in its quest for law-like explanations (the nonhistorical approach) and on the other hand (the historical approach) an interpretive science in search of meaning and the illumination of context (see Geertz 1973:5; Holmberg 1990:12). At the ends of the antipositivist continuum, two complementary insights will illuminate the methodological issues.

At the nonhistorical end, commensurability between different, even alien, cultures is presupposed. It is further assumed that ‘all societies share a commensurable underlying “hidden teleology” of functions’ (Stowers 1985:155-156).

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5 Rather than:

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\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{positivism} & \text{mediationist} & \text{anti-positivism} \\
\text{historical} & & \\
\text{positivism} & \text{anti-positivism} & \text{nonhistorical}
\end{array}
\]
Regarding the use of models, this is part of the positivist legacy in the social sciences. Since its introduction by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), it was believed that 'it would be possible to create a science of society based on the same principles and procedures as the natural sciences. This approach is known as positivism' (Haralambos 1980:18).

Although two of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology — functionalism and conflict theory— provide very different views on society, methodologically they share this legacy. Both offer 'general explanations of society as a whole', and since both 'regard society as a system' they are often referred to as 'system theories' (Haralambos 1980:15). Haralambos argues that

once behaviour is seen as a response to some external stimulus, such as economic forces or the requirements of the social system, the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences appear appropriate to the study of man. Marxism has often been regarded as a positivist approach since it can be argued that it sees human behaviour as a reaction to the stimulus of the economic infrastructure. Functionalism has been viewed in a similar light. The behaviour of members of society can be seen as a response to the functional prerequisites of the social system (Haralambos 1980:20).

Powell, following Unger, makes the same point. A great deal of modern social science is naturalistic in that it rests on the assumption that 'there are inherent or necessary structures to human nature and social life' (1989:28). No doubt functionalism is implied. The second category, deep structure social theories such as conflict theories (Marxism), 'are fatally flawed at the very beginning by their failure to carry out consistently the rejection of naturalism' (1989:29). Anti-necessitarian theories, on the other hand, reject the idea of laws and 'invariant sequences or unavoidable structures to social life' (1989:30).

Haralambos admits that this view of system theory represents a considerable

6 Haralambos points out the following assumptions of the positivist approach in sociology: 'The behaviour of man, like the behaviour of matter, can be objectively measured.... The positivist approach in sociology places particular emphasis on behaviour that can be directly observed.... The positivists' emphasis on observable "facts" is due largely to the belief that human behaviour can be explained in much the same way as behaviour of matter.... Men react to external stimuli and their behaviour can be explained in terms of this reaction' (1980:18-19; and see Herion 1986:6). According to Cohn, the same arguments would apply to anthropology (see 1980:207).

7 For a discussion and critique of functionalism, see Haralambos (1980:9-12, 521-534), Saliba (1977:188) and Stone (1977:9-10), Saldarini (1988:19). For conflict theory, see for example Haralambos (1980:12-18, 534-543). Discussions and critiques of the various theoretical perspectives are common knowledge today in the social scientific approach to the New Testament (see Malina 1983a:16-18; Elliott 1986:7). However, the epistemological issues and the concomitant way in which models are used within these theoretical perspectives are seldom addressed.
oversimplification of a complex issue. However, it is probably fair to say that with regard to the use of models, as well as the assumption of commensurability, system theories resemble a nonhistorical rather than a historical proposition (see Haralambos 1980:20; Holmberg 1990:12; Skocpol 1984b:12-17; 1984a:362-363; Skinner 1985; Stowers 1985:154). Thus even interpretations which focus on symbolic systems can, in terms of the use of models, be nonhistorical or doomed to an anachronistic aim.

The reverse side of the nonhistorical coin is the assumption, maintained by most functionalist sociologists (see Holmberg 1990:140; Stowers 1985:152; Saldarini 1988:19), that social phenomena can be analysed quite independently of the beliefs of the actors. The implication is that the interpreter's model and not the participant's point of view is the decisive factor. Ignoring the intersubjective meanings of participants, that is, interpreting all other societies in terms of one's own categories, can only be disastrous to a comparative science (see Taylor 1977:125).

Since for many decades — quite often unnoticed — functionalism was, and in many instances still is, the foremost theoretical approach not only for sociologists but also for anthropologists (see Haralambos 1980:9; Wax 1984:6; O’Toole 1984:39; Guenther 1979:114; Saliba 1977:188; Berger 1974:126), their way of doing things was canonised. Their methodology has rubbed off on many social scientists who apply models without due regard for the native’s point of view.9 It is not suggested, to be sure, that functionalism and Marxism are positivistic or ahistoric in all respects, but with regard to methodology they very often are compatible to the nonhistorical approach (naturalistic theory of science) and they disregard historical or hermeneutical features in fundamental ways.

At the other end of the continuum there is the historical approach, with the general aim of understanding other societies from within.10 Contrary to the idea that social phenomena and societies can be analysed independently of the beliefs of the actors, social scientists increasingly came to understand that ‘any explanation which involves conceptions of structured social relationships has to be grounded empirically in knowledge of what different structural locations and re-

8 These theories are also referred to as grand theories (see Meeks 1983:5; Marcus & Fischer 1986:8-9). A grand theory style is where the primary aim of the social sciences is seen as seeking and constructing systematic theories about the nature of individuals and society (see Skinner 1985:3).

9 This is one result of an antithetical relationship of many years’ standing between history and the social sciences. However, many social scientists today are involved in a more historically oriented model-building process: their models and theories take account not only of their own contingency but also that of the participants (see Craffert 1991).

10 Burke adds that sociologists, ‘who concern themselves with the actor’s point of view, whether they call themselves “phenomenologists”, “symbolic interactionists”, or whatever, are much closer than the functionalists to historians who have never ceased trying to look at the past through the eyes of contemporaries’ (1980:28-29).
lations actually meant to those assigned to them' (Abrams 1982:211). This methodological ideal (see Saliba 1977:197) of understanding other cultures and people from within reflects the fundamental humanistic assumption 'that the human world is essentially a network of meanings and that, therefore, nothing in this world can be adequately understood without understanding of these meanings "from within"' (Berger 1974:126; and see Cohn 1980:198-201). However, if one's aim is to reduce anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations, the ideal becomes an imperative. Unless we begin by characterising a society or culture in its own terms, MacIntyre says, 'we shall be unable to identify the matter that requires explanation' (1971:223; see also Skocpol 1984a:368; Geertz 1973:14, 18; Mommsen 1978:21).

While the nonhistorical approach treats social reality as a system, hence as a thing, it is believed in terms of the historical approach that to 'treat social reality as anything other than a construction of meanings is to distort it' (Haralambos 1980:498 and see Stowers 1985:153-155). The interpretive turn, Rabinow and Sullivan says, 'refocuses attention on the concrete varieties of cultural meaning, in their particularity and complex texture, but without falling into the traps of historicism and cultural relativism in their classical forms' (1979b:4). The explanatory power of the anti-necessitarian type of theory identified by Unger 'comes from its capacity to render comprehensive contingency and change rather than to fit a particular society into a general framework' (Powell 1989:30).

Winch was one of the first social scientists to object to the idea in mainstream social sciences that the object, methods and aim of the social sciences are the same as, or even analogous to, those of the natural sciences (see Winch 1958:72). He does not deny the possibility of developing and employing sociological concepts and categories other than those of the participants (see Winch 1977b:161; Dallmayr & McCarthy 1977:139). As a matter of fact, on the possibility of comparing different societies and language games he says: '...the question is not whether we can do this, but what sort of comparison is involved' (Winch 1977a:208). He claims that the social scientist's access to the data, the formulation of the 'more reflective understanding' and the application of concepts must be mediated through the participant's way of viewing the world (see Winch 1958:89). The interpreter must understand the language game that is being played (see 1977b:162).

Despite some criticism, Stowers states an important and lasting implication...

11 In the words of Marcus and Fischer: 'The authority of "grand theory" styles seems suspended for the moment in favor of a close consideration of such issues as contextuality, the meaning of social life to those who enact it, and the explanation of exceptions and indeterminants rather than regularities in phenomena observed — all issues that make problematic what were taken for granted as facts or certainties on which the validity of paradigms had rested' (1986:8).
from Winch's position: 12 that

the explanation of a society in terms of its own beliefs, intentions and concepts (as the
participants understand them) must come before explanations in terms of causes. An-
thropologists or historians of antiquity who a priori assume that certain causes of
'functions' belong to a certain "pattern of behavior" cannot justify their assumptions
without reference to the particular beliefs and will almost certainly impose their own
beliefs on the subjects of study (1985: 159).

If the aim is to reduce anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations, one should
avoid the temptation to read one's own standards and concepts into, or project
them onto, what is being studied. When compatibility and commensurability be-
tween phenomena are not assumed, the alternatives are to go native (see Bern-
stein 1983:93-94) or adopt an interpretive stance where commensurability has to
be argued. In this regard the work of Geertz is an example of a historical or inter-
pretive approach which tries to mediate between the native's point of view and
the interpreter's ready-made concepts and structures (see 1979:228). 13

If we remember that the focus is on methodology (hence the use of models),
the argument of this section, which also determines the structure of the rest of the
study, is quite simple. In the nonhistorical approach commensurability between
model and data set or evidence is assumed, with the result that the native's point
of view is disregarded. The corresponding but adverse position in the historical
approach is to argue or demonstrate a fit between model and evidence, the re-
verse side of the coin being a tendency to start from the native's point of view.

12 Stowers sees Winch as a strict intentionalist, in other words, he takes it that Winch sees
each society as a closed system. Since there is 'complete incommensurability between
different cultures ... no one can evaluate a culture except on its own terms' (1985:157-
158). The mediationist view would, according to Stowers, take the position between the
two extreme mirror opposites. The kind of extreme relativist attributed to Winch, which is
rather a caricature, hardly exists (see Bernstein 1983:92) and neither does Winch maintain
that view (see 1977a:208). In my view, and with the aim of this study, the two are close
enough on the continuum to be considered within the same camp. I disagree with Stowers
who sets Winch up as puppet against the functionalist (naturalist) view in order to argue for
a mediationist view between the two extremes. He is however correct in that he senses a
heterogeneous inclination on the historical end of the continuum. One of the most
important indicators of this heterogeneousness has to do with the aim to understand from
within or from without.

13 The movement of interpretive social science away from functionalism and grand
theories in general made social scientist over a broad spectrum aware that it is
exceedingly difficult to apply concepts such as religion and magic, family and witchcraft,
ritual and kinship, honor and shame (see Geertz 1975; Thomas 1975; Beidelman 1980;
Davis 1977) to cross-cultural phenomena. Even concepts such as society, structure and
function have to be defined in terms of their historical expressions (see Evans-Pritchard
1961:10-11), since they are inseparable from their functionalist presuppositions (see Jones
Some of these thorny issues will be taken up again with regard to the use of models after introducing the main viewpoints on the use of models in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament.

3 MODELS AND MUDDLES: OMNIPRESENCE, EXPLICIT AND CONSCIOUS

A model, in short, is an abstracted representation derived from a number of concrete examples representing some real world object, event or social act which is used to interpret or understand other objects, events, or communities (see Malina 1983a:14; Scroggs 1986:142).

Following Carney, Elliott maintains that models serve to make explicit those assumptions which the researcher has concerning the social world and its meanings. In social scientific research they serve as heuristic devices for investigating, organizing and explaining social data and their meaning....Selecting and articulating certain theories about the nature and relationships of aspects of these phenomena, the model shapes research objectives, the kind of data to be gathered, and the way in which these data are to be assembled and interpreted (1986:8).

It will be useful to highlight some characteristics of the use of models which are highly regarded in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament.

1 All exegetes use models. 'Human perception is selective, limited, culture-bound and prone to be unaware that it is any or all of the above' (Rohrbaugh 1987:23); perception always takes place by cognitive filtering and by using cognitive maps (see Carney 1975:1-4; Elliott 1986:6). The 'analogy of faith approach, like theological hermeneutics' (Malina 1983a:19; and see Meeks 1983:2-5) is equally a model used to make sense of the text. Against the received view\(^\text{14}\) in biblical scholarship, the position of most practitioners of the social scientific approach is significant in two respects. On the one hand it demands the explicit and conscious use of models as against the implicit and unconscious use of them, and on the other hand the use of accepted social scientific models as against intuitive or commonsense models.

\(^{14}\) Malina describes the received view as 'the label used in the philosophy of science to characterize the prescribed way of asking and answering questions in a given academic discipline.' It is 'a very powerful and dogmatic orthodoxy, controlling academic departments, key journals as well as grant and/or fellowship bestowing agencies' (1986:171). In New Testament research the received view over the past fifty years can, broadly speaking, be described as a literary and theological enterprise where ideology and the history of ideas predominated and history and the concrete social history, not to mention the social and cultural matrix in which those texts were produced, were almost totally neglected (see Holmberg 1990:1-3; Meeks 1983:1-5; Scroggs 1980; Malina 1986:172).
It follows from the assumption about the omnipresent nature of models or cognitive maps in human perception that if social scientific models are not used, humans rely on commonsense models — that is, the accepted wisdom of their group — to understand, arrange and categorise (see Carney 1975:3). There are so many opinions and decisions involved in scientific enquiry that "we cannot possibly support them all with personally examined evidence..."Good reasons" presuppose expert authority' (Botha 1990:66). A social scientific model however, is not different in kind from a commonsense model, 'it is simply more general in form, more consistent internally (at least in appearance), and hence better able to support a process of scientific or quasi-scientific deduction and testing' (Humphreys 1980:17). Models, then, can be seen as particularised contexts.

Models should be used explicitly and consciously. The neglect of an explicit theory, says Meeks 'too often means to substitute for theory our putative common sense' (1983:5) which most often results in ethnocentric and anachronistic interpretations (see Malina 1983a:21; 1983b:127-128). Although the implicit and unconscious use of models generally goes hand in hand with the use of intuitive or commonsense models (as is the case in the received view), it is not necessarily so.

Some practitioners of the social-scientific approach, like many historians who use models in practice while routinely denying that they do so (see Hughes 1960:30-33; Burke 1980:35; Barraclough 1978:58-59), are accused of relying on models, without being explicit as to which models they use. It is simply accepted that meaning, which is socially and culturally determined, is encoded in the texts as in their social and cultural context. A contemporary commonsense model of society and of the way meaning is encoded in that society is transposed to ancient society.

Irrespective of whether social-scientific models or intuitive models are used, the implicit or unconscious use of models is equally open to criticism. Elliott maintains that while explorations of the foreign world of the Bible certainly must continue, it cannot and will not proceed without models as guides. The question which remains is how productive the expedition will be if the explorers cannot or will not say why they went, how they saw, why they collected what they did, and what the trophies tell us of the culture of that foreign world (1986:9).

The advantages of being explicit about and conscious of the use of models are
4 Models function at different levels of abstraction. Discussing a social facets seminar, Rohrbaugh says: '...it is less the basic need for models than the difficulties presented by their use that gave reason for the continued discussion' (1987:23). He argues that models are generalisations which tend to blur the contours of particular historical situations (see 1987:25). Thus models work at different levels of abstraction: The higher the level, the more the specific detail of a historical situation tends to lose its focus; the lower the level of abstraction, the more important such particularities become. His point about differentiating the levels of abstraction is worth taking, but it will be argued that it cannot be used as an excuse against the historian's or interpreter's insistence on historical or contextual contingency. Even before the question of whether 'the conclusions drawn from the use of the model match the level of abstraction at which the model is drawn' (Rohrbaugh 1987:28), it is necessary to address the question of the fit between the evidence and the model.

It is no exaggeration to say that the emphasis in New Testament social-scientific research is on the omnipresence of models and the resultant demand that models be used consciously and explicitly. Unfortunately the impression is being created that anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations can be reduced in that way. However, a contemporary sociological model can just as readily result in anachronism and ethnocentrism as a contemporary theological or literary model. The point is that the explicit and conscious use of models, even so-called cross-cultural models, does not necessarily prevent anachronistic or ethnocentric interpretations, since the way models function is determined by preferences which are not implicit in the models themselves. Models are merely the tools used to achieve certain results and the instruments used within particular philosophy-of-science paradigms to serve the scientific needs of interpretive communities. Unless the relationships of models to these aspects are brought into the open, I foresee no progress in clearing up some of the muddles in the models debate.

15 Not only the reaction to the received view in biblical scholarship, but also the criticism by some proponents of the more sociologically minded approach can only be applauded. On the principle that models should be explicit rather than implicit, they react strongly against the more historically minded theorists in their own ranks (see Schöllgen 1988; Tiryakian 1985:1139; Malina 1985; 1986:176; Stowers 1985:169-170; Richter 1984:79-80; Rohrbaugh 1983:523-528; Holmberg 1990:14, 21-76).
4 MODELS AND METHODOLOGY IN INTERPRETIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

The inevitability of models in social-scientific research, and what historians can learn from the social sciences with regard to the use of models, are points that have been emphasised over and over (see Crafter 1991:124-128). However, the fact that models are ‘time- and cultural bound creatures of humans’ (Scroggs 1980:167) has been deplorably disregarded not only by social scientists but also by New Testament scholars interested in the social sciences. The overemphasis on the inevitability of models as against the datedness of models to my mind parallels the debate in hermeneutic theory between the historicity and historicality of texts, events, and data (see Hirsch 1984) and, in the philosophy of history, between the inevitable present-mindedness of the historian and the datedness of the evidence (see Tosh 1984:108-125). The sociological fallacy of Judge emphasises the historicity side in this debate; and even if that were the only positive aspect in his warning, it would be worth listening to. In terms of the present paper, he expresses the aims of a historical methodology.

4.1 The sociological fallacy

Judge’s warning against the sociological fallacy, supported by the words of Stowers echoed in the opening paragraphs of this study, is to my mind highly appropriate. Referring to the work of Holmberg, he objects that Holmberg couples with New Testament studies a strong admixture of modern sociology, as though social theories can be safely transposed across the centuries without verification. The basic question remains: What are the social facts of life characteristic of the world to which the New Testament belongs? Until the painstaking field work is better done, the importation of social models that have been defined in terms of other cultures is methodologically no improvement on the ‘idealistic fallacy’. We may fairly call it the ‘sociological fallacy’ (italics mine) (Judge 1980:210).

At issue is the relationship between model and evidence. Judge presupposes a theory of science which maintains that the investigation should start from the native’s point of view and perceive social facts as part of a world – their meaningful world. From the historical methodology outlined in this study, the very first question concerns the possible fit between model and evidence; do they address...
the same phenomena? The second and related question has to do with the way models function as research tools within different research methodologies.

4.2 The interaction between evidence and model

It has already been argued that, in mainstream sociological and anthropological research, commensurability between societies and cultures is assumed. At least two problem areas can be identified in the interaction between models and data as perceived by mainstream social scientists.

First, they tend to forget that the world is not as homogeneous as it seems, and the evidence that researchers happen to obtain is no fair representation of reality but rather the cultural product of a particular group (see Haralambos 1980:518-520; Erikson 1971:70-71; Jones 1976:300). Both sociologists and anthropologists often think that they 'experience the data they use in their studies at first hand: after all, they can reach out and touch the walls of the institutions they are interested in, speak to people they are trying to understand, observe the social scenes they are writing about, and consult the records of their own era' (Erikson 1971:70).

However, in claiming control over and direct entrance to data they tend to forget that their data are very often collected by others, which implies that they are just as remote from their sources of information as historians are (see Evans-Pritchard 1961:5; Erikson 1971:75). Furthermore, many social scientists believe that theory is possible without substantial recourse to history (see Knapp 1984:51). History is 'above all a discipline of context' which deals with 'a particular problem and a particular set of actors at a particular time in a particular place' (Stone 1977:28). Just as social institutions, human interaction, and events in human activities are products of time and culture, so are the models used by social scientists. This, says Erikson, is the implication of the sociology of knowledge taught by many sociologists (see 1971:70) which should also be acknowledged in the field of models and their use.

Secondly, since many social scientists (especially sociologists) take methodological comfort in the illusion that they remain close to their data, they neglect the nature of the thing itself. The nature of the thing itself, Geertz says, 'is a conceptual as well as an empirical problem' (1975:71). She explains the issue by relating an anecdote (of Selden) 'about Sir Robert Cotton who was exclaiming over the strange shape of a shoe which was said to have been worn by Moses, or at least by Noah, when his wife, apparently a much more simple soul, asked: “But Mr Cotton, are you sure it is a Shoe?”' (1975:71). The problem is that many social scientists think the concepts they use are 'a descriptively pre-given' rather than 'a theoretical constructed object' (Jones 1976:301). Sociologists can only profit from an awareness of the self, and promote a kind of skepticism and uncer-
tainty about the data. Before types or institutions can be compared across time periods, continental and cultural distances, it has to be known whether cultural particulars can be classified into specific general types. Commensurability cannot be assumed, it has to be argued and demonstrated.

The danger of parallellomania, when a superficial analysis of two institutions in different cultures suggests that they resemble each other, is a serious problem not only in sociological but also in anthropological research (see Barraclough 1978:59; Kocka 1980:457; Carney 1975:11-13, 34; Geertz 1975:72-73; Beidelberg 1980:28; Tosh 1984:135). This use of the methods, and especially the findings of sociology and anthropology, usually results in the ‘cookie cutter approach in which abstract categories created for organizing data and testing hypotheses are imposed on or read into texts’ (Saladini 1988:14).

The other side of this coin is the disease of ‘tunnel vision’, where data are perceived by means of a model developed for a restricted field of activity (see Tosh 1984:89, 135). Tunnel vision and the procrustean bed produce in the same type of muddle, present-mindedness (anachronism and ethnocentrism) which tends to eclipse the distinction between past and present (see Tosh 1984:120). A model, Nickelsburg warns, ‘must not become a die that shapes the ancient materials or a filter that highlights or obliterates textual data in a predetermined way’ (1983:649). Not only social scientists working in the tradition of grand theories but also New Testament scholars are often cautioned not to fall into the trap of tailoring evidence to fit the model (see Gager 1975:13; Holmberg 1990:13, 155; Rodd 1981:104; Carney 1975:34; Stowers 1985:162; Herion 1986:12; Best 1983:192-193). The principle, as Stowers maintains, should rather be to tailor the theories to fit the data, not the data to fit the theories (see 1985:162). The solution is not to retreat into more data (see Tosh 1984:131; Abrams 1982:217-218) but to apply much higher standards to the testing and choice of models and to develop critical principles governing the way models are used - and that is what concerns us here.

Before the impression is created of a positivistic idea of data an sich, the difficulty of the interaction between models and data can be expressed in the words of Abrams:

[T]heory must work on the empirical without either dominating or being dominated.

At the same time, at any given moment in the course of theoretical and empirical work the empirical will be deeply contaminated by theory and theory will be deeply

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17 Sociologists further need to become sensitive to, and acquire a sharper sense of, the relationship of social events to time and to localities (see Erikson 1971:73; Skocpol 1984a:360; Barraclough 1977:63; Jones 1976:301). The temporal nature of social forces should be appreciated as well as the changes that take place in time — not only internal to models but also external in the way models are used and chosen for research.
contaminated by the empirical....we have to find a way of living with the fact of the mutual interdependence and contamination of theory and evidence without resorting to either the anti-theoretical fetishism of history-as-evidence ... or the a-historical fetishism of theory as knowledge....(1982:333)

As a methodological ideal, this dichotomy in the interaction between models and data — or rather the ‘dialectic of theory and evidence’ (Abrams 1982:316) — is meaningless without an enquiry into how it can be implemented (see also Tosh 1984:117,124,149). Without clear methodological principles to serve as constraints, evidence will merely be dominated by the need for relevance and the power of subjective theories.

The issue in short is at what point present-mindedness interferes with the ideal to do justice to the past. In practice the objective is not only to prevent historical study from becoming mere propaganda, but also to avoid the fallacious claim that the past can be recreated as it really was; the intent to strike a balance between theory and evidence does not claim to be more objective or true but rather appeals to the principle that historical knowledge can be broadened and even corrected (see Carr 1961:121; Tosh 1984:125; Stanford 1986:80-82). In other words, it rejects the relativist claim that all constructions have equal value, fostering the ideal of preventing inadequate, one-sided or misleading pictures of the past (see Carr 1961:120).

5 MODEL: HEURISTIC TOOL OR IRON MATRIX?

The uses to which models are put¹⁸ should not be confused with the ways in which they are used. The latter is not an inherent feature, nor is it directly related to what models are used for. Thus it is possible to distinguish the inherent weakness in models¹⁹ for a particular task from the general shortcomings associ-

¹⁸ Carney describes this under the heading What models can do (see 1975:11-34). That issue is not dealt with here. Riley maintains that models serve two main types of research objectives, the one exploratory in nature, the other aimed at testing certain hypotheses (see 1963:14-15). However, scientists — and New Testament scholars — often confuse this aspect with the way models can be used. Attention is given to the different tasks that can be performed by means of social-scientific models without addressing the issue of how models are used, regardless of what task they are pursuing.

¹⁹ It is often said that in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament good social-science models should be used. Herion argues that ‘every social science study of ancient Israel should begin not simply with a description of a particular model or theory but also with a critical evaluation of it, especially noting how subsequent social science study has qualified, modified or revised that model or theory’ (1986:24). As a first step this is indispensable. My argument, however, presupposes that the models used have been evaluated and tested critically as social-science models. In the words of Holmberg: ‘Biblical scholars who use sociological theories and models are in principle fully accountable for them, which means that they must know them, understand them, be acquainted with their critical history, and their fundamental assumptions’ (1990:143; and
ated with the use of models. My interest is in the latter — in the way models are used in cross-cultural and historical interpretation. In this respect sociologists working on the experimental side can hardly be a good role model for New Testament scholars (see section 4.2).

Although in practice it usually turns out to be somewhere in between, the ways in which models are used can be diametrically opposed. They may be used deductively (in a paradigmatic or dogmatic way) or inductively (in a heuristic or pragmatic way).20 As we shall see, the differences between historical and nonhistorical methodologies respectively can be expressed in inductive or deductive uses of models.

A deductive use of models is ‘where you start with a sociological theory and apply it to the data, or use it as a fact-finding instrument’ (Holmberg 1990:73). Commensurability between the phenomena of the model and the evidence is assumed, the native’s point of view is disregarded, and consequently the aim of interpretation resembles that of the natural sciences, namely to explain by means of a law-like model.

The strong emphasis on the use of social-science models in New Testament research tends in this direction when Elliott, for example, stresses the potential of models to shape ‘research objectives, the kind of data to be gathered, and the way in which these data are to be assembled and interpreted’ (Elliott 1986:8). Another version of this position is the quite common practice in New Testament studies of testing a model against the New Testament material (see Seland 1987:199) in the case of Seland, as in most other cases, it means that the model functions as a frame placed over the data, and reality is then described in terms of what is visible thanks to the frame.

An inductive approach, Holmberg says, is ‘assembling the data, then finding the best theoretical interpretation of them’ (1990:73). In such an approach the aim is to keep together the two features — the absolute unavoidability of using models (explicit or implicit) and the non-absolute character of models — by emphasising the interpretive and non-absolute character of models. Given the interpretive turn which emphasises the native’s point of view as the point of departure, the aim of reducing anachronistic interpretations, the culture- and time-specific character of models and the dialogical interaction between data and model, it should be emphasised that models are ‘the time- and culture-bound creatures of humans’ which are useful ‘in so far as they have heuristic value, that is, in so far as they serve to illumine the unique phenomenon the researcher is studying’ (Scroggs 1980:167; and see 1986:142; Rodd 1981:104).

see Moxnes 1988:157).

20 Carney draws a similar distinction between a deductive and inductive use of ideal types (see 1975:13-15) while Koepping refers to the choice between a ‘heuristic device’ and a ‘typology’ (see 1977:126).
The challenge, to my mind, is not to endorse the inevitability of using models and their tendency to shape research objectives, but to counteract the total contamination of evidence by one's model or theory. Relativism is alive and well (see Marcus & Fischer 1986:32-33). It is, however, better to counter it by recognising its main difficulties and seeing how far they can be overcome in practice (see Tosh 1984:123) — hence the challenge to maintain methodological constraints to curb present-mindedness. In an inductive approach the following suggestions may be considered:

1 Models are not 'applied': rather they inform and shape the imagination of the interpreter (see Hughes 1960:33). The aim of an interpretive approach, say Rabinow and Sullivan, is 'not to uncover universals or laws but rather to explicate context and world' (1979b:13; and see Geertz 1984:185). Amid the distortion caused by the historian's selection of evidence, somehow the ideal is still to discover the meaningful world of the past or of foreign cultures. The value of heuristic models lies not in their explanatory power but in their capacity to raise interesting questions (see Tosh 1984:148). Models used heuristically 'help to frame new questions and look for evidence nobody cared about before' (Holmberg 1990:15). According to this admittedly idealised view, models are thus used only in so far as they are useful and continue to be useful in throwing up new understandings (see Geertz 1973:27).

2 If the 'non-absolute character' (Holmberg 1990:13) of social-scientific models protects the data from being pressed into the mould of the model, it also serves to point out the idiosyncrasies of the past or of foreign cultures. Divergences between model and data are not glossed over (see Herion 1986:13), since not only the interpreter's subjectivity but also his or her ability to listen to the other is at stake (see LaCapra 1983:63-64). Every social-scientific study of ancient Israel (and thus also of the New Testament and its world), says Herion, 'should be committed to pointing out not only the parallels but more importantly the inevitable divergences that will result whenever social science models or theories are brought together with historical data' (1986:24). When models are heuristically used the incompatibility between modern sociological categories and models on the one hand and ancient data on the other proves 'decisively how different antiquity is from the contemporary world' (Saldarini 1988:13). Openness in this regard may allow the other to question the reader and even help to transform the questions posed (see LaCapra 1983:64). The discipline of historical context demands respect not only for relevance but also for contrary evidence (see Tosh 1984:126).
3 It needs to be emphasised again that models used consciously and explicitly also bring to the fore the interpreter's assumptions and values—the kind of thing Malina often does with regard to contemporary western societies (see, for example, 1989 and Malina & Neyrey 1988:145-151). If one is explicit about the often tacit structures, features, and idiosyncrasies of one's own world, the differences between it and other worlds emerge much more clearly.

4 It is no secret that a text or data set can sponsor almost any reading or interpretation. Or, to put it negatively, almost any text or data set can be shaped to fit a theory (see Stanford 1986:81, 101; Tosh 1984:131; Hirsch 1967:166; 1984). Thus testing models against evidence cannot be avoided, but at the same time very high standards need to be applied when testing the theory or model. In an inductive approach, the original context as a lifeworld for texts and artifacts functions as a set of parameters for the application of any contemporary model. In interpreting historical sources, the first step seems to be to create the mental world (that is, the social and cultural codes and conventions) behind them (see Tosh 1984:116). The discipline of historical context seems to be a starting point which informs the interpretive process rather than a check at the endpoint. Discovering their world and the appropriate codes and conventions may in itself be a daunting interpretive activity.

To conclude, would not so-called cross-cultural models solve this dilemma? From a historical point of view such a species as cross-cultural or comparative models does not exist, since models are the temporal and cultural products of human beings. Models can, however, be used in cross-cultural or comparative interpretations. One as yet unmentioned danger of so-called cross-cultural models is that the model functions at such a high level of abstraction or generalisation that almost nothing is excluded, and thus very little can be explained. In principle 'an anthropological bulldozer effect' (LaCapra 1983:67) is exactly the same as the procrustean bed or tunnel vision. Models used as heuristic tools, especially in comparative or cross-cultural situations, carry an awareness of these defects—thanks to the historical aim of interpretation which fosters a heuristic use of models.

21 Wilson's sect model is a case in point. The definition of a sect as a protest movement, or a movement in reaction to the world (see 1973; 1988:225), has been criticised extensively for being at such a high level of generalisation that it explains very little (see Koepping 1979; Miller 1979).
6 THE SOCIOLOGICAL FALLACY RECONSIDERED

The arguments supporting the sociological fallacy, together with the objections to it, can be related to the historical/nonhistorical continuum. The way I see it, calling attention to the sociological fallacy is neither to return to a 'pure form of empiricism' (Esler 1987:15; and see MacDonald 1988:26), nor is it a plea 'for the exclusive use of models from the environment' (MacDonald 1988:25; and see Richter 1984:84). Rather, it represents an attempt to deal in a methodologically responsible way both with human subjectivity and with intersubjective reality. Such an approach is called (in this study, at least) a historical approach.

While one of the initial stimuli in rejecting positivism was the rediscovery of the subjectivity of all human activities, different reactions to positivism can be identified. The historical and nonhistorical approaches outlined in this study share some traits, albeit different ones, of the positivism they wish to supersede. Regarding the use of models, it is argued that although they emphasise the subject's involvement in interpretation, a great many social scientists use models as iron matrixes and emphasise their own interests rather than trying to discover the native's point of view. On the other hand, an emphasis on the importance of the native's point of view and a rejection of the idea of commensurability between contemporary and ancient societies is in no way a return to the ideals of positivism, nor is it a pure form of empiricism by means of which a disinterested interpreter can fully grasp the reality of the social world. The aim of the historical approach is rather to admit its subjective involvement while simultaneously building in some constraints against a merely present-mindedness.

In an historical approach as opposed to the hardline position on the use of models, a less emphatic position is taken with regard the use of models and the ability of models to shape the data. In terms of the weaker position, some methodological principles that facilitate dialogue between model and data are defended. These principles are: emphasising the native's point of view as a point of departure; focussing not only on similarities but also on idiosyncrasies in the data; using the constraint of historical discipline to curb one's tendency to a mere present mindedness; avoiding law-like explanations in favour of the heuristic use of models; emphasising the contingency not only of evidence but also of models.

Judge is concerned with the native’s point of view and the question as to the terms in which the first-century data set can best be described and analysed. Regarding Holmberg's study which he discusses, he has reservations as to whether there is a fit between the data set and the model. This emerges clearly in the final section of his article especially (see 1980:212-217), where he argues that a contemporary religious model cannot be used to analyse first-century phenomena where religion did not exist in the form assumed by the model. He uses a model — indeed he is explicit with regard to the model — but when the first-century evi-
dence is compared to it, he concludes that 'it is hard to see how anyone could seriously have related the phenomenon of Christianity to the practice of religion in its first-century sense' (1980:212). The fact that he uses a social-science model and concludes that the phenomena are not comparable does not negate the principle that a model and the evidence should at least fit or address the same phenomena. Furthermore, the fact that Judge himself is often accused of using models implicitly, or simply relying on assumed commonsense models, does not invalidate his argument on the non-commensurable nature of modern religious models with first-century phenomena. A contemporary political or economic model could be just as far removed from first-century phenomena as a contemporary religious one.

I conclude this study by reiterating, in inverse order, its most important findings. Models can be used as heuristic tools or as iron matrixes. Two main differences characterise them. Firstly, in the 'former case' the relationship between model and data is itself seen as creating an interpretive problem while in the latter case data are much more dependent on the model. This can be seen in varying attitudes regarding (1) the broadening of concepts and models or their application, and (2) the assumption of commensurability between phenomena or the fundamental belief that commensurability is a matter of argument and not assumption. The second difference is, on the one hand, the explicit aim of taking the native's point of view seriously and explicating its world and context, and on the other hand disregarding the native's point of view in favour of producing coherent scientific explanations. In its more extreme form this would mean uncovering universal social and cultural laws. These differences represent the metatheoretical values of two different theories of science which, in different ways, deal with the subject/object dilemma faced in all interpretation.

Thus, where models function as iron matrixes it can be misleading to think that anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations have been ruled out. As a matter of fact, modern social-science models which function as matrixes that shape the material, or filters that obliterate or highlight the data in a predeter-

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22 The early Christian movement cannot be seen as a religious organisation in the sense presupposed by modern contemporary religious models. According to his analysis the Christians in the last resort 'were seen, and saw themselves, as a kind of national community...There may well be no comparable phenomenon known to history, and it could therefore prove a fundamental error to attempt to explain primitive Christianity by sociological methods which work through analogy and presuppose the repetitiveness of human behaviour' (italics mine) (1980:213). His analytical conclusion on the actual identity of the Christians may not be accepted by all, but then his application of the model and his use of the evidence are in dispute and not the methodological principle.

23 Stowers comes to a similar conclusion: 'It is a mistake to think that the choice between a socially holistic explanation and a theologically reductionistic one is parallel to a choice between a causal or “latent” explanation, and an explanation in terms of the participant’s own beliefs’ (1985:176).
mined way, can be just as anachronistic as modern theological or any other models which disregard the historical contingency of cultures and models. Judge and Stowers might just be right. Unless this can be avoided in the social-scientific approach to the New Testament by implementing practical constraints, the results will be no different from those of the theological fallacy to which it is a reaction. Social-scientific research of the New Testament and its world according to the nonhistorical role model will inevitably end up with the sociological fallacy.

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