

Like Poets in Times of Dearth

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Holderlin, in his last elegy *Bread and Wine*, asked: "what good are poets in times of dearth?", and today we can ask the same question of social scientists. In the face of economic, social and ecological crises what contribution can social scientists make to resistance, in the form of social movements, to the production and continuation of crisis?

Whether scientific knowledge has a particular contribution to make has, for some time now, been disputed by post-structuralists (amongst others), amounting to a crisis in the validity of science itself. In the face of compound crises this question has renewed relevance but our answer is methodological rather than philosophical, as we feel befits the aim to contribute to *practice*. We begin with analysis of participatory action research (PAR) as a methodology exemplifying recent attempts to bring social theory to practice. With examples from environmental movements we show the shortcomings of the relativist approach often entailed in PAR, and similar approaches, and find that it fails to provide for a contribution by social scientists, as *scientists*.

We then outline our approach, which holds that while multiple forms of knowledge, both objective scientific knowledge and indigenous or situated knowledges, can be involved in such resistance they have different roles. By objective we mean neither absolute nor complete but rather demonstrably and communicably the case. This knowledge must be brought with humility to the movement and be subject to revision but can provide guidance on, for example, elements of movement strategy, such as the appropriate targets of demands and avenues for support.

Thirdly, we present cases which show how the receptive context for relativist theories of knowledge, and their application in practice is created and consolidated by funding regimes; streams of funds lend support to research and organizations promoting particular social theoretical approaches and, importantly, activist strategies, which ultimately undermine resistance.

Finally, we conclude that opposition to this will involve both an exercise of academic freedom and supplanting the concerns of generous funding foundations with attention to the successes and failures of social movements. Thus can resistance to crisis *set the agenda* for social scientists in times of dearth.

This submission is intended for the topic O: Social movements, social activities and civil societies: Practices, claims and issues.