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UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY

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Among those who study the history of sociology, it is commonplace to distinguish the institutional history of the discipline from the history of sociological ideas and to recognize the importance of disjunctions between the two domains: most strikingly, of instances where the cultivation of fruitful ideas was impeded by the absence of institutional structures to sustain them and support their further development. Historians of sociology have reflected often on such cases. Ironically, they have rarely classified their own speciality area as an instance-in-the-making of this same kind of disparity – or so the area presently appears when viewed from an American point of view.

Judged in terms of its quality and quantity, scholarship on the history of American sociology, as well as work by American scholars on historical developments in sociology abroad, has attained an all-time high in the space of the last ten or so years with the appearance of several dozen major studies. On the subject of American sociology itself, these have included: studies of the development of theoretical, methodological, and political ideas in the discipline at large during key periods (Bannister 1987, 1992; Converse 1987; Hinkle 1994; Platt 1996; Ross 1991; Smith 1994; Vidich and Lyman 1985); work on institutional patterns in the discipline (Turner and Turner 1990); research on particular academic departments (notably Chicago [Bulmer 1984; Fine 1995; Harvey 1987]; Columbia [Camic and Xie 1994; Turner 1991; Wallace 1989]; and Harvard [Nichols 1992]) and research projects (Bulmer et al. 1991; Gillispie 1991); and treatments of pivotal figures ranging from G. H. Mead (Cook 1993; Joas 1985; Shalin 1988) and Talcott Parsons (Buxton 1985; Camic 1989, 1991; Gerhardt 1993; Wearne 1989) to Jane Addams (Deegan 1988) and Jessie Bernard (Bannister 1991) (see also Brick 1986; Johnston 1995; Laslett 1991; Swedberg 1991). American scholars have also made valuable contributions to the historiography of sociology in Europe with: studies of thinkers as diverse as Comte (Pickering 1993), Spencer (Haines 1988), and Max Weber (Kahlberg 1994; Scaff 1989; Sica 1988; Turner and Factor 1994) (among many others); original efforts to enlarge this “canon” of thinkers (Lemert 1993; Seidman 1994); and a sweeping comparative analysis of the intellectual foundations (*inter alia*) of the British, French, Italian, and German sociological traditions (Levine 1995). At the same time, the *Heritage of Sociology Series* (University of Chicago Press) has continued to bring out volumes on past and more

contemporary historical figures, recently expanding its list to include entries on Maurice Halbwachs, Max Scheler, Martin Buber, Everett Hughes, Morris Janowitz, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Robert Merton.

This vast outpouring of historical scholarship has been without precedent in American sociology, but it has paradoxically produced nothing analogous to the current situation in France, as Valade and Hirschhorn characterize it. Valade reports that “histories of sociology … are required reading for every student of the discipline” in France; and Hirschhorn observes that “far from [any longer] giving the history of sociology a marginal status, [French] sociologists now seem to be infatuated by it”, taking the view that “the real sociologist is not just someone who is versed in the theories, concepts and techniques, but is also someone who knows how Mauss is related to Durkheim, is familiar with the young sociologists who went to the United States after the war, and has heard of Le Play.”

Nothing could be further from the situation in America, where the “real sociologist” knows virtually nothing of his or her discipline’s history (let alone about the foreign academic travels of previous generations), and where most histories of sociology remain unread – not only by nearly “every student”, whether undergraduate or graduate, but also by the majority of professional sociologists. Indeed, in many cases, these histories go unread even by other scholars engaged in research on the history of sociology itself. In this country, the history of sociology is an area in which most colleges and universities neither offer courses nor seek to recruit faculty members; an area with no journal of its own, nor any one particularly receptive to its subject matter (despite valiant efforts, several years back, to float *The History of Sociology*); and an area with no national professional organizations, regular conferences, newsletters, etc. (though, as of this writing, plans seem finally underway to establish a “history of sociology” section of the American Sociological Association). At the present time, active contributors to the literature in the history of sociology remain an unorganized miscellany: those cited above hail from different disciplines, different countries, and on the whole display little if any sense of involvement in a collective intellectual enterprise, of working in mutual awareness on different aspects of more-or-less shared questions and problems, or of participating together in ongoing substantive and methodological debates. No wonder then that scholarship in this field often remains unnoticed even by those in the field – and largely invisible to the profession at large. As an area, the history of sociology lacks the institutional foundations that – as historians of sociology know perfectly well – make for a successful academic field. In this sense, despite its very substantial recent intellectual achievements,

the history of sociology still exists in the United States as an academic backwater, relegated to the “marginal status” which Hirshhorn no longer observes in France.

Why is this so? A variety of factors have been involved, but, in the present context, there is one that especially bears notice. This is the continuing effects of the alliance forged, in the period between the two world wars, between sociological theory, on the one side, and the history of sociology, on the other, with the latter field brought on as the junior partner in the arrangement. The best known early American accounts of sociology’s past were put forth by sociologists who were simultaneously attempting to advance distinctive theoretical agendas for the discipline: most notably, Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), but also Park and Burgess (1921) and Sorokin (1928), among others. Seeking to legitimate their own theoretical positions by appeals to the past, these works grafted the study of the history of sociology onto contemporary theoretical debates – and to this day the history of sociology has yet to liberate itself institutionally. Even now, theorists constitute the largest single group of American scholars writing on the history of sociology; and whatever knowledge the practicing American sociologist may possess of the history of his/her discipline consists largely of what he or she happened to learn about past thinkers during one or two “theory courses”. Emblematic of this situation is the contrasting status of “sociological theory” and the “history of sociology” within the International Sociological Association (ISA) and the American Sociological Association (ASA): in the ISA, the Research Committee on the History of Sociology is a long-established, distinguished body (and, in the absence to date of their own national-level organization, the only regular forum for American historians of sociology), from which the Committee on Sociological Theory is a very recent offshoot; in the ASA, the Section on Sociological Theory is the longstanding unit, from which (as noted above) a group focused on the history of sociology is only now beginning to emerge.

Of course, following its American start in the interwar period as theory’s junior partner, the history of sociology might subsequently have taken other institutional paths. The area could, for example, have been incorporated (along with the study of the history of the other social sciences) into history of science programs; or, once sociological interest in history soared in the early 1970s, research on the history of sociology could have become part of the burgeoning field of “historical sociology”. But the reluctance of the latter field to focus on intellectual-historical developments (as opposed to economic and political changes), combined with the resistance of history of science programs to regarding social science as science, closed off these possibilities, leaving sociological theory as still the most receptive niche for the history of sociology.

This particular institutional alliance has had serious intellectual consequences, which continue to be felt. It has made concerns that in themselves are fundamentally ahistorical the measure of a field of historical inquiry, imposing on studies in the history of sociology the recurrent “presentist” demand: how does this work contribute to theoretical debates in contemporary sociology? In raising this demand, theorists in the U.S. tacitly accept the instrumentalist standard of sociologists outside the theory area who likewise expect direct present-day payoffs from historical scholarship. But the difficulties and dangers of attempting to conduct historiographic research in a context where this research is valued *not* for its actual historiographic contribution, but mainly for its superadded contemporary messages have increasingly been demonstrated. As a result of the “historicist” challenge forcefully launched by Jones (1977), it has been established that studies driven by predominately presentist concerns often produce, *inter alia*, severely anachronistic accounts of the very thinkers and conditions that scholarship on the history of sociology seeks to understand (see also Camic 1987, 1992; Jones 1986, 1994). Theorists, though, have generally been slow to accept this historicist critique, preferring in some cases simply to continue the historiographic example of Parsons and make use of the past to legitimize new theoretical projects (e. g., Alexander 1982–82, 1987). Indeed, the persistence among theorists of this practice has served, in recent years, to keep some historically-minded historians of sociology away from work emanating from the theory area – thereby exacerbating, rather than overcoming, the institutional fragmentation that characterizes the history of sociology as a field.

We come here to one of the central underlying dilemmas currently confronting this field in the United States: if the historian of sociology cleaves to the theory area, s/he preserves the institutional niche that his/her field has established but is then faced with ahistorical, presentist standards, instead of historicist criteria suited to the study of the past; but if, in the interest of the past, the same scholar opts for historicism over presentism, s/he risks eroding the field’s traditional theory constituency, reducing the slender institutional base that already disadvantages the history of sociology. In short, s/he must frequently choose between the institutional and the intellectual-historical poles of the field, with little hope of aligning the two – or of ironing out the current uneven development between ideas and institutional conditions. This dilemma is more than an abstraction. I have elsewhere argued, for example, that a number of open questions about the formation of American sociology might be resolved if scholars abandoned their concentration on historical developments that were internal to the discipline of sociology and nationally-uniform across universities and, instead, gave attention to the interdisciplinary context from which American sociology emerged under different local university conditions (Camic 1994, 1996). Judged in terms of direct payoffs for contemporary sociological theory,

however, this shift in focus from the disciplinary and the national to the interdisciplinary and the local is an unjustifiable detour, whatever its merit from the historiographic viewpoint.

From their brief papers, it is not entirely clear where Hirschhorn and Valade stand with respect to this fundamental dilemma, or whether the tension between presentism and historicism is even a salient issue for French historians of sociology. The particular way in which Valade cites Giovanni Busino's remarks implies an affinity with an historicist position, while Hirschhorn seems rather closer to the immediate instrumentalism of presentism when she writes that "the history of sociological thought finds its justification ... not [as] an end in itself, but [in serving] the development of the discipline" by finding "resources" useful for the contemporary task of drafting "a new analytical framework".

On the basis of these few statements, however, I may well be misclassifying these scholars. After all, the belief (to quote Hirschhorn) that "the history of the discipline can contribute to its development" is not one that necessarily entails any objectionable presentism. Indeed, among the staunchest historicists, there are few who would not strongly agree with the position to which Busino seems to give voice: viz., that by examining past ideas in their own terms and by investigating the contingent historical processes by which certain forms of knowledge were institutionalized at the expense of others, the history of sociology "frees us from the present" and breaks our "self-centered focus on our own knowledge" – thus yielding, in due course, the expanded *presentday* benefits that emerge when, and only when, the horizon of alternatives is broadened beyond the bounds of present possibilities. In the United States, however, long-range benefits of this sort are difficult to pursue given the uncertain institutional position that continues to characterize the history of sociology and to demand from the field short-run theoretical payoffs. Realizing the large intellectual promise of the history of sociology, as the recent growth of scholarship in the area has began to do, still requires substantial institutional work, lest uneven development claim another casualty.

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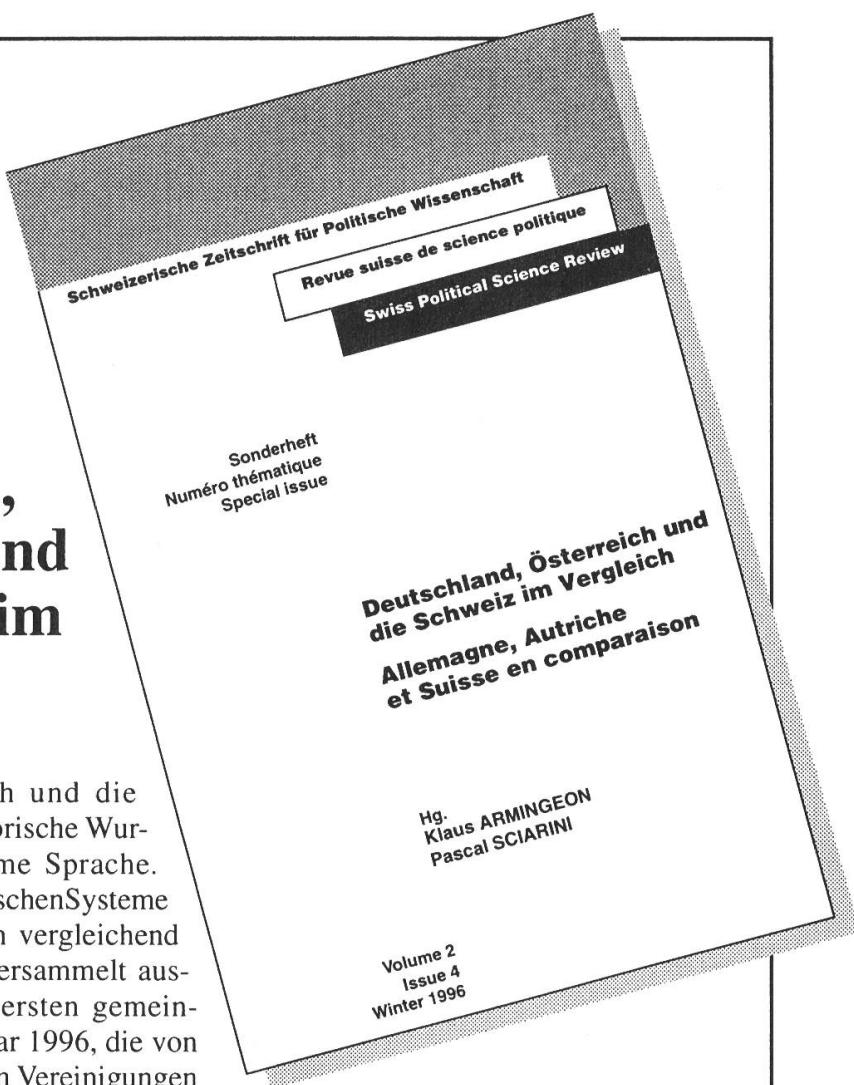
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Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz im Vergleich

Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz teilen einige historische Wurzeln und eine gemeinsame Sprache. Dennoch wurden die politischen Systeme der drei Länder nur selten vergleichend analysiert. Dieser Band versammelt ausgewählte Beiträge einer ersten gemeinsamen Konferenz im Januar 1996, die von den fachwissenschaftlichen Vereinigungen der drei Ländern getragen wurde. Einige der Arbeiten sind vergleichend, andere konzentrieren sich nur auf ein Land – Deutschland, Österreich oder die Schweiz. Die Analysen identifizieren Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede der politischen Kultur, der Institutionen oder der Staatstätigkeiten in diesen Ländern.

Alle Beiträge sind in deutscher Sprache.



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