

SOCIAL THEORY AS A VOCATION

Genres of Theory Work in Sociology



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DONALD N. LEVINE

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Preface

“A course in *what? American sociological thought?*”

For summer 1996 I was invited to create such a course for a class of Japanese students coming to the University of Chicago as part of a master’s program in the humanities. I was taken aback. Didn’t the authorities know that the social theorists who deserved to be reckoned as authors of our humanistic classics were Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber and that, relatedly, most other figures in that list, whom I was then recovering for The Heritage of Sociology series—figures such as Max Scheler, Norbert Elias, Maurice Halbwachs, Marcel Mauss, and Martin Buber—were not Americans?

No matter, they replied. This initiative formed part of an effort to respond to the interest of the Japanese students in getting better acquainted with *American culture*. To me, conceiving American sociological theorists as forming a tradition distinctive of American culture—that was new. I had never taught such a course and doubted that anyone else had either. Accepting the challenge, I supplemented my knowledge of mid-nineteenth-century American social theorists with refresher work on earlier authors. The task was eased by returning to authors featured by Morris Janowitz when he founded The Heritage series in the late 1960s—Thomas, Park, Wirth, and others; by my own turn to American authors to include in The Heritage series (Hughes and Cooley; Sorokin, Lazarsfeld, and Merton); and by work on some early American figures in my *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (1995).

The curriculum thus assembled seemed plausible to me and of interest to the students from Japan—sufficiently so that I was invited to repeat the course in Tokyo in autumn 1997.¹ Between those dates, I chaired the ASA Theory Section, “which prompted me” to reflect on how, without thinking much about it, I had styled my course: American Sociological Thought, 1900–1980. It had just seemed natural to make the cutting-off point of the course a year following the death of Talcott Parsons. But that date soon came to signify an increasingly problematic

status for American social theory. In the years after Parsons's passing, followed by the deaths of Morris Janowitz (1988), Edward Shils (1995), and James S. Coleman (1995), sociological theory in the United States seemed to be losing more than a generation of charismatic leadership, it was becoming embattled. Indeed, one began to hear cries against the very existence of a distinct line of work called theory, from those who viewed "the perpetuation of a separate specialty of Theory in Sociology to be a bad idea and one that has not been useful for the field" (Gusfield 1996). Thus it happened that, moving to inspire the enterprise, I devoted a session of the 1997 ASA Theory Section to the theme "Social Theory as a Vocation." My address was published in the *Theory Section Newsletter*, with responses by four colleagues.²

A decade later, the situation appeared even more problematic. The January 2004 *Theory Section Newsletter* included chair Michèle Lamont's note that only one American department possessed a critical mass of faculty committed to offering theory courses on a regular basis,³ and the plaint of a junior colleague that the field of sociological theory was "maligned by its students, neglected by its practitioners, and obscured by its architects" (Boyns 2004, 8). The following year Craig Calhoun convened a group of senior theorists to consider the matter; we spent a worrisome evening wrestling with whether or not sociological theory in the States had an institutional future. In 2012, Omar Lizardo pronounced a verdict: "The structure of the sociological field has changed, making it increasingly difficult to dedicate yourself to becoming proficient in most modes of doing 'theory'" (Lizardo 2012, 1).

Even so, at the same time as theory was being downsized in North American sociology, social theory in Europe was flourishing as never before since the 1920s.⁴ Contrasting the practice of social theory in North America and elsewhere, Stephen Turner wrote: "Today, when one opens a textbook in social theory, one is as likely as not to find no American sociologist in it. . . . Social theory thrives, but not in American sociology" (2004, 164).

To be sure, a decade after Turner's bleak assessment, theory work in North America appeared to be improving. Fresh material for a Parsonian revival appeared with the conference publication *After Parsons: A Theory of Social Action for the Twenty-First Century* (Fox, Lidz, and Bershadsky 2005) and the posthumous publication of *American Society: A Theory of the Societal Community* (Parsons 2007). Michael Mann produced the long-awaited finale of his four-volume *The Sources of Social Power* in 2013. In 2011, Robert Bellah published

a testamentary magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution*, then collaborated with Hans Joas to edit a related compendium, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (2012). Other notable compendia appeared in the decade—a critical conference examination of Weber’s *Economy and Society* (Camic and Gorski 2005), a display of the richness of social theory work among specialists in regional studies (Arjomand, ed. 2013), and *Worlds of Difference*, a wide-ranging collection of diverse views on modernization, citizenship, human rights, inequality, and domination (Arjomand and Reis 2013).

Randall Collins continued a productive career in theory with insightful works, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) and *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory* (2008). Important new work was issued by Saskia Sassen (2006), and—now part-time in the United States—Hans Joas (2009a, 2009b, 2012a, 2012b) and Karin Knorr Cetina (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002; Knorr Cetina and Preda 2007). Some linked theoretical claims to larger disciplinary projects—a “strong program” in the sociology of culture (Alexander 2006), a revival of pragmatist epistemology (Gross 2009), critical realism (Smith 2010), and “social aesthetics” (Martin 2011)—while others examined the multiple ways in which theory can enrich the human sciences more generally (Reed 2011).

Such accomplishments notwithstanding, both institutional and cultural support for social theory as a vocation remains meager. Students disposed to concentrate on theory are actively discouraged. Graduate students get introduced to theory in the most perfunctory manner. Required training in classical or contemporary theory rarely extends beyond one semester. “Most top graduate programs,” notes Lizardo, “have cut back the theory curriculum to a single ‘omnibus’ course that attempts the impossible task of going from Montesquieu to Judith Butler in one semester” (Lizardo 2012, 1). And he goes on, rightly, to link this decline to a trend to de-emphasize and indeed attack the humanities in American universities (Ibid. 2).

The latter concern points to the larger question of the ethos of American intellectual life. The waning of social theory in the United States arguably reflects enduring features of a national culture that, from Tocqueville and Emerson on, has been described as showing little concern for purely intellectual pursuits. This disposition favored what Richard Hofstadter described as an anti-intellectualism driven by populist prejudices and hegemonic commercial interests (Hofstadter 1963). In Sorokin’s terms, American culture had emerged as profoundly sensate, aversive to abstract intellectual formulations (1957).⁵

In that light, one might view the vast theoretic program sustained by Talcott Parsons and his followers as a tolerated exception.⁶ America's comparatively low tolerance for intellectuality has been accentuated by new technology, which fires an escalating demand for instant digestibles. Together with the addiction to ironies promoted by postmodern culture servers, it accentuates a disbelief in the integrity of ideas described as bordering on cynicism (Goldfarb 1991) and a secular process of dumbing down (Jacoby 2008).

Whatever imprint American culture may have added to the vulnerable status of social theory in the United States, secular global tendencies along with the American influence on world sociology have contributed to what has been reported as an international decline in the status of social theory. The widely noted weak institutional support for social theory demands a focused collective effort. For that to transpire, I believe, proponents of social theory need to state more forthrightly what it is that demarcates their subdiscipline and what constitutes the grounds of its credibility and importance. That is the burden of this volume, which proceeds from a trio of assumptions I shall set forth in the Prologue.

Notes

1. I offered the course again, to Chicago students, in 2006; the syllabus is in Appendix A.
2. *Perspectives: The ASA Theory Section Newsletter* 19, No. 2 (Summer 1997).
3. The department in question in Lamont's report was that of The University of Chicago. This was ironic in view of what I experienced as a graduate student in the department in the mid-1950s: not only did the department chair threaten publicly to prevent my theory dissertation from being accepted, but after I went on to do postdoctoral field work, the faculty voted never again to accept a theory dissertation, and to abolish theory as a special field. The hallowed History of Social Theory course ceased to be offered, until Morris Janowitz and I restored it to the curriculum in the late 1960s.
4. Consider the wealth of theory publications published in the past half-century in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Israel; and compare the single journal devoted to theory in North America with at least six theory journals published in Europe and Australia.
5. Exemplifying his own characterization, a younger Sorokin rejected the barely known corpus of Simmel's work out of hand for being too "metaphysical" (Sorokin 1928).
6. Although Stephen Turner (2004) went so far as to describe Parsons's achievement as sustained by an unholy alliance with empiricism, the grand conceptual synthesis embodied in his "Paradigm of the Human Condition" (Parsons 1978) stands as one of the most ambitious projects in pure theory in American sociology ever.

Acknowledgments

Two colleagues bear heavy responsibility for the existence of this volume. Over many years, Charles Camic urged me to find a way to publish “Social Theory as a Vocation,” my statement as chair of the Theory Section of the American Sociology Association in 1997. His persistence prodded me eventually to consider publishing it as the title paper in a volume of my selected papers. Once that project got under way, moreover, having STV as the title paper naturally changed the character of the project. It had perforce to become a book of selected papers with a point. With Charles’s continuing encouragement, the counsel of our mutual colleague Daniel Silver, and support of Mary Curtis, president of Transactions Publishers, it became a volume with a framework and an approach to the selections that were in tune with the message of that title.

None of that would have come to fruition, however, had it not been for the mediation of Howard Schneiderman, an extraordinarily devoted and knowledgeable student of sociological theory. At a time when publishers are studiously avoiding the genre of selected essays, Howard welcomed this project, brought it to the attention of Transaction Publishers, and provided some judicious suggestions for how to frame it.

For helpful comments relating to one or more of the selections in this volume, I owe a large debt of gratitude to numerous colleagues. They include—with apologies to any I forgot—Craig Calhoun, Lloyd Fallers, Hans Joas, Adam Kissel, Omar Lizardo, John Levi Martin, Ingo Meyer, Adam Mohr, Beyene Petros, Guenther Roth, Chris Shilling, William Shack, Daniel Silver, A. F. Wolde-Mariam.

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* * *

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- Ch. 1, "Note on the Crowd and the Public" in *The Crowd and the Public and Other Essays* by Robert Park. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, xxvii–xxxii. 1972.
- Ch. 2, Introduction to "Georg Simmel as Sociologist" by Max Weber. *Social Research* 39(1): 155–63. 1972.
- Ch. 3, Review of *Economy and Society* by Max Weber. *Contemporary Sociology* 10(2): 333–35. 1981.
- Ch. 4, Review of *The Essential Comte*, ed. Stanislaw Andreski. *American Journal of Sociology* 81(3): 654–56. 1975; and review of *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. G. Lenzer. *Contemporary Sociology* 6(3): 352–53. 1977.
- Ch. 5, "Émile Durkheim, Univocalist Manqué" in *The Flight From Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985.
- Ch. 6, Review of *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays* by Robert Merton. *American Journal of Sociology* 83(5): 1277–80. 1978; and "Merton's Ambivalence towards Autonomous Theory—and Ours." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 31(2): 235–43. 2006.
- Ch. 7 was written specifically for the present volume.
- Ch. 8, "Useful Confusions: Simmel's Stranger and His Followers" in *The Flight From Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985.
- Ch. 9, "Simmel and Parsons Reconsidered." *American Journal of Sociology* 96(5): 1097–1116. 1991.
- Ch. 10, "Cultural Integration" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 7, 373–80. 1968.
- Ch. 11, "The Organism Metaphor in Sociology." *Social Research* 62(2): 237–265. 1995.
- Ch. 12, "Rationality and Freedom: Inveterate Multivocals" in *The Flight From Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985. 142–62.
- Ch. 13, "Rationality and Freedom: Inveterate Multivocals" in *The Flight From Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985, 162–78.

Acknowledgments

- Ch. 14, "Putting Voluntarism Back into a Voluntaristic Theory of Action" in *Die Ordnung der Gesellschaft: Festschrift Geburtstag von Richard Münch*, eds. Hans-Jürgen Aretz and Christian Lahusen. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 1995.
- Ch. 15, "Ambiguity and Modernity" in "Epilogue: Two Cheers For Ambiguity in Science" in *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1985.
- Ch. 16, "Somatic Elements in Social Conflict" in *Embodying Sociology: Retrospect, Progress and Prospects*, ed. Chris Shilling. Oxford: Blackwell. 2006.
- Ch. 17, "Reconfiguring the Ethiopian Nation in a Global Era." *Análise Social* 41(2): 311–27. 2011.
- Ch. 18, "Simmel as a Resource for Sociological Metatheory." *Sociological Theory* 7(2): 61–74. 1989.
- Ch. 19, "Review Essay: Sociology after MacIntyre." *American Journal of Sociology* 89(3): 700–07. 1983.
- Ch. 20, "Scholarly Images and Assumptions" in *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (1974) 2000.
- Ch. 21, "Ethiopia's Dilemma: Missed Opportunities from the 1960s to the Present." *International Journal of African Development* 1: 9–24. 2013. Originally presented as a lecture to a Conference at Michigan State University. 2007.
- Ch. 22, Talk presented at Addis Ababa University in June 1992. Published in *Ethiopian Review* in August 1992 as "Greater Ethiopia Reconsidered."
- Ch. 23, "Modernity and Its Endless Discontents" in *After Parsons: A Theory of Social Action for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. R. C. Fox, V. M. Lidz, and H. J. Bershady. New York: Russell Sage. 2005.
- Ch. 24, Prologue and "New Goals for the Liberal Curriculum" in *Powers of the Mind: The Reinvention of Liberal Learning in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2006.



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Prologue: Social Theory as a Vocation

Why Is Social Theory So Important?

Both the discipline of sociology and the cultivation of public opinion stand to benefit from a revived specialty of Theory. Excellent theory work fructifies empirical work in numerous ways—by identifying significant problems, clarifying concepts, demanding coherent argumentation, and tracing continuities in research traditions. Absent such theoretic inputs, empirical work typically proceeds without clear aims, dissecting caches of data with no arguable significance; uses concepts in sloppy and unrevealing ways; propounds claims that rest on facile argumentation; and ignores relevant prior work.¹

In addition, the trove of works bequeathed by classical sociological authors possesses a distinctive value.² Edward Shils articulated this value in an enduring essay on sociology as a scientific discipline, when he underscored “the permanent relevance of the classics” for reaching levels of insight not available in contemporary work and for providing unmatched access to certain primal experiences of social life (1961). Others who broke fresh ground in highlighting this value include Robert Nisbet, in *The Sociological Tradition* (1966); Raymond Aron, in *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique* (1967); and Lewis Coser, in *Masters of Sociological Thought* (1971). Peter Baehr’s *Founders, Classics, Canons* (2002) resumes the effort in a searching discourse on the place of classics in intellectual traditions.

Finally, beyond the scientific values of social theory there stands its relevance to a deepened understanding of the human condition and to the complexities and moral demands of the modern order. Assaulting the failure of sociology to minister to such intellectual needs, Calhoun

exclaimed, in a paper designed to bring the work of Charles Taylor into the orbit of sociological discourse:

Sociology suffers from and fails to live up to its potential because of its disconnection from large parts of philosophy and interdisciplinary social and political theory, [and] our aversion to moral discourse (in the name of science) has greatly impoverished our understandings of identity and human agency. (Calhoun 1991, 232)

Morally informed discourses resting on good sociological knowledge promote more enlightened public policies and ideas for creating better lives. They blend reliable empirical accounts with historic understandings and normative aspirations in ways that the undisciplined mind simply cannot attain.

Resuscitating the practice of social theory demands those of us who feel called to profess it to respond to two questions: *what is it we presume to profess*, and then: *what rationales warrant pursuing such a profession?* I broach such a discourse here by considering a short list of the things we mean when we talk about social theory. This leads me to examine some objections to the profession of theory so conceived, followed by arguments designed to counter those objections. I then identify some exemplary accomplishments of social theorists, with an eye to compiling a paradigm (in the pre-Kuhnian sense) of special functions performed by the vocation of theory work.

What Do We Profess When We Profess Social Theory?

It is commonplace to note that when social scientists use the word “theory,” they employ it in a number of different senses.³ At a minimum, one can readily discern four distinct meanings of the term. In the sense of what we shall call theory₁ it connotes *abstract* or rational, as contrasted with empirical. Theory₂, by contrast, designates the sense of *general*, as contrasted with particular. A third meaning, closer to the Greek *theoria*, theory₃ has the sense of *contemplative*, as contrasted with practical. There is also an operational sense, peculiar to what are often called “theory” persons in departments of sociology: theory₄ persons are those who carry out purely *exegetical*, as contrasted with investigative, research.⁴ One might take a big step toward clarification simply by insisting that these meanings be kept distinct, thereby avoiding the frequent confusions that occur when, for example, the phrase “grand theory” has equated theory₁ with theory₂, thereby confounding abstraction, which can be about microsocial phenomena, with

generality, which alludes to the macrosocial domain; or when students, as they so often do, confound “practical” with “empirical,” because of their shared contrast to “theory.”

For each of the above meanings, theory can be pursued either *in conjunction with* its contrast term or *separately* from it. For now, let us assume that no one objects to the pursuit of theory when it is pursued conjunctively with (1) empirical, (2) particular, (3) practical, or (4) investigative work. So we can say that sociologists are generally thought to theorize legitimately in at least one of the following modes.

- Theory₁ relates abstract conceptualization to sets of facts—for example, when George Homans in *The Human Group* (1950) famously examined diverse case studies to generate abstract propositions about interaction systems; when Lena and Peterson (2008) looked at multiple music genres to generate hypotheses about their developmental stages; or when Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2000) considered moments of social interaction in diverse situations to develop a novel theory of contingency.
- Theory₂ links notions of a general order to particular elements or sectors, as in S. N. Eisenstadt’s *Japanese Civilization* (1996), which refers certain political and religious developments in Japan to overarching characteristics of its civilizational pattern, or Philip Gorski’s *The Disciplinary Revolution* (2003), which connects particular sectors of modernization with an overarching trend toward increased discipline.
- Theory₃ links theoretical analyses to policy recommendations, like William J. Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), which related socioeconomic conditions of inner-city black populations to policies geared to job creation and training rather than cultural reform or antidiscrimination laws, or Morris Janowitz (1983), which conjoined an analysis of weakened allegiance to country with recommendations for restoring a sense of patriotism.
- Theory₄ links the exegetical recovery of texts with ongoing investigation, like Coser in *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), which consulted a classic Simmel text to generate state-of-the-art propositions about consequences of inter- and intra-group conflict; or Joas and Knöbl (2013), which reviewed classics of social thought to theorize war as an under-acknowledged constitutive element of the modern social order.

In order to train and network sociologists with a theorizing bent whose work nevertheless manifests a lively linkage with the nontheoretical, the value of supporting a field devoted to theory—in one or more of the above senses—should be self-evident.

Suppose, now, we consider objections to modes of theorizing that are disjoined from their contrast modes. Regarding theory in the first sense, social scientists have voiced objection to abstractions that are

not “grounded,” not supported by data. Regarding theory₂, many have objected to generalities that do not link up with particular historical phenomena, as in C. Wright Mills’s insistence on relating general conceptions of societal states to orders of experience at the personal level. Regarding theory₃, many have objected to a purely theoretical approach to social understanding, from Marx’s “Thesis Eleven” or the philosophy of John Dewey to sociologists like Robert Lynd who voice what I call a pathos of practice—the notion that sociological work has value only insofar as it relates directly to the alleviation of suffering or the satisfaction of basic human needs. As for theory₄, there remains a charged current of opinion in the field that one would do best to forget the classics and deposit them forthwith in historical museums (Levine 1995, 62).

Against these objections, I claim that even in these disjunctive modes of theorizing, there is good and important work to be done. Whatever the type of theory involved, any kind of theory work in sociology possesses at least three kinds of value.

- (1) Possession of a body of theoretical notions gives one a kind of intellectual power, a level of mastery over social reality, that one simply cannot get by looking at case studies or percentage differences in rates.
- (2) The mental discipline that inheres in the rigorous investigation and mastery of theoretical materials sophisticates the pursuit of any substantive empirical or practical project.
- (3) Much of the teaching that introduces students to sociology is carried by the distinctive perspectives and conceptual tools that theory provides. (Even so devoted an empiricist as Ernest Burgess used to introduce graduate students to sociology by lecturing on a lengthy series of sociological “concepts”—which is not to say that lecturing of that sort cannot be dreary).

Beyond considering such points about the value of theory work in general, what might prove more persuasive would be *to review a number of exemplars of theory work of unquestionable value*. Let us consider a few, of both the pure and the mixed kinds. This can prepare the way for categorizing them that might offer an agenda for those inclined to profess social theory as a vocation, and perhaps clarify the field for those in a position to offer or withhold support for those so inclined.

What Do Social Theorists Do?

What are sometimes depreciated as “mere exegeses” perform crucial services. Consider how much substantive work was stimulated by

familiarity with the work of Max Weber. This was possible only through the labors of dozens of devoted scholars. In the United States, Frank Knight, Talcott Parsons, and Max Rheinstein began a long program of translating and interpreting Max Weber's oeuvre—followed by Shils, Hans Gerth, Mills, and Benjamin Nelson, which subsequently helped promote the retrieval of Weber in Germany by eminent scholars, all of which laid groundwork for a more sophisticated systematic representation of Weber's substantive and methodological contributions in works by Stephen Kalberg (1994, 2013) and others. Or consider, in reverse transatlantic direction, the fuller recovery of G. H. Mead's theory of communicative work by Hans Joas and Jürgen Habermas; or the recovery of Parsons's writings on Nazism by Uta Gerhardt.

Beyond the still unfinished work of appropriating the legacies of such commonly acknowledged giants as Adam Smith, Marx, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim, Mead, and others, the "remain enduringly substantial" contributions of neglected pioneers, including William Graham Sumner, W.E.B. DuBois, Werner Sombart, Ernst Troeltsch, Norbert Elias, and many others. Absent such work, the horizons of social scientists would be grievously narrower. And such broadening does not happen once and for all. Who now remembers Parsons's recovery of Pareto's critique of economistic thinking, more germane to contemporary social science than ever? In order to possess our heritage, each generation must earn it anew, as Coser emphasized by posting Goethe's dictum as epigraph to his *Masters of Sociological Thought*.

This kind of theory work does more than retrieve and translate. Didactic abridgments or summaries sometimes communicate an author's thought more clearly than the original—Harriet Martineau for Comte, Leon Mayhew for Parsons. Interpretive exegeses can simply transform one's thinking. Consider also how Lisa McIntyre prods you to overcome your sociological prejudices about law in *Law in the Sociological Enterprise* (1994), how Andrew Abbott's (1999) interpretation forces you to rethink whether early "Chicago Sociology" was so mindlessly empiricist after all, and how Baehr's (2013) reconstruction of the sociological perspective of Raymond Aron adds both to our understanding of Aron's work and to the repertoire of sociological theory.

Beyond the foundational work of critical editions, translations, and exegeses, there is the no less important work of *correcting extant recoveries and reinterpreting those texts*. The value of correcting earlier appropriations is manifest when one considers, for example, Richard

Münch's recovery of "interpenetration" in Parsonian theory; Charles Camic's critique of Parsons on the utilitarians; Moishe Postone's rereading of Marx and the Marxians; Birgitta Nedelmann's restoration of Simmel's key text on modernity; or the correcting reconstruction of the intellectual background of Durkheim's work by Warren Schmaus (1994, 2004). Indeed, the task of correcting extant recoveries through subsequent scholarship seemed so important that it was made an ASA Theory Section mini-conference theme in 1995 (Camic 1997).⁵

Another task that theorists have assumed is to secure substantive *continuity* in the sociological enterprise, a task that Robert K. Merton once thematized as one special mission of the theory vocation. Calls to *codify* theory and attend to continuities formed covering notes to his own seminal paradigms (functional analysis, sociology of knowledge) and conspectuses of research traditions (reference group behavior). Kindred efforts jump to mind in many areas: Gelles and Straus's codification of theoretical perspectives on family violence; Nelson's codification of work on what he called structures of consciousness; Mike Featherstone's synthesis of takes on late modern culture. Under this heading one may also locate the activity of reviewing divergent findings and conclusions on a common problem, a process often glossed as meta-analysis.

The work of codification leads directly to one of the most essential steps in inquiry of all kinds: defining problems. Merton's evocative terms for this crucial process neatly circumscribe the work in question: *specification of ignorance* and *problem finding*. To illustrate the specification of ignorance, regarding which he observes, "It requires a newly informed theoretical eye to detect long-observed pockets of ignorance as a prelude to newly focused inquiry," Merton analyzed a sequence of successful specifications of ignorance in the development of the sociology of deviant behavior (1996, 53 ff.)—an analysis that itself exemplifies the work of codifying continuities as well. Classical exemplars of problem finding include Simmel's specification of ignorance regarding the whole category of forms of social interaction, and Weber's specification of the problem of the religious origins of the spirit of modern rational capitalism. More recent instances include Putnam's (2000) discovery of the problem known as *Bowling Alone*, and Abbott's (2014) discovery of the problem of dealing with *excess* rather than the fixation on problems of scarcity.

Beyond the function of problem finding—well, at this point a panoply of essential types of theory work explodes in our faces. They include

the activities of (1) articulating and refining concepts, (2) constructing typologies, (3) constructing models, (4) formalizing theory, (5) differentiating theory, (6) replacing theory, (7) redirecting inquiry, and (8) theorizing new areas.

Some scholars strike pay dirt by inventing an attractive concept at just the right time: William Graham Sumner (1906), folkways and mores; David Riesman (1950), other-directedness (1956); Saskia Sassen, the “Global City” (2001). Others spend years productively elucidating one or two concepts. In philosophy, tomes have been produced on such notions as freedom, justice, law, and love.⁶ In sociology, valuable work of this sort has taken many forms. At a minimum, it focuses on disambiguation, as per Walter Wallace’s proposals to work toward standard, univocal definitions of key sociological concepts. Even if such work hits obstacles owing to the “essentially contested” character of our core concepts, Wallace persuades me that such efforts can be productive—as, indeed, in the badly needed disambiguation of Weber’s conceptions of rationality by scholars like Bendix, Kalberg, Levine, and DiMaggio. Beyond that, codification of the range of standard meanings of a term can be useful, as in Kluckhohn and Kroeber’s listing of some 150 definitions of “culture.”

Critical examination of key terms and their implications offers not only a commendable route toward intellectual sophistication and clear thinking; it helps to explore the context of concepts and to unpack their properties and vicissitudes. *Keywords* by Raymond Williams offers a shorthand entree into such wisdom. More expansively, consider what we have learned from Shils’s disquisitions on “tradition” and “secrecy,” Orlando Patterson’s on “freedom,” Guillermina Jasso’s on “justice,” or Stephen Turner’s on “practices.” Volker Schmidt has broken fresh ground in a number of searching publications on justice, most recently “Global Modernity, World Society and Global Justice: Preliminary Thoughts” (2013).

Finally, there comes a time when a theorist is needed to reconceive the accepted or conventional meaning of a term. One follows with undiminished interest and profit the route Durkheim traverses in conceptualizing “crime” and “religion,” or Merton’s in the journey that led to the concept of “opportunity structure.” Even if one does not agree with where Dahrendorf ended his tortuous reconceptualization of “class,” shifting its denotation from a socioeconomic stratum to a party in combat (and I for one do not), one still learns from the course of his thinking about it.

Concepts never exist in isolation. Perhaps one should theorize the notion of concept-sets as symbolical structures comparable to role-sets. Conceptual typologies present a conspicuous contribution of theory work. Consider Weber's consequential typology of action orientations; Thomas's social personality types (philistine, bohemian, creative); Parsons's forms of social pressure (inducing, coercing, persuading, guilting); Janowitz's typology of political-military elites (aristocratic, democratic, totalitarian, garrison state). Such schemas help us sort issues and generate questions. Even for straight empirical descriptions, categorical frameworks comprise indispensable boxes for sticking in statistics.

The disambiguation of concepts offers prime work for the theorist and often a sure road to generating fruitful typologies. Consider the schema that Sennett (2011) forms from disambiguating the notion of social exchange; the disambiguation of Mauss's concept of "the gift" by Graeber (2014); Gray's trenchant disambiguation of "autocracy" and "democracy" (2014). This genre of theory work can become explosively innovative with regard to existing frameworks, models, and theories. With regard to existing frameworks, models, and theories, theory work becomes innovative in numerous ways. For differentiating concepts or relations that previously had been lumped, consider Margaret Wood's differentiation of the social type of the stranger into the newly arrived outsider and the sojourner; Michael Johnson's separation of forms of violence against women into "patriarchal terrorism" and "common couple violence"; of J. W. Friedman's distinction among three kinds of interdependence: structural, behavioral, and evolutionary; and the differentiation of types of contemporary individualism into instrumental and expressive by Robert Bellah et al (1985).

Models represent another level of theoretical empowerment. Models incorporate motion and formalize frameworks. Consider how empowered we are by models like those of Bales, on the stages of interaction process; of Bellah, on stages of religious evolution; of Coleman, on the stages of community conflict; of Smelser, on stages of collective behavior; or Blau, on the generation of power formations generated through imbalances in exchange. An even more rigorous kind of systematizing work appears in efforts at formalization, in which clearly formulated premises are used to generate logically derived corollaries, as in Collins's enunciation of dozens of postulates and hundreds of propositions regarding the dynamics of complex organizations, ritual, and societal stratification.

The biggest payoff of theory work is often associated with the generation of theoretical propositions, though much of this work, appropriately, is conjoined with substantive empirical work: the factors associated with, for example, revolutions, as in the creative theorizing of Edwards, Moore, Skocpol, Arjomand, or Goldstone; professionalization, as in the theory work of Hughes, Wilensky, Freidson, and Abbott; crime, as in that of Sutherland, Cloward and Ohlin, Lemert and Becker, Turk and Quinney; or as in the synthesis of the vast “neighborhood effects” literature by Robert Sampson (2012).

Another potent job of theory work occurs when it adds *intervening variables*, as Coser did to a number of Simmel’s propositions, such as associating the effect of external conflict on groups with the structural properties of in-groups. It can proceed by *integrating two different theories into a single framework*, as Smelser did regarding Spencer’s and Durkheim’s theories of social differentiation. It can replace a vulnerable theory with an ostensibly sounder one, in the manner of *supersession* exhibited by Dahrendorf on class conflict; Murray Davis, in his theory of humor; Mark Granovetter, in his theory of weak ties; or Max Scheler, in his theory of *ressentiment* that so effectively superseded that of Nietzsche.

Theory work also functions by *redirecting existing inquiries along new lines*. Consider what was accomplished by Simmel on the associative consequences of conflict, by Tom Scheff on the role of unacknowledged shame in social violence, or Niklas Luhmann’s addition of linguistic codes to the properties of specialized institutions. At times redirection occurs through *bringing older works to bear on current problems*, as when Norbert Wiley refocused theorizing on the self by incorporating ideas of Peirce.

Other kinds of innovative work *open up new areas for theorizing*. This happens by recovering forgotten bodies of work—Camic on habit, Coser on conflict—or by analyzing emergent phenomena—James Rules on public surveillance, Roland Robertson on globalization, Jean Baudrillard on simulacra. Most often, it occurs through inventing a new conceptual angle from which to examine long familiar phenomena: Karl Mannheim on generations; Erving Goffman on face work; Barry Schwartz on queuing; Carol Heimer on risk; Matilda White Riley on age structure; Carol Gilligan and Arlie Hochschild on gender issues; Bryan Turner, Arthur Frank, and Chris Shilling on the body in society.

Up to this point my focus has been on types of theory work that arguably perform important, indeed essential, functions *within* the

sociological enterprise itself. But other functions associated with theory work link sociology to other disciplines and broader concerns. Comte and Simmel were perhaps the two figures who articulated these functions most clearly. For Comte, the arrival of positive social science meant one could dispense once and for all with abstract philosophy, but there remained the important function of linking the conceptions of sociology with those of other disciplines, especially biology. This remains a frontier task for the theorist, more so now than ever (Tiryakian 2003). Consider the light thrown on the dynamics of social interaction by Thomas Spence Smith's pioneering linkage of social interaction theory with well-studied psychological and biochemical processes, or Alan Wolfe's comparison of the assumptions of sociological theory with those of the burgeoning field of artificial intelligence. In the hands of scholars who roam handily across the literatures of half a dozen disciplines—like Parsons or Eisenstadt, for example—that kind of theory work becomes electrifying.

Furthermore, pace Comte, we now understand that beyond synthesizing knowledge from different positive domains, other philosophical functions still demand attention. As Simmel put it, every positive discipline is surrounded by two boundaries at which reflection necessarily takes on a philosophical character: the domain of the cognitive preconditions of the discipline, and the domain where the necessarily fragmentary contents of positive knowledge become augmented into a world picture and related to the totality of life (see chapter 8 below, p. 83).

Epistemic foundational ideas are of two sorts. One concerns presuppositions about social reality. This is the area that figures like Parsons and Don Martindale investigated so creatively and that Jeffrey Alexander and James Coleman ploughed again so boldly in the 1980s. The other concerns the ideas about methods to be followed. Work in this vein by Lazarsfeld on typological procedures and the relating of variables, Dubin on theory building, or Stinchcombe on modes of conceptualization can be studied with profit by scholars of many orientations.

The domain of transempirical work that augments securely attestable knowledge includes a good part of the tradition of Western social theory. Virtually every figure in that tradition has said something on the nature of modernity.⁷ (Levine 1995, 2005). Over the past half-century, distinguished authors have crafted major new contributions in this genre—Daniel Bell, Norbert Elias, David Riesman, Leszek Kolakowski,

Jürgen Habermas, Alan Touraine. Recent decades have seen a good deal of fresh thought of this kind, including Ulrich Beck's theorization of modernity as risk laden, Rosalind Williams's portrayal of subterranean images of modernity in *Notes from the Underground*, or Peter Beilharz's genial amalgam of modernist takes on romanticism, urbanism, and dual economies in *Postmodern Socialism*.

The supra-positive domain Simmel mentioned concerns the relevance of moral valuations to social facts. In considering this broad and complex area, one needs to distinguish carefully a number of intellectual questions that often get confounded: the ways in which sociologists should study and analyze social norms (Durkheim, Bellah), a question that belongs in the domain of ordinary sociological work and demands no special treatment; the norms of the sociologists themselves, as related to their conduct as scholars and investigators (Merton on the norms of science); the ethical relevance of their problems (Weber's *Wertbeziehung*); the impact of their other moral commitments on the prosecution of scholarly work (Merton's "Insiders and Outsiders"); and the ways in which the work of sociologists can contribute to the clarification and direction of moral judgments for persons, groups, and societies (Weber's guidelines for value clarification, Durkheim's rules for normality and pathology, Myrdal's methodological notes on valuation).

The conjunction of broad interpretive work with moral-evaluative work yields the genre of social diagnosis and social criticism. This, too, offers a legitimate domain for the social theorist, one that is often shied away from or else depreciated as mere opinion. Yet there is a world of difference between the street corner pundit and the conscientious, informed, and disciplined observer-critic. If the role of the latter shades into that of the public intellectual, so much the better for democracy, and so much the better for legitimating the work of social theory. It is time for social theorists to dust off that role again, clarify its mission, and exemplify how social theorists as public intellectuals can function in a credible and constructive way.

What Should Social Theorists Do?

The kinds of work just glimpsed divide into what may be called *custodial* functions and *heuristic* functions, the latter in turn dividing into efforts *internal* to sociology and those *external* to the discipline. Listing these functions in a paradigm helps clarify what areas might need special attention at a given time. The provisional paradigm I offer can serve as a stepping-stone toward a more authoritative inventory of

Figure P1. An agenda of theory work in sociology.

1. Custodial theory work
 - 1.1. recovering the heritage: critical editions, translations, exegeses
 - 1.2. correcting and reinterpreting accepted recoveries
 - 1.3. forming inventories and codifying ideas
 - 1.4. constituting and sustaining dialogues⁸
 2. Heuristic work internal to the discipline
 - 2.1. conceptual articulation, disambiguation, and reformulation
 - 2.2. construction of conceptual frameworks and typologies
 - 2.3. model building and formalization
 - 2.4. problem finding and problem justifying
 - 2.5. redirecting current scholarship
 - 2.6. theorizing new areas, through
 - 2.6.1. extrapolation from earlier work
 - 2.6.2. attending to emergent phenomena
 - 2.6.3. constructing new analytic angles
 3. Heuristic work external to the discipline
 - 3.1. foundational
 - 3.1.1. ontological
 - 3.1.2. epistemological
 - 3.2. representational syntheses
 - 3.2.1. syntheses with other disciplines and perspectives
 - 3.2.2. grand descriptive syntheses
 - 3.3. ethical syntheses
 - 3.3.1. ethics of scholarship
 - 3.3.2. theory-practice relations
 - 3.4. social diagnosis and criticism
-

functions. Meanwhile, it does the job that Merton assigned to paradigm construction: bringing out into the open the array of otherwise tacit assumptions, concepts, and propositions in an area.

The above paradigm not only throws light on the array of scholarly tasks in the domain of theory work, it may prompt fresh thought about ways to invent curricula and learning experiences that imbue training in the theory area with more professional dignity. In contrast to disciplines like statistics, languages, law, and medicine, the teaching and learning

of social theory has not received much thought and experimentation. Little wonder that sociologists in general, and social theorists *a fortiori*, rarely have the benefit of thoughtfully informed curricula. In the Appendix, I share a few of my thoughts and curricular experiments in order to stimulate discourse and experimentation on the matter.

This volume includes a sample of publications from my oeuvre with an eye to exemplifying several of the categories of theory work listed above. In some cases, I have inserted language that introduces them with words designed to clarify that exemplification. Note to the reader, then: I organize these selections with the hope that, however much you may be edified or irritated by the substance of their content, you will study them in order to determine what they are *doing*, even more than for what they are saying.

Notes

1. In what other discipline would scientists employ central concepts, for example, like anomie, strangerhood, and rationalization, as though they had univocal meanings, when established theoretic analyses of each had demonstrated the polysemic character of those notions? See efforts to disambiguate these concepts in chapters 6, 9, and 10 below.
2. “Awareness of this value prompted”? Morris Janowitz to found The Heritage of Sociology Series in the late 1960s, a project that in turn contributed to the work of dozens of European and Japanese scholars to retrieve the legacy known as The Chicago School.
3. Levine (1985) argues that the condition of being an “essentially contested concept”—of admitting a variety of meanings stoutly defended by those who profess them—applies to virtually all concepts used by social scientists. The term was coined by Gallie (1964).
4. While taking note of the earlier version of this paper, Abend (2008) offers a different set of distinctions, based on the assumption that diverse uses of the term theory represent contested meanings that pose a practical, political problem for sociology, rather than—as I indicate here—that they designate complementary kinds of theoretical practice, each one performing an important function.
5. It may seem problematic that I grant so much space to theory work concerned with classic texts. For arguments regarding the enduring importance of the classics for present-day sociology, see Levine, “The Variable Status of the Classics in Differing Narratives of the Sociological Tradition,” with an update by Robert Owens, forthcoming in the *Journal of Classical Sociology*.
6. I have previously urged all sociologists concerned with freedom, for example, to familiarize themselves with Mortimer Adler’s two volumes on *The Idea of Freedom* and Felix Oppenheim’s *Dimensions of Freedom* (see chapter 10 below).
7. See Levine 1995 and chapter 23 below, “Modernity and Its Endless Discontents.”
8. This genre will provide the agenda for a sequel to this volume, *Dialogical Social Theory*.



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Part I

Custodial Theory Work

Custodial theory work involves the critical recovery of texts that are not ready at hand. This includes translation into another language; publication of unpublished material; and critical editions of publications that are incomplete or extremely hard to come by. Such work can have enormous impact on a field. For example, the first translation of excerpts from Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*) in 1948 sparked a major movement in comparative political sociology.

The present volume includes four efforts in this vein. Robert E. Park's dissertation of 1904 was foundational for signature Chicago courses and publications on collective behavior in the 1920s. It became available in English only seven decades later, in an edition for which I provided the introduction. Little was known of the relation of Max Weber to Georg Simmel until the discovery of his unfinished statement, "Georg Simmel as Sociologist," written in 1908 just after the appearance of Simmel's *Soziologie*. My translation with an introduction appears as chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents my review of the critical 1968 variorum translation of Weber's *Economy and Society*, published posthumously in 1922.¹

A second form of this work involves critical reappraisal of extant efforts to recover and to interpret important texts. This volume includes four such efforts, starting in chapter 4 with reviews of three publications from the 1970s of texts by Auguste Comte. Be it noted: the genre of the book review serves as an essential medium for this sort of custodial theory work. That is why it is essential that book review editors of major journals take extraordinary care in selecting their reviewers.²

The three ensuing chapters have some sort of connection with Comte. His most consequential follower, Émile Durkheim, sought to implement the Comtean project of a naturalistic science of society. This included the univocal definition of scientific concepts. Chapter 5 appraises critically one of Durkheim's classic efforts, demonstrating how difficult it was for Durkheim to follow one of his major methodological precepts. Chapter 6, which conjoins a book review of 1978

and an article of 2006, examines a close follower of Durkheim, Robert K. Merton (also a follower of Comte as historian of science). Merton drew on one of Durkheim's efforts to combat ambiguity; the two pieces show how Merton himself played around with both ambiguity and ambivalence.

Chapter 7 was written for this volume. It stands as an update to the complex task of interpreting Simmel's work as a whole. One part of that work stands to challenge the Comtean claim that the only kind of knowledge worth having is "positive" knowledge—propositions that can be verified by some sort of sensual observation. Chapter 7 examines diverse ways in which the Simmelian corpus has been interpreted and broaches the issue of ways to bring intellectual order into Simmel's diverse investigations.

That challenge invites efforts to represent the discursively presented ideas of an author in schematic form, efforts that can engender new insights and stimulate productive research agendas. Forms these efforts take include the Table, which involves cross-tabulation, and the Paradigm, a tool promoted by Merton ([1949] 1966). Chapters 8 and 9 present excursus of this sort. In chapter 8 I work up the diverse responses to Simmel's essay on *The Stranger* into a paradigm. Chapter 9 develops my decades-long ruminations on the contrast between Parsons and Simmel into a Table, permitting both a schematization of their main concepts and facilitating comparisons between their theories.³

Notes

1. For reasons of space shortage and ready availability of the text, I decided not to include material on another long delayed translation—Georg Simmel's testamentary masterwork, *Lebensanschauung* (*The View of Life*), published by the University of Chicago Press in 2011. The introduction to that translation (by John A. Y. Andrews and myself) was co-authored with Daniel A. Silver.
2. The discipline as a whole owes an exceptionally large debt to Alan Sica for his exemplary stewardship of the ASA journal of book reviews, *Contemporary Sociology*.
3. Other efforts in this genre include my reconfiguration (in *Wax and Gold*, 1965, Fig. 14) of typologies of modes of conformism and deviance pioneered by Merton and Parsons, and an extrapolation of the Parsonian schema of patient-doctor relations as a way to schematize what transpires in the martial art of aikido between attacker and attacked (2007).

Note on Park, *The Crowd and the Public*

Masse und Publikum is a gem of sustained thought and critical reflection. I believe it has been greatly underestimated, not least because of Park's own depreciation of the manuscript and the fact that it was not available in English translation.

I

The general character of the work was inspired by Simmel's conception of sociology as the science of social forms. The expressed objective of *Masse und Publikum* is to determine the generic characteristics of "two basic forms of sociological entities" (*zwei Grundformen [der] soziologischen Einheiten*), the crowd¹ and the public. Methodologically, Park's aim is to achieve a maximum of clarity and precision in the construction of scientific concepts, a concern most immediately stimulated by Rickert. Substantively, the dissertation involves a synthesis of three traditions of social thought: group psychology, individual psychology, and political philosophy.

Each of the three chapters of the dissertation focuses on one of these three traditions. The first chapter, "Die Masse," begins with a critical review of the literature on crowd behavior as found in the works of Sighele, Le Bon, Tarde, Rossi, and Sidis. Park then proceeds to reject as scientifically unviable two popular conceptions the crowd: that it is equivalent to rioting behavior, and is to be viewed as a collection of spatially contiguous individuals. He notes that the principal proponents of group psychology rather define the crowd in terms of psychic interaction. This characterization is by itself not adequate, however. Park concludes by defining the crowd as a phenomenon involving reciprocal stimulation in which the whole interaction process is directed toward one common goal.

II

Chapter 2, “Der soziologische Prozess,” begins with a search for a theory that will combine the individualistic approach of political economy with the collectivistic approach of group psychology. The ingredients for such a “synthetic discipline” are to be found in imitation theory. The forerunners of the theory of imitation are Butler, Hume, and Adam Smith; its contemporary exponents are Tarde, Baldwin, and Giddings. The crucial sociological importance of the imitation process is that it serves to transmit culture, and to communicate constraints from the group as a whole to the individual. This primary interaction, spreading and generalizing ways of acting through imitation, is for Tarde the specifically “social.”

Other kinds of processes are involved, however, when groups act to reshape their orientations—processes exhibited in the deliberations of parliaments or courts of justice. These processes appear in simplest form in the behavior of the crowd. Crowd behavior is characterized above all by a concentration of attention on a single object. The immediate consequence of this heightened collective attentiveness is an inhibition of customary impulses and associations that results in increased suggestibility. Through social attentiveness in the crowd, customs and stable forms of intercourse are loosened and finally dissolved. Mass movements thus have the dual role of destroying existing institutions and preparing the spirit of new ones.

Another basic form of interaction that serves to reorient group attitudes is that of the public. In developing his conception of the public, Park draws on Tarde’s concept of counter-imitation, Baldwin’s and Royce’s concept of opposition, and Simmel’s ideas about social differentiation and exchange. Exchange is a “secondary” form of interaction. It also involves a kind of imitative responsiveness to others, in that one sets oneself so as to sympathize with the point of view of the other, but then one acts in a direction contrary to that of the other. It is this combination of entertaining the ideas and attitudes of others with assertion of personal interests that constitutes the essential structure of the public.

In the crowd, all purely personal impulses are suppressed. Only those ideas that fit in with the ideas stained by the collective interaction process are active in the minds of individual participants. In the public, individual impulses and interests emerge against a background of common information and are developed further through the interaction process. Whereas crowd behavior remains at the level of common

perception, public behavior, expressed through public opinion, results from discussion and deliberations based on a consideration of facts. In the crowd, existential and normative considerations are fused; all members have the same view of reality and what to do about it. In the public these dimensions are separated. The same perception of empirical realities is shared by all members of the public, but their value orientations regarding these things are diverse. Because of this, because the practical orientations of the public must refer to “theoretical” observations, which provide materials for deliberation, the public is subordinated to theoretic norms. Independently established theoretical standards are the necessary precondition for the public. They introduce a new force into the collective life, a force that is not present in the crowd.

The public seeks to find its will through deliberation, to evaluate the diverse individual preferences from a supra-individual another structural dimension, that represented by the concept of the general will.

III

Chapter 3, “Der Gesamtwille,” discusses the evolution of the idea of the general will from Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau through Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. The ethical substance that Hegel calls morality can be identified with Rousseau’s concept of the *volonté générale*. This psychic substance is manifest subjectively in the individual mind as conscience and objectively in the form of the mores. The negative reactions of the totality aroused by the immoral behavior of an individual are an expression of this general will. This, not social interaction, is the source of obligatory norms: they represent a collective response for the protection of collective values.

Institutionalized social groups—castes, classes, sects, political parties, etc.—are therefore characterized by two distinct levels of psychological reality (1) interaction—the action and adjustive reaction of human drives on one another, and (2) a general will manifest as a collective drive that subsumes all individual wills, and that even at times may stand opposed to the momentary impulses of the totality of individuals.

The crowd and the public stand in contrast to all such established groups. They are types of association that bring individuals out of their existing bonds and into new ones. Structurally more primitive than established groups, they exist empirically afterward. They differ from the other types of groups, not with respect to the content of their collective consciences, but their form. The crowd and the public are governed by a collective drive, but one that has not yet crystallized

into a norm. They do not possess a general will in the traditional sense of the term, but represent an empirical forestage thereto. Neither crowds nor publics possess rules, modes of conscious governance, self-consciousness, or boundary maintenance. They are limited only by the immanent conditions of spontaneous interaction.

While crowds and publics are similar as fluid social forms, which serve to mediate social change, they differ in that the public is critical whereas the crowd is mindless. One needs only the capacity to feel and empathize to be a member of a crowd. To belong to a public, one must not only feel but be able to think and to understand the thoughts of others. Though not subject to practical regulations, one must adhere to the norms of logic.

Crowd and public are the only truly individualistic social forms. In the crowd we find anarchy in its purest form. In a public the individual stands only under the norms of logic, though the ultimate tyranny, as Max Stirner observed, is the tyranny of concepts.

IV

Park's dissertation is notable in several respects. It is probably the first attempt to formulate a functional interpretation of crowd behavior. Previously such phenomena had been viewed merely as threats to civil order and high culture or, at best, as involving deteriorated states of human functioning. *Masse und Publikum* shows the necessity for society to have such fluid, primitive forms to enable it to make institutional change.

Park's conceptualization of the distinction between crowd and public is a brilliant feat of intellectual differentiation. It has largely been lost sight of in later discussions of mass society and public opinion. It provides eloquent grounds for arguing the importance of professional journalism in democratic society, an implication not drawn out in the dissertation but well understood in Park's own life.

Masse und Publikum presents the first synthesis of two conceptions of the "social," which have stimulated much of modern sociology: Durkheim's (and Sumner's) notion of the social as a body of normative constraints, and Simmel's conception of the social in terms of forms of interaction. While Simmel considered norms to be of secondary interest, and Durkheim's approach neglected the actual process of interaction, Park achieved a bifocal awareness of these two dimensions of social organization.

Finally, it might be noted that some analytic scheme that Park adumbrated in this dissertation shows a striking parallel to the famous typology of types of authority that Weber was to work out some years later. The stages of imitation of custom, concerted action based on emotion, and public deliberation leading to the promulgation of new norms by established bodies show an obvious correspondence to the Weberian categories of traditionality, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. What Park has done is to look at the social psychological underbelly of these types of authority—a type of analysis that social scientists are today coming to regard as deeply significant.

From the point of view of Park's intellectual biography, the dissertation is also of considerable interest. One finds him there laboriously working out many of the basic ideas that were to guide some of his most important contributions to sociology two decades later: the concept of concerted action; the distinction between two levels of group life, one governed by norms and one not; the role of impartially presented information in the life of publics; and the relationship between elementary collective behavior and social change.

Note

1. Park uses the term *Masse* throughout, although it is not always clear when he is referring to crowds and when to a diffuse mass as represented, for example, by all those affected by advertising.—Ed.

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