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## Sociology

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## SOCIOLOGY

*Robert C. Bannister*

Sociology emerged in response to the problem of social order in modern society in the wake of the American and French Revolutions and the rise of industrialism and market capitalism. A precondition of the project was the recognition of a civil society apart from any particular political form. Combining skepticism and a faith in reason, sociologists insisted that society is not a reflection of a natural or divine order but is nonetheless subject to rational analysis. Whereas Enlightenment theorists had viewed society in terms of a "social contract" and a convergence of individual interests, sociology explored the forms and structures that make "society" possible.<sup>1</sup>

Taking sociality as its subject, sociology differed from the other social sciences in claiming no specific area as its own, such as primitive society, politics, or the economy. While the other social sciences took their subjects as given, the first academic sociologists expended vast energy arguing that there was such a thing as "society" to be studied. As a result, the discipline developed a decade or more later than anthropology, political science, and economics. Strategies to legitimate the new discipline ranged from claims that it was the capstone of the social sciences to more limited proposals to study social relations.

Sociology had its roots in the theories of August Comte and Herbert Spencer and in empirical work previously conducted by census bureaus, state labor boards, and reform organizations. A tension between theory and practical knowledge persisted throughout the various stages of its history: (1) a preacademic era, during which the concept of "sociology" emerged (1830s–1860s); (2) the proliferation of organicist and evolutionist models of society (1870s–1890s); (3) parallel traditions of statistics and social investigation

<sup>1</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Form of Sociology* (New York: Wiley, 1976) and his "Sociology," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Shils (New York: Macmillan, 1968), vol. 15, pp. 25–36; Peter Wagner, "Science of Society Lost," in *Discourses on Society*, ed. Peter Wagner, Bjorn Wittrock, and Richard Whitley (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 218–45; Heinz Maus, *A Short History of Sociology* (London: Philosophical Library, 1962).

(1830s–1930s); (4) a “classical period” coinciding with mature industrialization and the formation of modern nation-states, during which sociology became an academic discipline (1890s–1910s); (5) the interwar flowering at the University of Chicago in the United States, paralleled in Europe by a relative decline and virtual disappearance following the rise of fascism; (6) a worldwide revival under United States influence after 1945, when, ironically, American sociological theory was being re-Europeanized; and (7) fragmentation and continuing crisis following the radical assaults of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

Sociologists recounted this history in a series of competing narratives. In the *positivist* scenario dating to Comte, the logic of science advances knowledge inexorably, albeit incrementally, as metaphysical speculation yields to empirically grounded social laws. *Pluralist* accounts, responding to the reality of conflicting “schools” during the interwar years, instead stressed the multiplicity of complementary approaches. *Synthetic* histories identified a “true” sociological tradition that took shape between 1890 and 1910 in the work of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, among others. Despite substantial differences, these accounts shared the assumption that sociology, like natural science, is cumulative, progressive, and entirely cognitive. *Humanist* histories of the 1950s and 1960s focused instead on a “classic” tradition extending back to the eighteenth century, a relatively small group of theorists who addressed the breakup of the European ancien régime and the emergence of modern society with an aesthetic sensibility and a moral passion similar to that expressed in literature and philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1960s, *contextual* histories have stressed the role of social, institutional, ideological, and cultural factors in shaping the discipline.<sup>4</sup> Challenging the positivist scenario, contextualists historicize the concept of “science” itself, termed “scientism” or “objectivism.” Struggles over theory, and the split between theory and empirical work, appear as contests for social influence and authority rather than as movement toward a unified sociological tradition.

<sup>2</sup> For periodization, see Edward Shils, “Tradition, Ecology, and Institution in the History of Sociology,” *Daedalus*, 99 (1970), 760–825; Terry Clark, “The Stages of Scientific Institutionalization,” *International Social Science Journal*, 24 (1972), 658–71.

<sup>3</sup> Typology adapted from Donald N. Levine, *Visions of Sociological Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chaps. 1–5. Examples include: John Madge, *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1962) [positivist]; Don Martindale, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), and Eisenstadt, *Form of Sociology* [pluralist]; Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937) [synthetic]; Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), and Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, 2 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1965–7) [humanist].

<sup>4</sup> Continuing the typology of note 3, see: Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), Robert C. Bannister, *Sociology and Scientism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), and Stephen and Jonathan H. Turner, *The Impossible Science* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990) [social/institutional]; Irving M. Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), and Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) [ideology]; Arthur J. Vidich and Stanford W. Lyman, *American Sociology: Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Direction* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985) [cultural-religious].

For contextualists, a discipline born of concern for social and moral reconstruction at the start of the modern age appears more often to be a servant rather than a critic of the status quo. This contextualist critique contributed to a crisis that continues three decades later.

#### THE FOUNDERS, 1830s–1860s

Although social and economic changes during the middle third of the nineteenth century provided a common context for the emergence of preacademic sociology, the work of the first sociologists mirrored important national differences in the timing and intensity of the modernizing process. In France, members of a relatively powerful middle class, remembering the excesses of both the Terror and the Napoleonic dictatorship, vacillated between a wish to fulfill the egalitarian promises of the Revolution and a desire for social and moral order. For Auguste Comte (1792–1857), the burning issue was the French Revolution and its aftermath. Breaking with his Royalist, devoutly Catholic father, Comte embraced republicanism. After collaborating with the early socialist Henri de Saint-Simon from 1814 to 1824, Comte outlined his sociology in the *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42) and the *Système de politique positive* (1842). There he announced the “law of three stages” and a hierarchy of the sciences wherein knowledge proceeds from the theological to the metaphysical and finally to the positive or scientific stage. The last science to develop is “sociology,” a term he coined in 1839. Sociology was to be the basis of governance in modern society, although after his break with Saint-Simon, Comte increasingly viewed scientists as the least capable of rulers. In his later work, Comte outlined a Religion of Humanity, a normative theory complete with priests and ritual.<sup>5</sup>

In England, removed by a century from Civil War and Glorious Revolution, the promises and perils of the Industrial Revolution took center stage. In *Social Statics* (1850), his first book, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) defended a “moral sense” philosophy against the utilitarian “expediency doctrine” that looked to government to achieve the greatest good of the greatest number. In *The Study of Sociology* (1873) Spencer produced the first major treatise on sociological method since Comte’s *Cours*. In the *Principles of Sociology* (1876–93) he provided a functional analysis of social institutions, using extensive ethnographic and historical materials within a comparative and evolutionary framework and arguing that all societies proceed from the simple to the complex or, in an alternate formulation, from the military to the industrial, a unilinear view for which he was later criticized.

<sup>5</sup> On Comte, see Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); on later positivism, see Christopher G. A. Bryant, *Positivism in Social Theory and Research* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985).

In Germany, which had a weaker middle class, modernization was the work of a relatively closed elite, who accepted its technical and economic but not its political and social consequences. Sociology was rooted in traditions of philosophical Idealism and Romanticism, and was shaped by the perceived excesses of Enlightenment rationalism and individualism and by Germany's uncertain sense of national identity. The result was a legacy of holistic analysis, historical consciousness, distrust of reason, and alienation from modernity. Sociological elements surfaced in the works of historians and philosophers from Herder to Hegel to Karl Marx and a host of lesser-known figures. But the vitality of the historical/philosophical tradition impeded the development of "sociology" proper, a term virtually unknown in Germany until the late 1870s.

In the antebellum United States, the anomaly of chattel slavery in a "free" society inspired George Fitzhugh's *Sociology for the South* (1854) and Henry Hughes' *Treatise on Sociology* (1854), critiques of northern industrial society and the first American books to employ the term "sociology." In the North, utopian socialists drew on Comte and others in their quest for alternative social orders. Although these particular trails went cold after the Civil War, the desire for social reconstruction and the presence of a large middle class disposed to embrace modernity made the United States a fertile ground for the new discipline.<sup>6</sup>

#### ORGANICISM AND EVOLUTIONISM, 1870s–1890s

Comte and Spencer also contributed to the proliferation of organic and evolutionist metaphors that developed from the 1860s onward. A natural rather than a metaphysical object, the social organism for Comte provided an object worthy of human veneration, legitimating the Religion of Humanity.<sup>7</sup> For Spencer society *was* an organism, literally, not simply by analogy. He conceded, however, that social organisms differ from biological ones in the sense that consciousness adheres in the organism's separate parts, not in a centralized "social sensorium," thereby preserving his methodological and political commitment to individualism and *laissez-faire*.<sup>8</sup> Continental theorists refined and extended organic analogies through the end of the century. In *Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers* (1875–8), Albert Schäffle drew extensive analogies between the human body and the social body – for example, likening the nuclear family to the basic cell, and the police to epidermal protective tissue. Albion Small and George Vincent introduced Schäffle to American

<sup>6</sup> Eisenstadt, *Form of Sociology*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Levine, "Organism Metaphor," *Social Research*, 62 (1995), 239–65.

<sup>8</sup> On "social Darwinism" and Spencer, see J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), chaps. 2–3; Jonathan Turner, *Herbert Spencer* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1985), chap. 3.

readers in *An Introduction to Sociology* (1895), one of the first textbooks in the field.

Organic/evolutionist works also emphasized conflict among groups and races. Already developed in Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* (1873), conflict moved center stage in the work of the Austrian "struggle school," represented by Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) and Gustav Ratzenhofer (1842–1904). They played important roles in shifting sociology's attention from the individual to the group and group interests, an influence evident in Small's later work. In *Social Evolution* (1894), Benjamin Kidd (1858–1916), a British civil servant, produced one of sociology's first best-sellers. Kidd argued that the struggle for existence, although necessary to human progress, could not be justified by reason – since rational calculation was always self-interested – but only by what he termed a "super-rational" sanction, an irrationalist echo of Comte's Religion of Humanity.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, racialist ideologies surfaced in the works of Joseph Arthur Gobineau, Georges Vacher de Lapouge, and Otto Amon, each of whom enjoyed an especially wide audience in Germany.

By the 1880s, sociologists had perceived a threat in the alliance with biology: It undercut the need for a separate discipline and, in Spencer's laissez-faire version, tainted the discipline among social reformers and other constituencies crucial to its success. In *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), the American Lester Frank Ward (1839–1913) addressed both issues. Rooted in evolutionary biology, sociology would study the ways in which basic human drives give rise to "social forces." In this process, according to Ward, mind emerges (the "psychic factor"), allowing scientific direction of human affairs, and the creation of a polity he termed "sociocracy." Sociology was "dynamic" in reconciling human desire and social order, an emancipating vision from which Ward and his disciples retreated after the 1890s.

Challenging Ward's reading of evolution, the Yale professor William Graham Sumner (1840–1910) defended laissez-faire in countless essays and in such widely read works as *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883). An Anglican clergyman turned economist, Sumner looked warily to "sociology" to analyze how the biological "struggle for existence" described by Malthus was conditioned by social rules and norms that governed the "competition for life." Although attracted to Spencer on ideological grounds, Sumner fashioned his own "science of society," the term he preferred to sociology, from anthropology and the historical ethnography of the German Julius Lippert. In his pathbreaking work *Folkways* (1906), he emphasized the power of social mores to shape individual behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Although later branded and dismissed as "social Darwinists," a politically charged pejorative that warned against the alliance between biology

<sup>9</sup> James Alfred Aho, *German Realpolitik and American Sociology* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1975); D. Paul Crook, *Benjamin Kidd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Bannister, *Sociology and Scientism*, chaps. 1, 6–7.

and sociology, the evolutionists and organicists played an important role in shaping the discipline. Spencer's contributions included an early analysis of sociological method, the use of ethnography and the comparative method, and incisive treatments of religion, the military, the professions, and other social institutions. The organic metaphor also served to legitimate the dispassionate study of society by scientific methods and to advance holistic methodological positions.<sup>11</sup>

### STATISTICS AND SOCIAL INVESTIGATION, 1830–1930

Empirical work developed alongside, although separate from, sociological theory in the realm of statistics and the social survey. Statistics was rooted in the work of the Belgian Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874), the social survey in that of Frédéric Le Play (1806–1888), a conservative French reformer who pioneered studies of the working classes. The earliest investigations were census tabulations to meet the administrative needs of consolidating nation-states; vital statistics, growing from epidemiological and actuarial concerns; and “moral statistics,” which reflected anxiety over social problems. To these were later added the practical concerns of charity and settlement house workers in ministering to the poor.

Although modern statistics is a twentieth-century development, its key elements took shape in two stages during the nineteenth century. Viewing variation as accidental, Quetelet assumed that data for any group display a normal distribution around a mean, arguing that the average represents the group's essential “type.” Combining the concerns of earlier statisticians with the technical tools of astronomers, Quetelet helped to shape the conviction that regularity in masses does not depend on assumptions regarding the causes of individual behavior, and that social science is the study of laws rather than simply of facts. In the 1870s, drawing on studies of heredity and evolution, Darwin's cousin Francis Galton focused instead on variation. Refined mathematically in the work of Karl Pearson and George Yule, this “new statistics” was concerned not with calculating averages, but with measuring and describing the distribution of traits in any given population. In *The Grammar of Science* (1892), Pearson advised scientists to analyze experience in terms of probabilities rather than “causes.” By substituting “correlations” for “causes,” statistics provided a way to measure in the absence of theory.<sup>12</sup>

In Britain, early industrialization forced the “social question” to the fore earlier than in other countries, and with it an interest in collecting statistics.

<sup>11</sup> Levine, “Organic Metaphor.”

<sup>12</sup> Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Bernard J. Norton, “Pearson and Statistics,” *Social Studies of Science*, 8 (1978), 5–33.

Initially created during the era of poor law reform of the 1830s, institutions such as the Manchester Statistical Society (1833), were separate from the older universities. Although the economic crisis of the 1870s dampened enthusiasm for this work – since neither statisticians nor economists appeared to have any solutions – statistics, along with the social survey, flourished in Britain, supported by government agencies and professional and reform organizations, until well into the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Sociology elsewhere responded slowly to these developments. Although Lester Ward served a lengthy apprenticeship at the United States Bureau of Statistics, his sociological work contained only the simplest numerical tabulations, as did most other studies, even those by sociologists who touted the value of “statistics” when they meant only counting. In *Suicide* (1897), however, Durkheim pioneered the use of a comparative, quantitative analysis for determining suicide rates, before turning in his later work to questions that could not be addressed statistically. In 1915, the British economist A. L. Bowley developed sampling techniques that transformed later survey work. By the 1920s, the “new statistics” entered American sociology in the work of two of Giddings’s students, William Ogburn and Stuart Rice, and in studies by Dorothy Thomas, who had studied with Bowley at the London School of Economics. More than a change in method, the new statistics signaled the rise of a value-free “objectivism,” a pejorative term implying that this sociology treated social activities as inert objects and was thus more concerned with the “how” than the “why” of human behavior, with control rather than with amelioration.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas sociologists eventually embraced statistics, the profession turned its back on the survey tradition. The social survey grew out of charity work in Great Britain; the most important British surveys were Charles Booth’s *The Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889–1903), B. Seebohm Rowntree’s *Poverty* (1902), and the urban studies of Patrick Geddes, a Scottish naturalist who was the first to apply the term “ecology” to social phenomena. The earliest social surveys conducted in the United States focused on race and immigration, both relatively more important there than in Britain, the best-known being W. E. B. DuBois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Jane Addams and associates’ *Hull House Papers* (1895), and the “Pittsburgh survey” (1909–12).<sup>15</sup>

In the 1920s, however, Chicago sociologists disparaged surveys as the work of “social politicians,” as compared to sociological research, which

<sup>13</sup> Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Oberschall, “The Two Empirical Roots of Social Theory,” *Knowledge and Society*, 6 (1986), 67–97; Gary Easthope, *A History of Social Research Methods* (London: Longman, 1974), chap. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Milton Gordon, “The Social Survey Movement,” *Social Problems*, 21 (1973), 284–98; Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).



involved the systematic testing of hypotheses. Although the secretary of the *Recent Social Trends* (1933) project had worked in the survey tradition, this government-sponsored work ignored the tradition entirely. Echoes of the survey lingered in the work of some of Giddings's students, but the new community study exemplified by Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) and by the sampling surveys of the 1930s had no direct connection to the earlier tradition. This development revealed important changes in the entire field of social investigation: a shift from local to regional and national issues; new sources of funding from foundations, government, and industry rather than from local elites and charity organizations; and, as with the embrace of the new statistics, a shift from alleviating to managing social problems.<sup>16</sup> From a concern of scattered theorists and diverse social investigators, sociology had become a discipline with an institutional base in academia, which brought more focused intellectual discussion and an effort to bring sociological expertise to bear on public policies.

#### THE "CLASSICAL" ERA, 1890S–1910S

After the 1870s, the problems of modernity assumed new forms. Unification struggles in Germany, the United States, and Italy and the creation of the French Third Republic left in their wake problems of nationhood and national identity. Accelerated industrialization forced attention to providing more adequate state responses to the "social question." Universities emerged as major sites for the organization and dispensing of social knowledge. "Science" assumed new authority, while itself being transformed from theoretical knowledge of the past to practical, instrumental control of the present. National differences continued to affect sociology's fortunes, resulting in resistance in Europe and a relatively quick embrace of a positivistic, instrumentalist sociology within the newly created universities of the United States.<sup>17</sup>

A crisis in classical economics provided the opening, as sociologists sought to explain social forces that were economically important but not strictly economic. Epistemologically, sociology challenged the individualistic assumptions of classical economics; politically, its crude reliance on a self-regulating market based on rational calculation; and institutionally, its prior establishment as *the* science of society within the university. This conflict was played out in the careers of all of the classical European sociologists and

<sup>16</sup> Stephen P. Turner, "The World of the Academic Quantifiers," and Martin Bulmer, "The Decline of the Social Survey Movement," in *Pittsburgh Surveyed*, ed. Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), chaps. 10, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Peter T. Manicas, *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), chap. 10, and his "The Social Science Disciplines," in *Discourses on Society*, ed. Wagner, Wittrock, and Whitley, chap. 3.

also in the United States, where Giddings, for example, began his career as a "marginalist" economist, then turned to sociology to explain what determines economic preferences. The Ward–Sumner confrontation of the early 1880s was but one of a series of battles between sociologists and their economist colleagues.<sup>18</sup>

The outcome of this pre-war project was finally a paradox. In Europe, classical sociology, despite its intellectual brilliance, gained little institutional permanence and left little immediate legacy. In the United States, the institutional success of prewar sociology, despite its intellectual shortcomings, provided a basis for sustained development and also, ironically, for the revival of the European classical tradition after 1945.

Academic sociology in France developed in several stages: a formative period dating from the appointment of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) to the faculty of letters at the University of Bordeaux in 1887 to the publication of the *Année sociologique* in 1898; its establishment as a university discipline in 1913, when Durkheim's chair at the Sorbonne was first titled Education and Sociology; and the eventual dominance of a "Durkheim school."

The Durkheimians' ability to establish sociology as a discipline in their own image was the result of an interplay of theory, institutional strategies, and the cultural/ideological milieu.<sup>19</sup> Durkheim and his chief competitors each presented viable theoretical paradigms: Durkheim in the view that society, a reality apart from individuals, must be studied using rigorous, often statistical methods; René Worms in his elaboration of the organic analogy in *Organisme et société* (1896); and Gabriel Tarde in the view that social life can be reduced to processes of "invention" and "imitation" whereby an elite leads a sheepish mass, a view elaborated in *The Laws of Imitation* (1890, English trans. 1903). Each had an institutional base: Durkheim in Bordeaux and Paris, Worms as editor of the *Revue internationale de sociologie* (1893) and academic entrepreneur par excellence, and Tarde as professor of philosophy at the Collège de France. Each spoke indirectly to the political concerns of the day: Durkheim and Worms to those who wanted more social stability, Tarde to an elitist right still not reconciled to the legacy of the Revolution.

Durkheim's competitors, however, had fatal weaknesses. Worms's theory of the social organism was fast losing ground; his eclectic enterprise lacked the ability to provide career opportunities; and his highly abstract support of social stability offered nothing compelling to any faction within French politics. Tarde proved weaker than either of his rivals, although his theory of

<sup>18</sup> Wagner, "Sciences of Society Lost," pp. 226–33; Norbert Wiley, "The Rise and Fall of Dominating Theories in American Sociology," in *Contemporary Issues in Theory and Research*, ed. William E. Snizek, Elizabeth R. Fuhrman, and Michael K. Miller (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), pp. 52–3.

<sup>19</sup> Philippe Besnard, ed., *The Sociological Domain, the Durkheimians and the Founding of French Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Roger L. Geiger, "The Institutionalization of Sociological Paradigms," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 11 (1975), 235–45.

the central role of the individual in the process of invention and imitation influenced work in crowd psychology and American sociology. The metaphysical cast of concepts such as “imitation” and Tarde’s anachronistic view of science failed to distinguish sociology from philosophy, and his aristocratic biases were not compatible with the prevailing republican ideology.

Durkheim, by contrast, had considerable strengths. Concerned with structures rather than with the individual, he argued in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) that “social facts” are the subject of sociology. External to the individual, they exercise a coercive, constraining power and are not reducible to biology or psychology. Society is *sui generis*, and sociology is a field with its own subject matter. Societies are characterized by two different forms of integration, “mechanical” and “organic,” the latter resulting not from forced similarities but from differences created by the division of labor. Modernity thus holds the promise of organic unity. When social integration breaks down, however, the result is “anomie,” a state of normlessness the consequences of which Durkheim examined in *Suicide*.<sup>20</sup> In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912, English trans. 1915), he viewed religion – the entire realm of “the sacred” as opposed to the “profane” – as the “collective representation” of a group consciousness that frees the individual from personal interests, regulates behavior, and provides a sense of well-being. Whereas *Suicide* employed comparative statistics, *Elementary Forms* focused on a single case, the totem religion of Australian Aborigines.

Although Durkheim’s call for social integration combined spiritual appeal and political relevance, he was widely attacked during his lifetime. Numerous critics objected to his anti-individualistic “social realism,” his scientific pretensions, and his analysis of religion. His program nonetheless provided a three-pronged route to disciplinary formation and definition. The notion of society as *sui generis* provided an ideal platform for disciplinary autonomy; indeed, the extremism of the Durkheimians on this point was a source of strength. Institutionally, Durkheim and his followers cultivated their connection with philosophy, an already established discipline, while also serving such classical disciplines as history and geography. The fact that *Suicide* provided a concrete example was a further source of strength. To this was added carefully orchestrated connections with social science in Germany, Britain, and the United States, using *l’Année Sociologique* as a showcase for their own brand of sociology. Finally, Durkheim’s insistence that society provided a basis for civic morality neatly dovetailed with French republicanism, winning the support of key figures in government and education. This ascendancy assured that Durkheim’s influence

<sup>20</sup> On Durkheim, see Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Kenneth Thompson, *Emile Durkheim* (London: Tavistock, 1982). On his legacy, see Victor Karady, “Prehistory of Present Day French Sociology,” in *French Sociology*, ed. Charles C. Lemert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 33–47, and his “Durkheimians in Academe,” in *Sociological Domain*, ed. Besnard, pp. 72–89; Albert Salomon, “The Legacy of Durkheim,” *ibid.*, pp. 247–66.

would be passed on to later generations, although his disciplinary program was eroded when World War I ushered in an era of fragmentation and stasis.

German classical sociology in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), Georg Simmel (1858–1918), and Max Weber (1864–1920) made an even sharper break with the traditions of Comte and Spencer than did the French. Each man eventually reshaped sociology elsewhere, notably in the United States, and also helped the discipline to gain grudging acceptance in Germany. But none succeeded in establishing an institutional presence or a sociological tradition comparable to that of their French and American contemporaries.

Of the three, Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) remained the closest to the nineteenth-century evolutionary tradition, restating as “community” and “society” a distinction that echoed Sir Henry Maine’s “status” and “contract” and similar dichotomies between traditional and modern society. Simmel, by comparison, decisively rejected Spencerian organicism as well as the German Idealist distinction between *Natur* (nature) and *Geist* (spirit or mind). He insisted that “society” was real but consisted of the patterned interactions of individuals. Sociology was to focus on the “forms” of this interaction.

Weber rooted his sociology in German historical and legal thought.<sup>21</sup> Whereas Durkheim and Tönnies studied structures, Weber stressed the individual actor. Social structures such as the state and the church, when reduced to their elements, consist of social activity and the repetition of specific actions. Sociology is the study of human activity from the perspective of its meaning to participants, whether or not consciously intended. Weber distinguished “traditional” from “modern” society by virtue of the latter’s “goal-oriented rationality,” not its “organic” solidarity, his central concern being the process of rationalization that had been transforming Western society for centuries. Transcending the historicist/positivist divide, he denied that the natural and social sciences are identical, but also insisted that it is possible to generalize about the realm of human activity. In his doctrine of “ideal” types, he located a level of abstraction that, by highlighting certain elements of a reality, allows a qualitative comparison of similarities and differences and is not merely a statistical average. The method of “*verstehen*,” removed from idealist metaphysics, provided a tool for exploring motivation, the unique causal factor in human activity.

Weber’s substantive interests ranged from agrarian society in antiquity to medieval trading associations, religion, politics, and bureaucracy. In

<sup>21</sup> On Weber, see Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960); Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (New York: Knopf, 1969); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Dirk Käsler, *Max Weber*, trans. Philippa Hurd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); see also the chapters in this volume by Stephen Turner and Dorothy Ross.

*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5, English trans. 1930), the work for which he is probably best known among nonspecialists, Weber argued that Calvinism, by making one's work into "calling," cultivated the worldly asceticism necessary for the development of capitalism. Testing this theory, he subsequently analyzed the relation between economic ethics and social life in Confucianism and other non-Western religions. Bureaucracy, pervasive in most industrial countries, was a second example of the rationalization of modern society. Its hallmarks are a ruled-defined division of labor, hierarchical organization, recruitment based on expertise, a separation of official from personal concerns, and an established career line. Bureaucracy for Weber constituted the most efficient mode for organizing and managing tasks on a large scale, especially in government, although he recognized that in practice bureaucracies are often inefficient and pose a threat to the individual.

Although a German sociological community was developing by the turn of the century, several factors continued to impede successful institutionalization within academia. These included pessimism about the future and about sociology's ability to further progress, and a split between the strong historical/philosophical tradition among academically oriented social theorists and the reform-minded empirical studies conducted by nonsociologists. Although some financial support came from the Verein für Sozialpolitik, a research and policy organization founded in 1872, its reformist goals did not interest most sociologists. A sharp distinction between the social and natural sciences, rooted in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, appeared to deny to sociology the positivist claim to objectivity.

These impediments framed the careers of the German triumvirate. Tönnies remained at Kiel in northern Germany and, oddly, rarely applied his theory in his own research, so his influence never matched the personal esteem in which he was held. Simmel, a Jew of independent means, was unable to obtain a professorship and was also an outsider politically, commenting only occasionally on current events. His influence came through his writing and his sparkling lectures, whose audiences included the American Robert Park and a who's who of European intellectuals.<sup>22</sup>

Weber was a preeminently successful academic, having been appointed at the age of thirty-two to replace the economist Karl Knies at Heidelberg. His wide-ranging interests and brilliant intellect made him a central figure among prominent academicians from a variety of disciplines. Although remaining above partisan wrangling, he was sympathetic to the nationalist program of the Pan-German League in his youth, and in 1918 he accepted an offer to run for nomination to the National Assembly. But his fearless honesty kept him from allying for long with any party, leaving him by the

<sup>22</sup> Donald N. Levine, "Simmel's Influence on American Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology*, 81 (1975–6), 813–45, 1112–32.

end of World War I disillusioned with a Germany he had once loved. Compounding these problems, a nervous breakdown in 1898 cut short his academic career. He published and traveled feverishly until the outbreak of war in 1914, but his diverse interests meant that he did not address a single constituency of would-be sociologists, and he never again held a regular academic position.

European classical sociology, while often brilliant intellectually, thus failed to achieve firm institutional bases. By 1914, the term "sociology" had become widely recognized, sociological journals thrived, and professional societies multiplied. But within the universities the story was different. In France, by 1914 there were only four sociology courses offered by the Paris Faculty of Letters, and only a half-dozen para-sociological offerings elsewhere. Durkheim's greatest influence would be on anthropologists, economists, geographers, and historians, notably the *Annales* group, led by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. But even members of this group were marginal within the universities. Likewise, no chair of sociology appeared in Germany until 1919, or in Italy through the interwar years. Although American sociologists knew the works of Tönnies, Weber, and even Durkheim, into the late 1920s they were as likely to cite Spencer, Tarde, or even Leonard Hobhouse, a British sociologist who continued to work in the evolutionist tradition.<sup>23</sup>

While Europeans attracted disciples, Americans created departments, the first at the University of Chicago under Albion Small in 1892, a second at Columbia under Franklin Giddings two years later. By 1914, other important programs existed at Yale under Sumner, at the University of Wisconsin under Edward A. Ross, and at the University of Michigan under Charles Horton Cooley. In 1895, Small founded the *American Journal of Sociology*, later to become the official organ of the American Sociological Society, organized in 1905. By 1920, American universities had granted approximately 175 PhD degrees in sociology, approximately fifty each at Chicago and Columbia.<sup>24</sup>

This disciplinary success was the result of a decentralized, loosely organized, relatively new university system; a well-educated, reform-minded public; and a relatively clear demarcation in the United States between civil society, church, and state, reinforced by a cultural diversity that made it easy to think of various forms of social life coexisting in a single political order. Although poverty and industrial conflict concerned American sociologists, the problem of national identity and central state authority, settled in principle if not in fact by the Civil War, were relatively less important in the

<sup>23</sup> Werner J. Cahnman, "Tönnies in America," *History and Theory*, 16 (1977), 147–67; Roscoe C. Hinkle, "Durkheim in American Sociology," in *Essays on Sociology and Philosophy*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Peter Kivisto and William Swatos, "Weber and Interpretive Sociology in America," *Sociological Quarterly*, 31 (1990), 149–63.

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas C. and Carolyn J. Mullins, *Theories and Theory Groups in Contemporary American Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Robin M. Williams, "Sociology in America," in *Social Science in America*, ed. Charles M. Bonjean, Louis Schneider, and Robert L. Lineberry (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), pp. 77–111; Wiley, "Dominating Theories," pp. 48–79.

United States than in France and Germany. Attention instead focused on the transformation of a rural, ethnically homogenous country of communities into a heterogeneous, urban nation; on race and immigration and the moral and cultural issues raised by diversity; and on individual interaction, rather than on power or authority.

These factors gave American sociology a distinct coloration, although not always to its advantage by European standards. In the pressure to differentiate itself from competing social sciences, sociology cut itself off from philosophical and historical traditions that strengthened classical European theory, intellectually if not institutionally. The lavish capitalist patronage and local business support that created so varied and open a university system left professors vulnerable to political pressures, as many discovered during a series of academic freedom battles in the 1890s. The tension between "science" and "activism" created a desire to distinguish sociology not only from socialism but also from "Christian sociologists" and other do-gooders, resulting in a separation of academic sociologists from social workers, town planners, and other potential constituencies who created their own professional training schools. By 1920, there were two identifiably "American" strains within academic sociology: the heavily empirical urban ecology and community studies of the Chicago School, and a scientific, quantitative neo-positivism emanating from Columbia.

Albion Small (1854–1926) and Franklin Giddings (1855–1929), the initial sources of this division, refined their competing systems over several decades. Abandoning the social organism metaphor in *General Sociology* (1905), Small described "association" as a "process" wherein conflicting "interests" compete, converging to form "groups," which are the fundamental units of sociology, a theory derived from Ratzenhofer. In *The Principles of Sociology* (1896), building on Spencer and Tarde, Giddings described social evolution as a threefold process: aggregation; association via "consciousness of kind" and "imitation"; and selection, wherein a social version of natural selection weeds out "ignorant, foolish, and harmful" choices. In *Inductive Sociology* (1901), he began a retreat from concern with the subjective elements in social behavior in favor of a statistical, probabilistic sociology later termed "pluralistic behaviorism."<sup>25</sup>

In sociological theory, the most important developments at Chicago came not from Small but from William I. Thomas.<sup>26</sup> Drawn to sociology by his reading of Spencer, the early Thomas viewed humans as creatures of instinct; for example, he classified men as "katabolic" and women as "anabolic" in *Sex and Society* (1907). In his *Source Book for Social Origins* (1909), which was

<sup>25</sup> Robert W. Wallace, *The Institutionalization of a New Discipline: The Case of Sociology at Columbia University, 1891–1931* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1989); Charles Camic, "The Statistical Turn in American Social Science: Columbia University, 1890 to 1915," *American Sociological Review*, 59 (1994), 773–805.

<sup>26</sup> Norbert Wiley, "Early American Sociology and the *Polish Peasant*," *Sociological Theory*, 4 (1986), 20–40.

influenced by the anthropology of Franz Boas, he repudiated Spencer's unilinear evolution and looked at primitive cultures to find the crucial elements in social change: attention or individual response; habit and crisis, whereby attention is alternately relaxed and disturbed; and control, the end of all social interaction. The nature and rate of change depend upon the actions of extraordinary leaders, the level of culture, and experience of previous adjustments. Thomas later outlined an alternative to "instinct" theory in his doctrine of the "four wishes" – recognition, response, new experience, security – while stressing the importance of "attitudes" and the way individuals act on the basis of their "definition of a situation." This reorientation led him to emphasize the importance of "behavior documents" such as biographies, diaries, and medical reports, most notably in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20), written with Florian Znaniecki, a work that later fueled a debate between advocates of the "case study" and of "statistics."

Like Thomas's study of the "disorganization" of an immigrant community, other major works of the prewar era addressed the problem of social order. In *Folkways* (1906), Sumner argued that the most expeditious social practices first become "folkways," then gain coercive power as "mores," against which there is no appeal. In *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902) and *Social Organization* (1909), Charles Horton Cooley described the "looking glass self," whereby identity is created by a process of social interaction and natural "primary" groups are replaced by artificially created "secondary" ones. In *The Process of Government* (1907), Small's sometime student and critic Arthur Bentley provided an early statement of "interest group theory," just as Ogburn and others would translate Giddings's teachings into an administrative liberalism. In *Social Control* (1901), E. A. Ross provided a rationale for eugenics and immigration restriction.

British prewar sociology – statistics and survey work aside – was at best a footnote to developments on the Continent and in the United States. Breaking with utilitarian and laissez-faire traditions, British sociological theory combined evolutionism and philosophical Idealism in a "new liberal" faith that the modern social order held the materials for progress and individual self-fulfillment, given some guidance from government. Its chief representative was Leonard Hobhouse, professor of sociology at the London School of Economics (1907–29), the only chair in Britain until after World War II. In 1903, Hobhouse joined a coalition of theorists, social survey workers, and eugenicists – among them Geddes and Francis Galton – to form the London Sociological Association.

Britain nonetheless failed to develop a vital sociological tradition. A powerful force in the late nineteenth century, British philosophical Idealism contained the conceptual materials for a sociological theory that might have paralleled those of Durkheim and Weber. But the Idealist worldview in Britain was hostile to what Spencer and Kidd had defined as "sociology" and remained mired in the Hegelian conviction that the "state" was the basic unit



of modern society. The resistance of the older English universities to the new social sciences and the vitality of governmental and extra-university support for empirical studies also impeded the marriage of theory and practice.<sup>27</sup>

## INTERWAR YEARS

On the surface, American and European sociology during the interwar decades was a study in contrasts. In the United States, sociology experienced a rebirth in the work of the "Chicago School," while Columbia's influence continued through the work of its graduates. Philanthropic foundations funded much of interwar sociology, including the Lynds' *Middletown* (1929) and Gunnar Myrdal and associates' *An American Dilemma* (1944). In Europe, by contrast, there was a dispersal of energies as the founders' hope of uniting different levels of sociological analysis gave way to a separation of theory and research and to institutional fragmentation. In the end, however, sociology suffered setbacks on both sides of the Atlantic. During the 1930s Chicago declined in output and influence, and the profession as a whole coped with a loss of financial support and often-bitter infighting.

Newcomers won "Chicago sociology" its fame: Robert Park, a former newspaperman who arrived at Chicago in 1913; Ellsworth Faris, a former missionary who succeeded Small as departmental chair in 1925; Ernest Burgess, a sociologist of the family; and William Ogburn, author of *Social Change* (1922).<sup>28</sup> Chicago sociology was actually a mosaic, defined by individuals and generations. The urban ecology of Robert Park (1864–1944) and his students; the Park–Burgess textbook, *An Introduction to the Science of Society* (1921); and their combination of theory and firsthand study of urban settings initially gained the department national attention.<sup>29</sup> Park described cities in terms of a series of concentric zones, "natural" areas such as skid rows and rooming house districts. He described social interaction in terms of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation, a process that yields temporary peace among specific groups, but is constantly repeated as new groups make their own claims and move from the central ghettos to middle-class neighborhoods and suburbs. Since differences are never eliminated, individuals and groups maintain a measurable "social distance" from one another, a concept derived from Simmel.<sup>30</sup> Park garnered funds from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller

<sup>27</sup> Stefan Collini, "Sociology and Idealism in Britain, 1880–1920," *European Journal of Sociology*, 19 (1978), 3–50. Cf. Noel Annan, *The Curious Strength of Positivism in British Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

<sup>28</sup> Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Anthony J. Cortese, "The Rise, Hegemony, and Decline of the Chicago School of Sociology, 1892–1945," *Social Science Journal*, 32 (1995), 235–54; Jennifer Platt, "The Chicago School and Firsthand Data," *History of the Human Sciences*, 7 (1994), 57–80.

<sup>30</sup> Fred H. Matthews, *The Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1977).

Foundation, channeled them through an interdisciplinary committee, and worked with community agencies to further his research program on the city, race, and immigration.

A second element in the Chicago mosaic was the rigorously quantitative statistical sociology of William Ogburn (1886–1959), which gained ascendancy after his appointment in 1927 through the work of such students as Philip Hauser and Samuel Stouffer. For Ogburn, sociology was to be quantitative and value-neutral, a view he put into practice in influential statistical studies of legislation, voting, and social indicators; in his 1929 presidential address to the American Sociological Society, “The Folkways of a Scientific Sociology”; and as an advisor to governmental agencies during and after the New Deal.

A third and most enduring strand of Chicago sociology was “symbolic interactionism,” so named by Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) in 1937. In response to Ogburn’s objectivism, which he termed “science without concepts,” and Park’s drift toward what one sociologist has termed “instrumental positivism,”<sup>31</sup> Blumer argued that individuals and groups act on the basis of “meanings” that they attach to objects, creating symbolic systems used to communicate and analyze experience. Drawing on the work of George H. Mead and, by extension, of Thomas, symbolic interactionism was refined in the 1940s and 1950s by Blumer, Arnold Rose, and Erving Goffman, especially in Goffman’s widely read *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Against the structural-functionalist emphasis on the performance of externally defined social roles, symbolic interactionists stressed individual and interpersonal definition, thus providing a counterpoint to the Harvard-based sociology of Talcott Parsons.<sup>32</sup>

Chicago nonetheless declined as a sociological power in the 1930s. The Depression made the work of the Parkians seem less relevant; Rockefeller funding ended; and the world crisis of the late 1930s gave the pessimism of some European social theorists greater appeal.<sup>33</sup> The Columbia department, by contrast, created a second generation network of quantifiers, committed to making sociology rigorously “scientific,” the most prominent being James P. Lichtenberger (PhD 1910) and Stuart Rice (1924) at the University of Pennsylvania; Howard Odum (1910) at the University of North Carolina; F. Stuart Chapin (1911) at the University of Minnesota; and Ogburn (1912) at Chicago. The increasing influence of the educational foundations worked

<sup>31</sup> Bryant, *Positivism in Social Theory*, chap. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ross, *Origins of American Social Science*, pp. 428–48. On symbolic interaction, see J. David Lewis and Richard L. Smith, *American Sociology and Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Hans Joas, “Symbolic Interactionism,” in *Social Theory Today*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Jonathan H. Turner (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 82–115.

<sup>33</sup> Bulmer, *Chicago School*, pp. 205–6; Ruth Cavan, “Chicago School of Sociology,” *Urban Life*, 11 (1982–3), 407–20; Bernard Farber, “The Human Element: Sociology at Chicago,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 31 (July 1988), 354.

in the same direction. Science, typically equated with statistical analysis, provided a seemingly absolute standard in place of outworn customs and assumptions, now branded "subjective," while at the same time satisfying the grant givers' preference for "realistic" and politically uncontroversial projects.<sup>34</sup>

These developments occurred against a backdrop of broader changes within American sociology in the 1930s. Although foundation funding dropped sharply, it left a legacy of bitterness among sociologists who felt excluded or marginalized by a foundation-created "establishment" that included some of the leading quantifiers. The rise of fascism, although ignored by most American sociologists, contributed to mounting criticism of "value-free" scientism. Charles Ellwood's *Methods in Sociology* (1933) and Robert Lynd's *Knowledge for What?* (1939) attacked narrowly statistical work, while calls for a revival of "theory" created a climate for the future reception of Talcott Parsons's work.<sup>35</sup>

Internecine struggles and the increasing number of sociology faculty members and undergraduate courses together produced fragmentation. Meanwhile, other developments contributed to a postwar revival: new opportunities for government service; the increased sophistication of interviewing techniques, market research, and public opinion polling; and an influx of German and Austrian refugee scholars.

Continental sociology continued to produce accomplished individual theorists, although the swiftly changing political currents and the divide between academic theory and application-oriented research continued to impede institutional success. In France, chairs of sociology existed only at Bordeaux, the Sorbonne, and Strasbourg, the latter two occupied by Durkheim's principal heirs, Paul Fauconnet and Maurice Halbwachs. The centralized university system continued to withhold official recognition, while the changed political climate made both the conservative LePlayist tradition and Durkheim's non-clerical civic religion appear anachronistic. Yet, as Durkheim's heirs moved in two different directions, they sowed seeds that would eventually flower after World War II. One was the exploration of the collective mind and group morals, as in Fauconnet's study of sanctions and the work of Marcel Mauss, whose social anthropology was a spiritual forerunner of the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and others. A second was a more positivistic, statistical approach, as in Halbwachs's reexamination of Durkheim's *Suicide* and the work on wages of his colleague François Simiand. Inspired by Halbwachs's struggles with other disciplines and with German and American sociology – a combativeness solidly within the Durkheimian tradition – this emphasis on

<sup>34</sup> Bannister, *Sociology and Scientism*, chaps. 11–12; Turner and Turner, *Impossible Science*, chap. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Turner and Turner, *Impossible Science*, chap. 2; Edward Shils, "The Calling of Sociology," in his *The Calling of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Robert C. Bannister, "Principle, Politics, Profession," in *Sociology Responds to Fascism*, ed. Stephen P. Turner and Dirk Käsler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 172–213.

quantitative methodology kept alive a tradition that was to flourish again in the 1950s.<sup>36</sup>

In Germany, sociology appeared to thrive during the Weimar years as universities established chairs for distinguished incumbents: at Cologne, Leopold von Wiese, proponent of a "systematic" or "formal" sociology in the tradition of Simmel; at Frankfurt, Franz Oppenheimer, a follower of Gumplowicz who emphasized group processes; at Heidelberg, Karl Mannheim, chief representative of the sociology of knowledge, and the cultural sociologist Alfred Weber, younger brother of Max; and at Leipzig, Hans Freyer, a conservative who made important contributions to the history of sociology. On the eve of the Nazi takeover, Weimar sociology flowered in a number of important books, including Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1929). In Vienna, a group of researchers under Paul Lazarsfeld revived an empirical tradition that had a long history in German-language sociology, though it was rarely given university support or recognition. The later sociologies of Alfred Schutz and Norbert Elias, although not recognized for several decades, also had roots in the Weimar period.<sup>37</sup>

The creation of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in 1923, meanwhile, launched the peripatetic Frankfurt School, whose members established branches in Paris and Geneva before moving in 1934 to quarters provided by Columbia University in New York. Its members, many of them Jewish, included the director Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Leo Lowenthal. A common denominator was an animus against "positivism," a term used loosely to encompass the French nineteenth-century tradition, the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle of philosophers, and less rigorous American versions. In 1950, Horkheimer and other key members would return the Frankfurt School to Germany, where its tradition continued in the neo-Marxist "critical theory" of Jürgen Habermas. Although Adorno and others made important contributions to sociological research, subsequent battles between "positivists" and "critical theorists" during the 1960s would deepen a divide between theory and empirical work that continued to blight German sociology.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the initiatives of the 1920s, Weimar sociology as a whole remained mostly promise at the time of Nazi ascendancy. Proposals to make sociology the centerpiece of university reform met with vigorous opposition

<sup>36</sup> John E. Clark, "Sociology and Related Disciplines between the Wars," in *Sociological Domain*, ed. Besnard, chap. 12.

<sup>37</sup> M. Rainer Lepius, "Sociology in the Interwar Period," in *Modern German Sociology* ed. Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld, and Nico Stehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Dirk Käsler, "In Search of Respectability: The Controversy over the Destination of Sociology during the Conventions of the German Sociological Society, 1910–1930," in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present. A Research Annual*, ed. Robert Alun Jones and Henrika Kuklick (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

from related disciplines, while the major impetus for sociology came from the "folk school" movement, labor courts, trade unions, and other nonuniversity sources of the sort that supported Lazarsfeld's studies. Although sociology became involved in debates over the imposition of a democratic political culture, sociologists themselves, unlike the Durkheimians of the Third Republic, failed to create an image of their discipline that supported the democratic program, nor could they resist the Nazi takeover. By 1938, two-thirds of all sociology teachers had been expelled from the universities. "Nazi sociology" brought a revival of holistic, idealist, and biologized approaches, with an emphasis on racial theory, the folk, and community – all intellectual dead ends. Meanwhile, a "realistic" sociology of area research, town planning, and labor policy became a branch of state administration.

Ironically, Nazi persecution laid a basis for the international postwar revival in which German emigrés played a major role. To Hans Gerth, Reinhard Bendix, Lewis Coser, and Kurt Wolff was left the task of introducing the international community to the work of Simmel and Weber; to Lazarsfeld that of transmitting the German empirical tradition; and to Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno that of explaining fascism and the "German catastrophe."

#### INTERNATIONAL REVIVAL AND AMERICAN HEGEMONY, 1945–1960

The climate for sociology improved dramatically after 1945. In the major Western countries the discipline established itself solidly in universities, in departments within government and industry, and in public esteem. Contributing to this renaissance was a general enthusiasm for applied science, disillusionment with Stalin-era Marxism, and the rise of the welfare state. As historical and philosophical studies became overtly specialized, educated public audiences increasingly turned to the social sciences.

Although these influences operated universally, national differences persisted. In the United States, university departments played a dominant role, creating an American research model that soon influenced work in most other countries. In France and Germany, university teaching and research institutes proceeded on separate paths, although research gained considerable support and sometimes academic status. In Britain, the teaching of sociology spread beyond the London School of Economics, but not until the 1960s to Oxford and Cambridge, as sociology struggled toward a closer relation with empirical work in the survey tradition. Prominent newcomers included the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, Latin America, and Japan.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Maus, *Short History*, chaps. 17–19.

Harvard and Columbia followed similarly disjointed paths toward postwar dominance. Appointed at Harvard in 1930, Pitrim Sorokin (1889–1968) was already an established scholar when he emigrated from Russia after the Revolution, but *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937–41), his magnum opus, was a sprawling review of 2,500 years of human history, in the tradition of Toynbee and Spengler, that left few openings for development by graduate students. He was also organizationally inept, and by the mid-1930s so disillusioned with Stalinism that he appeared to be soft on fascism.<sup>40</sup>

Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), in contrast to Sorokin, began his academic career inauspiciously with a ten-year stint as an untenured instructor. Although his education at Amherst (1920–4), the London School of Economics, and Heidelberg (1924–6) introduced him to the work of Veblen, Radcliffe-Brown, and Weber, it left him with a foreign doctorate and an uncertain position in a Harvard Economics Department that was less interested in theory than in certain technical issues that he found boring. Yet Parsons finally proved to have strengths that Sorokin lacked.<sup>41</sup>

Developing his theory in stages over several decades, Parsons drew on the classical European theorists most American sociologists had ignored. But, without acknowledging any American influences, he preserved an emphasis on conscious behavior, or voluntarism, that was squarely within the tradition of Cooley, G. H. Mead, and Thomas. During his first two decades at Harvard (1927–47), he elaborated this voluntaristic “action” theory in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), tracing it to convergence in the work of Alfred Marshall, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Vilfredo Pareto. Attacking the utilitarian, rationalistic conception of the individual, Parsons argued that society is held together by common values that orient individual choices of means and ends in the pursuit of goals. Although biological and environmental constraints limit accomplishment, social action must be understood sociologically, not reduced to biology or psychology.

As head of a new Department of Social Relations (1946), Parsons amplified his position. His “systems theory” in *The Social System* (1951), or “structural-functionalism” (a term Parsons disliked, favoring “structural analysis”), treated social structures – institutions and the norms that sustained them – in terms of the functions they served. From the late 1950s onward, he refined systems theory to deal with the interaction of social subsystems and to develop a cybernetic model of the ways in which the culture controls social change, interests already evident in his earlier work on the professions.

Parsons’s voluntarism enhanced his appeal to audiences that might otherwise have been deterred by his opaque prose and muddy definitions.

<sup>40</sup> Barry Johnston, *Pitrim A. Sorokin: An Intellectual Biography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Francois Bourricaud, *The Sociology of Talcott Parsons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Peter Hamilton, *Talcott Parsons* (London: Tavistock, 1983); Ken Menzies, *Talcott Parsons and the Social Image of Man* (London: Routledge, 1976).

To graduate students, his theory appeared to be original and open, inviting countless future projects. Institutionally, he effectively transcended the Chicago–Columbia divide. Presented in the language of European social theory, his antipositivism effectively positioned him against both classical economics and the statistical objectivism of Giddings's students, while at the same time upstaging the Chicago functionalist tradition. His personal convictions were also suited to the changing political climate. A left-of-center liberal, he attacked laissez faire in the 1930s, supporting the New Deal's social welfare and regulatory measures. At the end of the decade, he warned against the dangers of Nazism and joined anti-isolationist faculty groups supporting mobilization. In the early 1940s, his analysis of fascism was the most penetrating until that time by an American sociologist. His systems theory, so critics later charged, was likewise well suited to the administrative corporate liberalism of the 1950s.<sup>42</sup>

Columbia was soon drawn into Parsons's orbit, although not before Robert MacIver (1882–1970) failed to create a different sociological tradition there, for many of the same reasons as for Sorokin's failure at Harvard. Born in Scotland, MacIver studied classics at Edinburgh before accepting a post in political science in Canada in 1915. Although well received, his major works from *The Community* (1917) to *Society* (1931) straddled the divide between political philosophy and sociology. He had few disciples, a colleague later observed, because he possessed no distinctive method or model of analysis beyond his own genius.<sup>43</sup>

As chair from 1929 to 1950, however, MacIver rebuilt the Columbia department, appointing Robert K. Merton (b. 1910) and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1901–1976). A student of Parsons, Merton termed his mentor's systematic functionalism "premature," a philosophy rather than a method for testing hypotheses empirically. In *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949) he argued that earlier functionalism, particularly that of the British anthropologists A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, had overemphasized the degree of integration within societies: No sociocultural item was universally functional within any system, and there were no indispensable requirements for social integration, but rather a range of available alternatives. A corollary was a distinction between recognized and intended (manifest) functions, and unrecognized and unintended (latent) ones. Merton developed "middle range" theories such as "reference groups" and "relative deprivation" to analyze the family, the university, science, and bureaucracy.

The Austrian-born Lazarsfeld, after emigrating to the United States in 1933, founded and directed the Office of Radio Research at Princeton, New Jersey

<sup>42</sup> William Buxton, *Talcott Parsons and the Capitalist Nation-State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Mirra Komarovsky, "MacIver," *American Sociologist*, 6 (1971), 51–3; Leon Bramson, ed., *Robert M. MacIver* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

(1937–43), later the Bureau of Applied Social Research. In 1940 he joined Merton in the Columbia Sociology Department. In influential statistical studies of *The People's Choice* (1944) and *Voting* (1954), he analyzed the relation between political and popular culture. After 1945, a Merton–Lazarsfeld collaboration attempted to “operationalize” structural–functional theory, creating a Columbia renaissance and an informal alliance with Harvard, where Parsons and Samuel Stouffer had a similar collaboration.<sup>44</sup>

Wartime issues inspired such major collaborative efforts as Dorothy S. Thomas and colleagues' *The Spoilage* (1946), Samuel Stouffer and colleagues' *The American Soldier* (1949), and Theodor Adorno and colleagues' *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). Sociology also reached a wider audience in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* (1951), and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), as “status,” “norm,” “role,” and countless other sociological terms entered the American vocabulary.

Although Parsonsian/Mertonian functionalism thus dominated American sociology between 1945 and the early 1960s, one should not exaggerate the Parsonsian monopoly or American international influence. The revival of sociology in postwar Europe was greatly influenced by American models, but it also had indigenous roots in the needs of the emerging welfare states and was built on older national traditions.

By 1945, despite Durkheim's influence on related disciplines, France still had no specifically sociological instruction or practitioners, although several professors taught courses or pursued research bearing the label. The Centre d'Etudes Sociologiques in 1946, under the Russian-born George Gurvitch, was a gathering point for historians, geographers, and others interested in “empirical” research in their own areas. The appointment of Raymond Aron and Jean Stoetzel to chairs in sociology at the Sorbonne in the mid-1950s, the provision of state funding, and the creation of a publications system led to an expansion of sociological research and new interest in American models, earlier examples of which had included studies of industrial workers in the late 1940s.<sup>45</sup>

After the disastrous hiatus of the Nazi era, German sociology revived with the reconstitution of the German Sociological Society in 1946, the publication of von Wiese's *Studien zur Soziologie* (1948), the return of prominent exiles, among them René König, Horkheimer, and Adorno, and the reestablishment of the Institute in Frankfurt in 1950. University departments of sociology, however, played a relatively minor role. Through the 1950s, sociology continued to be taught under the aegis of other disciplines, in

<sup>44</sup> Allen H. Barton, “Paul Lazarsfeld and Applied Social Research,” *Social Science History*, 3 (1979), 4–44; Anthony Oberschall, “Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the History of Empirical Research,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 14 (1978), 199–206.

<sup>45</sup> Jean-Michel Chapoulie, “The Second Birth of French Sociology,” paper presented at the Twelfth World Congress of Sociology, Madrid, 9–13 July 1990.



research institutes, or by faculties outside the university structure funded by industrial and commercial interests. During the 1960s and after, sociological authors – Adorno, Horkheimer, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Habermas – gained international attention, although it was as social theorists or philosophical anthropologists, not as sociologists per se.<sup>46</sup>

A split persisted between a mainstream sociological practice based on American examples and a body of theory with roots in German tradition. The first produced more empirical studies in a decade than German sociology had produced in its entire history: studies of public opinion, community, the family, industrial relations, education. Although some of these studies were guided by theory – industrial studies, for example, by the work of the British-trained Dahrendorf – the major theoretical debates took place apart from empirical work. Returning to traditional themes of German sociology, conservatives in the anti-Enlightenment tradition, such as Arnold Gehlen and Niklas Luhmann, probed issues of rationalization and modernization, while “critical theorists” of the revived Frankfurt School subjected the Enlightenment tradition to critical scrutiny.

In 1976, the sociologist Robin Williams pointed with pride to American sociology’s postwar accomplishments: the accumulation of data in the many subfields – politics, education, the military, health; the use of new methods – participant observation, scaling, multivariate analysis; and, above all, the new ways of thinking about human society – a heightened “awareness of irony, ambiguity and paradox,” a recognition that “good intentions produce undesired results and vice versa,” and “a more complex and steady view of social realities than can be found in either utopian or cynical orientations.”<sup>47</sup> By this time, however, these values and the assumptions behind them were already under siege.

### THE 1960s AND AFTER

The 1960s spelled the end of “modern” sociology. In the United States, Parsons’s hegemony and Merton’s “middle range” compromise gave way to a politically charged humanist/positivist divide. Conflict theorists attacked Parsons for ignoring the reality of force and repression, notably C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) and Alvin Gouldner in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970). Symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists, and exchange theorists took aim at Parsons’s rigid model of human behavior and alleged blindness to the complexities of cognition and reality construction. French neo-Marxists argued that no single, abstract social system is common to all societies, but rather that historically specific

<sup>46</sup> Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld, and Nico Stehr, “The Social and Intellectual Organization of German Sociology since 1945,” in *Modern German Sociology*, ed. Meja, Misgeld, and Stehr, pp. 1–56.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, “*Sociology in America*,” pp. 91–7.

social systems reflect underlying "forces of production." A new breed of positivists, armed with computers and mathematical sophistication, insisted that Parsons's theories be tested empirically. Feminists charged that functionalism reinforced existing gender roles. Sociobiologists raised the perennial specter of biological determinism.<sup>48</sup>

Contextualist historians meanwhile told a story of cycles rather than of progressive advance, with success a product not of universal truths but of institutional and ideological factors. Appeals to "science" appeared to be at best discipline-legitimizing ideology, at worst a cloak for socially reactionary ends. Although sociology's defenders could reply that their discipline had immensely enriched the social vocabulary, amassed information useful to its diverse patrons and constituencies, and refashioned rather than abandoned the liberal tradition, the critics appeared to have carried the day. By the end of the 1970s, ironically, the winners were not the "radical" contenders but workaday methodologists, now armed with computers, backed by a mathematics lobby working through the Social Science Research Council, and dedicated to evaluating governmental programs quantitatively. Within the discipline as a whole, the result was fragmentation and what one observer has termed an "interregnum."<sup>49</sup>

A decade later, this challenge threatened more than a simple repetition of earlier cycles. As conflict and varieties of neo-Marxist sociologies gave way to poststructuralist/postmodernist approaches, critics deepened the challenge to sociology's basic tenets: its claim to provide universal knowledge, its emphasis on order and system, and its privileging of "expert" over lay understandings of society.<sup>50</sup> At issue was not just one or another theory or methodology, but the very concepts of "society" and the "social." "[The] death of the social," wrote the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard of sociology, in an extreme statement of this position, would also be its own death.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the divide between positivistic policy research and varieties of postmodernist theory undermined what remained of the cooperation between theory and research that had characterized the discipline during its most productive periods. While some sociologists urged rejection of postmodernism altogether, others noted hopefully that postmodernists address issues that have always engaged the sociological imagination: the major structural transformations in Western society, their impact on social interaction and identity, and the need for new methods and strategies. In this climate, the future of the discipline appeared to be as uncertain as it had been at the start of the academic era.

<sup>48</sup> Mullins and Mullins, *Theory Groups*, chaps. 7–11.

<sup>49</sup> Wiley, "Dominating Theories."

<sup>50</sup> Peter Wagner, "Sociology," in *The History of Humanity*, ed. UNESCO, vol. 7: *The Twentieth Century*, (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>51</sup> David R. Dickens and Andrea Fontana, eds., *Postmodernism and Social Inquiry* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).