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# Sociology and Classical Liberalism

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**T**he sociology profession in the United States is a large tent, displaying methods, purposes, and topics in great variety. Variety is severely truncated, however, in the matter of political ideology. It has long been observed that sociologists range from center to far left (in all varieties). There have never been more than a few classical liberals, libertarians, and conservatives in sociology since the days of William Graham Sumner. Today, their presence is nil, as shown by our recent survey of American Sociological Association (ASA) members. The classical-liberal character is virtually absent, and any few classical-liberal denizens probably keep their views at least half hidden. We venture to say that self-reinforcing sorting mechanisms now make the discipline unapproachable by anyone who is unabashedly classically liberal.

We advocate the development of a classical-liberal character in sociology. Even social democrats should recognize classical liberalism as a venerable tradition. They should recognize that its antistatist sensibilities remain a vibrant and valuable part of the general political culture. To say that classical liberalism is underrepresented in sociology would be a vast understatement. *Forbidden* might be more fitting. The lack of classical liberalism, in our view, has worked to the detriment of sociology and the public purposes that sociology presumably should be fulfilling.

Some people may think that sociology and classical liberalism just don't mix. Leftist sociologists may suspect that the "individualism" of classical liberals blinds them

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to some of the fundamental categories and concerns of sociology, such as social integration, solidarity, community, identity, and alienation. Classical liberals may suspect that sociology is inherently holistic, collectivist, or functionalist and therefore inherently hostile to the idea of depoliticizing social affairs. Our position is that there is no essential tension between sociology and classical liberalism. Many classical-liberal formulations have powerful application to sociological topics, and many sociological insights and literatures can enrich classical liberalism. These claims are not speculation. Their validity is evident in classical-liberal works by Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner, and many others. Such figures might have loomed large in sociology, alongside Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, if sociology had developed in a way that was not so entirely antipathetic to libertarian ideas.

This article has three parts. First, we relate recent controversies within the sociology profession to show that some sociologists are very critical of the profession's ideological character. Second, we summarize the results of our survey of ASA members, providing hard data that shows the almost complete absence of classical liberals in the organization. Third, we sketch a few substantive ideas to indicate the promise of classical-liberal sociology.

### **Recent Controversy in the Sociology Profession**

Sociologists have excelled in subjecting themselves to sociological investigation. Some of this self-scrutiny has expressed discomfort about ideological uniformity. For example, in 1994, Seymour Martin Lipset published a rather lugubrious article about the state of sociology. We are confident that Lipset would agree that the virtual absence of classical liberals and conservatives in the field has allowed leftist elements to become overbearing and domineering, a domination bordering on groupthink. Peter L. Berger says that “[t]he ideologues who have been in the ascendancy for the last thirty years have deformed science into an instrument of agitation and propaganda (the Communists used to call this ‘agit-prop’) invariably for causes on the left of the ideological spectrum” (2002, 29). The ideological drift of professional sociology has been criticized by others, including Horowitz (1993) and Marsland (1988), the latter focusing on the United Kingdom. These problems show themselves plainly in recent events.

With more than thirteen thousand members currently, the ASA is probably representative of professional sociology in the United States. A great deal of controversy surrounds the ASA's advocacy and politicking. For example, from 2003 to 2005, the ASA has:

- Submitted a brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of the University of Michigan's affirmative-action policy.
- Passed (in 2003) by membership vote a resolution calling for an immediate end of U.S. military action in Iraq.

- Issued a statement urging defeat of a California proposition that would have ended public agencies' abilities to collect data on citizens' race, ethnicity, and national origin.
- Passed by membership vote a resolution opposing a U.S. constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages.
- Issued a statement condemning Harvard president Lawrence Summers for his remarks about the possibility that innate differences play a role in determining women's representation in science and engineering.

The ASA leadership apparently feels that its members' views are sufficiently uniform for the association to promulgate advocacy. Imagine that you are a classical liberal or conservative who favors "color-blind" government policy and who feels that *maybe* innate differences between men and women can help explain achievement differences—and that your professional association is stumping against those sensibilities. In its politicking, the association shows disregard for differing perspectives, even driving them away or not allowing them.

The left-wing activism has been closely associated with "public sociology," an agenda championed by University of California sociology professor Michael Burawoy, the ASA's 2003–2004 president, who delivered a presidential address titled "For Public Sociology" (2005b). We find many sound insights in public sociology, such as that social sciences differ from the natural sciences in the way that learning is imparted and utilized—the social sciences are inherently cultural and "reflexive"—but we also see the significant call for sociologists, with ASA support, to engage in direct advocacy and politicking. Although Burawoy assured us that public sociology "has no intrinsic normative valence" (2005b, 8), a call to arms—especially when wielded by the nationwide organization—makes sense only when the membership will not be fighting each other. He also made amply clear that the agenda is leftist: "The aspiration for public sociology is stronger and its realization ever more difficult, as sociology has moved left and the world has moved right" (2005b, 6). He seemed to be saying that the more that we sociologists fail to represent those who pay our salaries, the more we ought to propagate ideas they oppose. In another manifesto for public sociology, in *Critical Sociology*, Burawoy is explicit about the Marxist lineage of public sociology and franker about the agenda: "We might say that critical engagement with real utopias is today an integral part of the project of *sociological socialism*. It is a vision of socialism that places *human society, or social humanity* at its organizing center, a vision that was central to Marx but was too often lost before it was again picked up by Gramsci and Polanyi [citation omitted]. If public sociology is to have a progressive impact it will have to hold itself continuously accountable to some such vision of democratic socialism" (2005a, 325, emphasis in original).

Another telling aspect of the public-sociology campaign is the lack of recognition of what would seem to be public sociology's leading success story—namely,

the neoconservatives' impact on public debate and policymaking. Significant figures in the neoconservative movement include the sociologists Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Irving Louis Horowitz, among others, none of whom seems to get much if any notice by the advocates of public sociology.

The ASA's activism and promulgation of activist doctrine have provoked reaction. Satoshi Kanazawa resigned from the ASA and from his position as coeditor of *The Agora*, the newsletter of the ASA's "Rationality and Society" section. He explained his reasons as follows:

However, as I become increasingly less "American" [he is now based in London] and "Sociological," I have become less fit for a job of editing a newsletter for a section of the American Sociological Association. I have also become progressively more uncomfortable with the politicization of the ASA: The Iraq war resolution, the gay marriage resolution, the Burawoy presidency. However, absolutely the last straw for me was the recent statement, passed unanimously by the ASA Council, on the Larry Summers affair [citation deleted]. As an evolutionary psychologist, I cannot afford to be part of a political organization which willingly promotes and spreads such a lie. I have therefore decided to resign from the ASA. (2005)

Kanazawa's unease as an evolutionist speaks of sociologists' long-standing aversion to sociobiology and other evolutionary research (Hopcroft 2005)—research that often upsets leftist ideas and sentiments.

In 2004, François Nielson, a sociology professor at Chapel Hill, published in *Social Forces* a thoughtful and biting criticism of Burawoy, public sociology, and ASA activism. He argued forcefully that Burawoy is wrong to impute a common political agenda to sociologists, that public sociology is a watered-down version of Marxist activism, and that, at any rate, direct activism is not only outside the ASA's purview, but embarrassing to and destructive of the association's scholarly and professional purposes. Nielson added that "[p]rofessional sociologists may well view the public sociologists' emphasis on moral and political values as a potential motive, and ready-made pretense, for disregarding professional standards of scholarship and [for] persecuting researchers who have dared come up with politically incorrect findings" (2004, 6).

The same issue of *Social Forces* carried an article by Charles R. Tittle, "The Arrogance of Public Sociology." Tittle, a sociology professor at North Carolina State, wrote that public-sociology advocates "seem to think that what is 'socially just' is clear and easily agreed upon among people with good will and sociological training." Yet "sociologists are as likely to be wrong as right and in the process they can easily cause damage" (2004, 1640, 1641).

ASA trends have another vocal critic in University of South Carolina sociology professor Mathieu Deflem. In 2004, he wrote in the ASA's newsletter *Footnotes*:

The recent abuse of the ASA resolutions process and the political drift it betrays in the ASA are indicative of a sad development in contemporary U.S. sociology. . . . Although the resolution [concerning gay marriage] was presented as “member-initiated,” it was in fact ASA President Burawoy who first initiated the idea in March 2004 when he emailed the chairs and chairs-elect of the ASA sections on Sex and Gender, Sexualities, and Family and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Caucus upon discussion of the issue with the ASA Council. (Although a constitutional issue was raised, the Sociology of Law section was not informed.) Even in presenting the resolution, the ASA President and Council violated procedures of democratic governance, acting as some mighty politburo which feels that the “full membership should have the opportunity to express itself” only after the Council made sure to express itself on a resolution it had instigated. . . . But in the ASA there is little or no debate allowed. Worse yet, judging from some of the private emails I have received, there are several people in the ASA—especially graduate students—who are afraid to speak out publicly for fear of retaliation. As the ASA police is already here, I cannot entirely blame them. . . . The non-sociological drift in the ASA entails a corruption of sociology to further a particularistic political agenda. President Burawoy is clear about his political intentions. (9)

Deflem also decried editor Judith Blau's decision to alter editorial practices at the journal *Social Forces* (which is associated, not with the ASA, but with the Southern Sociological Society) to include a new section devoted to solicited works in public sociology and a new e-publications devoted to public-sociology articles: “fresh, new, provocative—but without having gone through the lengthy review process” (Blau 2004, 459–60). Deflem criticized the new editorial regime, adding: “Public sociologists invoke discussion, to be sure, but only within the confines of a platform that shares a basic understanding of public sociology as an attempt to connect sociology with selected matters of public debate. . . . Public sociology is a form of political activism and an attempt to redefine sociology accordingly” (2005, 13).<sup>1</sup> And he announced the cancellation of his subscription to the journal. He now maintains a “Save Sociology” Web site ([savesociology.org](http://savesociology.org)), which he “developed in response to the various forms of attack on sociology as an academic discipline, especially since the advent of so-called ‘public’ sociology.”

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1. Recently, a new editor of *Social Forces* has been appointed, and the public-sociology section is to be terminated.

## Hard Data on ASA Ideology

The foregoing evidence makes clear that the ASA leadership is staunchly left-wing. What about the rank and file? According to François Nielson, “Notwithstanding Burawoy’s blanket assessment of the sociological profession as being politically ‘left,’ the moral-political agenda of individual sociologists are diverse” (2004, 4). Is that claim true?

Our survey of ASA members deals with this question of ideological diversity in the ASA. In March and April 2003, we surveyed 1,000 randomly selected U.S. ASA members. The survey controller received back 351 nonblank surveys, a response rate (adjusting for postal returns, and so on) of 35.2 percent.<sup>2</sup>

### *More Than 85 percent of ASA Members Vote Democrat or Green*

The voting question was worded as follows: To which political party have the candidates you’ve voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged? The responses are shown in table 1.

The Democrat to Republican ratio is 16 to 1. A 2001 Brookings Institution survey of ASA members with 115 respondents found a ratio of 47 to 1. In a smaller 1999 sample of sociology professors, Rothman, Lichter, and Nevitte (2005) found fifty-nine Democrats and zero Republicans. These findings agree with voter-registration investigations. For example, Cardiff and Klein (forthcoming) found that in the sociology departments of eleven California universities there are eighty-eight registered Democrats and two registered Republicans. The voter-registration data help to assure us that the ASA is representative of sociology professors in general.

The survey was also administered to five other social-science associations. Of the six fields surveyed, voting Democratic is most preponderant among the anthropologists and sociologists. In each field, the Democrat to Republican ratio is greater than 15 to 1. The range in the history, political and legal philosophy, and political science fields is 6 to 1. The least preponderant difference is in economics, but even there the ratio is about 2.5 to 1. Most of the ratios go up significantly, however, when we consider only the ASA’s *academic* members.<sup>3</sup>

### *Republicans Are Sorted Out of Academia*

Our data speak to the controversial question of whether Republicans tend to be sorted out of academia. We asked whether the respondent’s primary employment is (or had

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2. At the Survey Homepage, one may view a sample survey and documents explaining the methods, independent control, and certification of the survey results. The Survey Homepage URL is <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/klein/survey.htm>.

3. For an analysis of ASA and American Anthropological Association members’ policy views, broken down by voting, see Klein and Stern 2004; for a more general comparison of survey results from the six associations, see Klein and Stern forthcoming; for some provisional evidence that there is a Democrat membership bias in such associations (the American Economics Association is investigated), see Klein 2006.

**Table 1**  
**To Which Political Party Have the Candidates You've  
 Voted for in the Past Ten Years Mostly Belonged?**

|  | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Democratic                                       | 288        | 82.1         |
| Republican                                       | 18         | 5.1          |
| Green  | 8          | 2.3          |
| Libertarian                                      | 0          | 0.0          |
| <b>Respondents checking more than one option</b> |            |              |
| Green/ Democratic                                | 5          | 1.4          |
| Democratic/Republican                            | 0          | 0.0          |
| Libertarian/Republican                           | 1          | 0.3          |
| Diffuse (checked 3 or more)                      | 5          | 1.4          |
| Other (w/o comment)                              | 4          | 1.1          |
| Nonresponse                                      | 18         | 5.1          |
| Do not vote                                      | 0          | 0.0          |
| Cannot vote                                      | 4          | 1.1          |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>351</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

been) academic or other areas of employment (public sector, private sector, or independent research). Correspondingly, we sorted by whether a respondent is in or out of academics (table 2).

Table 2 shows that the number of ASA members in academia is more than four times that of those outside of academia. The difference between the Democrat-to-Republican ratios in academia and not in academia is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. If the ratios we found are reliable, they would mean that, *although a Democratic-voting ASA member has a 22.2 percent chance of working outside of academia, a Republican-voting ASA member has a 55.6 percent chance of working outside of academia*. The mechanisms at work might be ideological discrimination or self-sorting. All respondents are ASA members—85 percent with Ph.D.s—so clearly there is more going on than the alleged noninterest of Republicans in ideas and scholarship.

**Table 2**  
**Republicans Are More Likely to**  
**Work Outside of Academia (N = 297)**

|                  | ASA member is employed in |                 | % outside<br>academia |
|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|                  | Academia                  | Not in academia |                       |
| Votes Democratic | 224                       | 64              | 22.2                  |
| Votes Republican | 8                         | 10              | 55.6                  |
| D-to-R ratio     | 28 to 1                   | 6.4 to 1        | —                     |

### Policy Views: The Substance of Ideological Character

Our specific concern in this article is with classical liberalism, and one might observe that Republicans typically are not classical liberal, so their absence from sociology is not germane to the main question. Moreover, one might argue that Democrats can be classical liberal, or at least politically diverse. Our data on the eighteen policy questions we asked show, however, that classical liberalism is virtually absent from the ASA.

For the eighteen questions about public-policy issues, the following query about tariffs shows the format:

Tariffs on imported goods to protect American industries and jobs:

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| support<br>strongly      | support<br>mildly        | have mixed<br>feelings   | oppose<br>mildly         | oppose<br>strongly       | have no<br>opinion       |
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |                          |

The numbers 1 through 5 did not appear in the survey. They show how we weighted each response when creating an index (or mean response).

We present the results on the eighteen policy questions in three groups: economic regulations (table 3), regulation of personal choices (table 4), and role of government (table 5).

On tariffs (table 3), sociologists are distributed around the center position and lean toward opposition, but they are generally supporters of all the other economic regulations, and most are strong supporters. We see in table 4 that sociologists are



**Table 3**  
**Sociologists' Views on Economic Regulations**  
**N = 351, Frequency (Percentage)**

|   | 1                       | 2                     | 3                          | 4                    | 5                      |                        |                    |                          |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Government Activism</b>                        | <b>Support strongly</b> | <b>Support mildly</b> | <b>Have mixed feelings</b> | <b>Oppose mildly</b> | <b>Oppose strongly</b> | <b>Have no opinion</b> | <b>No response</b> | <b>Mean value (St.D)</b> |
| Tariffs to protect American industries            | 18 (5.1)                | 62 (17.7)             | 109 (31.1)                 | 87 (24.8)            | 66 (18.8)              | 3 (0.9)                | 6 (1.7)            | 3.35 (1.14)              |
| Minimum wage laws                                 | 305 (86.9)              | 20 (5.7)              | 15 (4.3)                   | 4 (1.1)              | 2 (0.6)                | 0 (0.0)                | 5 (1.4)            | 1.20 (0.62)              |
| Occupational safety regulations (OSHA)            | 306 (87.2)              | 29* (8.3)             | 8 (2.3)                    | 3 (0.9)              | 0 (0.0)                | 0 (0.0)                | 5 (1.4)            | 1.15 (0.48)              |
| Pharmaceutical market regulation (FDA)            | 265 (75.5)              | 42 (12.0)             | 30 (8.5)                   | 5 (1.4)              | 2 (0.6)                | 2 (0.6)                | 5 (1.4)            | 1.36 (0.75)              |
| Air and water regulation (EPA)                    | 318 (90.6)              | 23 (6.6)              | 3 (0.9)                    | 2 (0.6)              | 0 (0.0)                | 0 (0.0)                | 5 (1.4)            | 1.10 (0.38)              |
| <b>Economic Regulation Index, Mean (and St.D)</b> |                         |                       |                            |                      |                        |                        |                    | <b>1.63 (0.41)</b>       |

\*One respondent checked both “strongly support” and “mildly support”; counted as “mildly support.”

strong supporters of government restrictions on discrimination and guns, but are quite mixed on drugs, prostitution and gambling laws.

The forms of government activism most opposed by sociologists are the tightening of immigration controls and military action abroad (table 5). They are more centered on government ownership of enterprise. They generally support foreign aid, monetary policy, and fiscal policy. Most sociologists strongly support redistribution and the government production of schooling.

**Table 4**  
**Sociologists' Views on Public Policies Concerning Regulations**  
**of Personal Choices N = 351, Frequency (Percentage)**

|  | 1                       | 2                     | 3                          | 4                    | 5                      |                        |                    |                          |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Government Activism</b>                             | <b>Support strongly</b> | <b>Support mildly</b> | <b>Have mixed feelings</b> | <b>Oppose mildly</b> | <b>Oppose strongly</b> | <b>Have no opinion</b> | <b>No response</b> | <b>Mean value (St.D)</b> |
| Discrimination controls                                | 315<br>(89.7)           | 9<br>(2.6)            | 15<br>(4.3)                | 4<br>(1.1)           | 3<br>(0.9)             | 0<br>(0.0)             | 5<br>(1.4)         | 1.18<br>(0.64)           |
| Controls on "hard" drugs                               | 110<br>(31.3)           | 58<br>(16.5)          | 78*<br>(22.2)              | 47<br>(13.4)         | 46<br>(13.1)           | 1<br>(0.3)             | 11<br>(3.1)        | 2.58<br>(1.40)           |
| Prostitution controls                                  | 41<br>(11.7)            | 52<br>(14.8)          | 105<br>(29.9)              | 78<br>(22.2)         | 65<br>(18.5)           | 2<br>(1.6)             | 8<br>(2.3)         | 3.22<br>(1.25)           |
| Gambling restrictions                                  | 59<br>(16.8)            | 87<br>(24.8)          | 85<br>(24.2)               | 59<br>(16.8)         | 45<br>(12.8)           | 8<br>(2.3)             | 8<br>(2.3)         | 2.82<br>(1.28)           |
| Gun control  | 255<br>(72.6)           | 37<br>(10.5)          | 22<br>(6.3)                | 12<br>(3.4)          | 15<br>(4.3)            | 0<br>(0.0)             | 10<br>(2.9)        | 1.52<br>(1.06)           |
| "Regulation of Personal Choice" Index, Mean (and St.D) |                         |                       |                            |                      |                        |                        |                    | 2.26<br>(0.72)           |

\*One respondent checked both "mildly support" and "mildly oppose"; counted as "have mixed feelings."

Overall, sociologists overwhelming support (most of them strongly) economic interventions, gun control, redistribution, government schooling, and discrimination controls. That is, they are predominately left-wing.

### **There Are Virtually No Classical Liberals in the ASA**

Classical liberalism is a political persuasion that is extremely suspicious of government intervention across the board. Thus, classical liberals would usually (but not necessarily always) respond to the eighteen forms of government activism with "oppose

**Table 5**  
**Sociologists' Views on Public Issues Concerning the**  
**Role of Government N = 351, Frequency (Percentage)**

|  | 1                       | 2                     | 3                          | 4                    | 5                      |                        |                    |                           |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Government Activism</b>   | <b>Support strongly</b> | <b>Support mildly</b> | <b>Have mixed feelings</b> | <b>Oppose mildly</b> | <b>Oppose strongly</b> | <b>Have no opinion</b> | <b>No response</b> | <b>Mean value (St. D)</b> |
| Government ownership of enterprise   | 43<br>(12.3)            | 62<br>(17.7)          | 119<br>(33.9)              | 51<br>(14.5)         | 60<br>(17.1)           | 5<br>(1.4)             | 11<br>(3.1)        | 3.07<br>(1.25)            |
| Redistribution   | 243<br>(69.2)           | 57<br>(16.2)          | 27<br>(7.7)                | 6<br>(1.7)           | 4<br>(1.1)             | 5<br>(1.4)             | 9<br>(2.6)         | 1.43<br>(0.81)            |
| Government production of schooling (K–12)  | 218<br>(62.1)           | 33*<br>(9.4)          | 37<br>(10.5)               | 10<br>(2.8)          | 13<br>(3.7)            | 7<br>(2.0)             | 33<br>(9.4)        | 1.15<br>(0.48)            |
| Tuning the economy by monetary policy  | 104<br>(29.6)           | 119<br>(33.9)         | 74<br>(21.1)               | 16<br>(4.6)          | 3<br>(0.9)             | 21<br>(6.0)            | 14<br>(4.0)        | 2.04<br>(0.92)            |
| Tuning the economy by fiscal policy  | 108<br>(30.8)           | 119<br>(33.9)         | 67<br>(19.1)               | 17<br>(4.8)          | 5<br>(1.4)             | 25<br>(7.1)            | 10<br>(2.9)        | 2.03<br>(0.96)            |
| Tighter controls on immigration  | 42<br>(12.0)            | 38<br>(10.8)          | 63<br>(17.9)               | 90<br>(25.6)         | 113<br>(32.2)          | 0<br>(0.0)             | 5<br>(1.4)         | 3.56<br>(1.36)            |
| Military aid/presence abroad   | 30<br>(8.5)             | 48<br>(13.7)          | 89<br>(25.4)               | 52<br>(14.8)         | 121<br>(34.5)          | 1<br>(0.3)             | 10<br>(2.9)        | 3.54<br>(1.33)            |
| Foreign aid (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, USAID)                         | 137<br>(39.0)           | 65<br>(18.5)          | 95<br>(27.1)               | 17<br>(4.8)          | 25<br>(7.1)            | 3<br>(0.9)             | 9<br>(2.6)         | 2.19<br>(1.23)            |
| “Role of Government” Index (includes the Eight issues listed here), Mean (and St.D.) |                         |                       |                            |                      |                        |                        |                    | 2.45<br>(0.52)            |
| Public-Policy Index (includes all 18 Eighteen issues), Mean (and St.D.)              |                         |                       |                            |                      |                        |                        |                    | 2.17<br>(0.38)            |

\* One respondent checked both “support strongly” and “support mildly”; counted as “support mildly.”

mildly” (numerically scored as 4) or “oppose strongly” (numerically scored as 5). Accordingly, it is fair to say that only those with an overall average above 4.0 on the eighteen questions can really be counted as classically liberal. So what percent of the ASA membership can be deemed classical liberal?

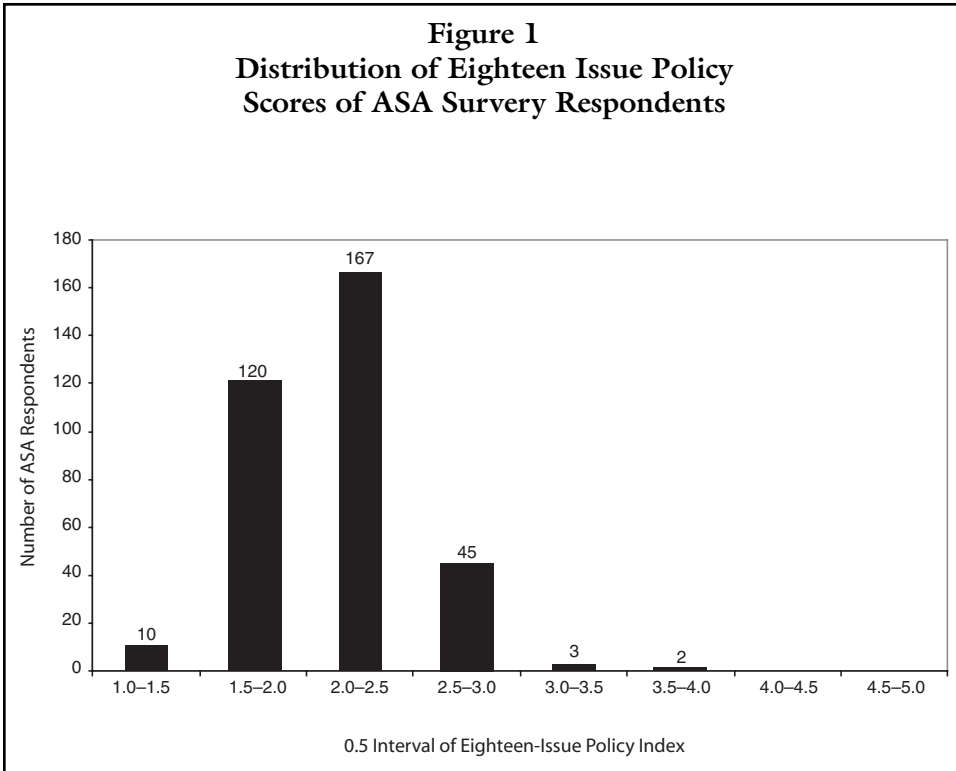
This question is answered by figure 1, which shows the distribution of 347 respondents by overall policy score. As we can see, more than 98 percent of the sample has a score of less than 3.0, and not a single member has a score greater than 4.0. It appears that the number of classical liberals who belong to the ASA is approximately zero.

## The Need for More Classical-Liberal Sociology

Many people are better qualified than we to sketch the need for more classical-liberal sociology. The foregoing evidence, however, invites an attempt to make that need plausible, so we now proceed to sketch some ideas for classical-liberal sociology. We do not mean to provide a research agenda or to suggest that the sketched ideas are original or as yet undeveloped. Our own awareness of the literature is unexceptional, but even we recognize that many of these ideas, though *underdeveloped* and *underappreciated*, nonetheless have significant literatures behind them in the library stacks and in current research. Citing articles and books that represent classical-liberal sociology would place upon us a scholarly responsibility that we do not wish to assume and that would alter the tone of these remarks. Hence, the following remarks contain no citations whatsoever.

### *The Voluntary/Coercive Distinction*

If there is one analytic distinction that sociology would do well to understand better, it is that between *voluntary* and *coercive* action. This distinction is rooted in a logic of property and consensual agreement, a logic that holds all ordinary commercial and market activity to be strictly voluntary. The primary locus of coercion is government, and business corporations avail themselves of coercion only to the extent that they enlist government power in their service. In contrast, much of sociology has tended to make primary a distinction between community and commercial society, between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. When sociologists incorporate the category “civil society” in their work, it usually is something separate from business and markets. Classical liberals tend to take *civil* to mean “voluntary,” and hence to see civil society as including business and trade. They believe that left-leaning sociologists often err by overstating the distinction between markets and communities or civil society. Classical liberals see markets, networks, and communities as intertwined and all of them as residing in the voluntary realm. Correspondingly, they would fault left-leaning sociologists for tending to associate community and solidarity with politics and government and for failing to recognize the coercion in intervention and progressive policies. What is



essential to government is the kind of action that would be criminal if undertaken by any other agent in society (suppose, for example, that your neighbor decided to impose a minimum-wage law on you).

### *The Interrelations Between Commerce and Community*

Relieved of left-wing tendencies, sociologists might enrich our understanding of how commerce and business interrelate with social institutions and communities—for example, in assuring trustworthiness and providing public goods. Sociologists might help to explain how the social and the economic have been bifurcated by government intervention—for example, by occupational licensing and tax law. In the nineteenth century, no clear distinction existed between community enterprise and business enterprise, but modern rules have created an unnatural separation.

### *The Role of Privilege, Prestige, Status, and Power in “Rent Seeking”*

Many economists and political scientists use the term *rent seeking* to denote lobbying for government favors and largesse. The emphasis has been on the quest for material benefits. Economists are ill equipped to explain how prestige, status, and coercive power interact with privilege, how they motivate privilege seeking, and how they

legitimate the privileges obtained. Sociologists might vastly enrich our understanding of the ethos and mentality of rent seeking and correspondingly enrich their own understanding of prestige and distinction by linking them directly to privilege rendered by government—rendered, that is, by coercing the nonprivileged (for example, arresting them for styling hair without a license). Indeed, economists and political scientists often fail to find a smoking gun in material “rents” and instead suggest as an unexplained afterthought that prestige, status, and ideology are more important determinants of government policy.

### *Instincts and Coping with the Modern World*

The social thought of Smith, Spencer, Sumner, and Hayek is highly evolutionary and very much in tune with modern evolutionary research: in the past fifty thousand years our genes have not changed, but society has, vastly. Our evolved instincts and our household/family heuristics often do not fit the modern world. Leftist mentalities have tended to find fault with the modern world rather than with man’s instincts, and correspondingly they have been averse to evolutionary theory. Sociologists might tame their left-wing tendencies and help us understand how people learn to cope with the modern world. Rather than rejecting various inequalities, practices, or outcomes that strike them as social injustices, they might explain how people can and do respond to such feelings, adapt them to modern life, and sometimes overcome them. Rather than urging statist “corrections” for the modern world, sociologists might assume the therapeutic character of Smith and Hayek by educating for happiness with modernity.

### *Improving and Testing the Hayekian Narrative*

The Hayekian narrative does not end with the modern world upsetting evolved instincts. Hayek tells of the reassertion of the primordial in the form of social-democratic statism. Spencer and Sumner, too, saw modern statism as a kind of atavism—the reversion to force—but Hayek more specifically writes of how democracy helps to give an encompassing organizational ethos to the modern mass polity, revivifying the collectivist values and sentiments of the primordial band or tribe. The testing and improving of these ideas are clearly jobs for sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists, as well as for political scientists and historians.

### *The Sociology of Statism*

Classical liberalism has generally done a bad job of explaining why, if it is such a good thing, it went into decline and in recent decades of intellectual revival has generally failed to reduce the scope and intrusiveness of government in the more developed countries. Materialist theories of rent seeking are clearly inadequate. The answers to

the failure are cultural, and sociologists are especially well prepared to explain how groupthink, indoctrination, preference falsification, conformity, obedience, acquiescence, cognitive dissonance, and other social mechanisms can bring about and preserve statism to an extent far in excess of its true desirability. Sociologists are especially well prepared to explain how people look to government for *validation* and hence how social movements become politicized and governmentalized. Classical liberalism is sorely lacking its political sociologists.

### Concluding Remarks

Classical liberalism is a vital, incisive point of view. Reaching back to Locke, it is a core strand of social thought. Every social science and humanities discipline should warmly nurture the classical-liberal character within its tent.

Internal criticism of sociology is often very uneasy about leftist domination of the field. We have presented survey results indicating that the ASA membership is overwhelmingly left-wing and devoid of classical liberalism. ASA members favor economic regulations, gun control, antidiscrimination laws, public schooling, and redistribution, and are moderate or mixed on tariffs, foreign aid, drugs, prostitution, and gambling laws. They lean against military endeavors. They vote overwhelmingly Democratic. Evidence strongly suggests that relative to sociologists who vote Democratic, sociologists who vote Republican are much more likely to work outside of academia.

At present, the sociology profession needs classical liberalism as a counterpoise to its excessive leftism. We have sketched some ideas to suggest that sociology needs classical liberalism and that classical liberalism needs sociology.

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