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## HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

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Historical sociology, as a field of inquiry, hangs together by negation and contradiction. If we date the emergence of sociology from Comte or Spencer, then "historical sociology" once constituted nearly the whole of the sociological enterprise. During sociology's first century, sociologists dehistoricized the field. The separation of sociology from history operated, curiously enough, through both abstraction and concretization: abstracting social processes from the constraints of time and space, concretizing social research by aiming it at reliable observation of currently visible behavior. Live individuals, properly studied, would reveal universal social laws. Or so many sociologists hoped.

The flight from history was more massive among the followers of Mill or Durkheim than among those of Weber or Marx (to attach convenient figureheads to the four main vessels of sociological thought). By World War II, the discipline—especially its enormously influential North American branch—had succeeded in wrenching itself away from history. Even then the lonely practitioners of historical analysis were united

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chiefly by negation. For a wide variety of reasons, they rejected the main trends of sociology.

As the disparate coalitions that make revolutions always learn after the revolutions are won, shared opposition to a common enemy is a poor guarantee of agreement on other grounds. In the heyday of ahistorical sociology, the discipline's seekers after history ranged from a Sorokin (with his massive tabulations of the whole of Western experience) to a Heberle (with his efforts to puzzle out the electoral patterns of Schleswig-Holstein at the end of the Weimar Republic). Perhaps the most important areas of historical effort in sociology during the 1940s were (1) the history of civilizations, à la Sorokin or Kroeber; (2) the history of social thought—Barnes or Becker; (3) the appropriation of historical settings or cases to contemporary sociological analysis—Homans or Firey; (4) the attempt to solve specific historical problems via sociological methods—Merton or Heberle. Since then the variety has increased, although the history of civilizations has lost its erstwhile popularity.

The big changes have occurred in the last decade or so. Sociology as a whole has moved back toward history. Why and how? The most important single reason for the shift, I believe, was increasing dissatisfaction with developmental models of large-scale social change. Models of modernization, industrialization, social mobilization, political development and related processes had grown up to accompany the economists' apparently powerful models of economic development. In fact, the sociological models were weak, the processes hypothetical.

Considering that they presumably dealt with processes which unfold in history, the developmental models were strangely timeless. Their time was the stereotyped, repetitive, mechanical time of clockwork; wind it up, and the same sequence begins again. Such models would eventually have burst apart as a result of their own internal tensions, and smashed as a result of their collision with an unyielding social reality. The bursting and smashing occurred sooner than one might have expected, because the model's political grounding became controversial. Spokesmen—real and imagined—for the Third World lambasted both the substance of developmental theories and the programs of change they embodied. The international movement against American warmaking in Southeast Asia promoted skepticism, and sometimes anger, in both regards.

Historical work was a natural response to the new skepticism, for the following reasons:

1. There was the emergence of the notion that the conditions which representatives of rich countries called "underdevelopment" were actually consequences of colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of

domination by those very rich countries; that notion led easily to a re-examination of the paths by which poor countries had reached their present condition. Willy-nilly, the reexamination was historical.

2. A reasonable way to attack the developmental models being proposed to forecast and guide Third World experience was to show that the models applied poorly on their home grounds, the historical experiences of "developed" countries.

3. Poor countries became less attractive sites for research on large-scale social change, as Western scholars developed qualms about their political and intellectual roles, and as local scholars and politicians began to resist academic colonialism; it became more comfortable for all concerned if the Western scholars aimed their studies of large-scale social change at the past. (I am least sure of this third point, since in areas such as demographic analysis there has been no obvious decline in the involvement of Western specialists in research on the Third World; the most one can claim there is that some of the energy which might have streamed into Third World studies has instead flowed into historical analysis of Western population processes.)

At the same time (and for some of the same reasons), Marxist historical work began to flourish as never before. As a result, different sorts of Marxist analyses became the strongest current in the reaction to developmental theories. These factors provided strong incentives for sociologists concerned with large-scale social change to dig into history as never before.

Trends within the historical profession reinforced the swing toward historical work in sociology. In several distinct branches of history, professional historians began trying to solve old problems by adopting models and methods drawn from the social sciences. Studies of political elites, of elections, of economic growth, the social mobility, of class structure, and of population processes are the obvious examples. The results of the kind of work done by a Louis Henry, a Lawrence Stone, or a Robert Fogel attracted a great deal of attention, and some emulation, from historians. Eventually the results came to the attention of sociologists as well. The sociologists recognized two opportunities: first, to influence sociological thinking through the study of historical settings and materials which sometimes yielded conclusions different from those routinely encountered in analyses of contemporary social processes; second, to make an impact on historical practice. Very few sociologists acquired the full array of historians' professional skills, including mastery of the relevant texts and archives. But the sociologists were often ingenious and energetic in squeezing systematic, even quantitative,

vidence from sources which historians had regarded as of secondary importance: biographical dictionaries, old censuses, parish registers, and the like.

Let me not exaggerate. Among the fifteen to twenty thousand professional historians currently practicing in the United States, no more than a few hundred maintain an active, daily involvement in the social sciences. Outside the United States, the proportion is surely lower. Of some six to ten thousand professional sociologists in the United States, only a few core are doing research which historians recognize as a contribution to their own field; over the rest of the world, the ratio is similar. In the United States, the rest of the 300-400 sociologists seriously involved in "historical sociology" either address problems which, for all their interest to fellow sociologists, stand low on the historical agenda, or do their work by glossing and synthesizing the publications of historians, rather than dealing with the texts which historians regard as their raw material. Some do both at once.

The sociological historians and the historical sociologists, furthermore, are not working on a unified set of problems. Within history, sociological work falls into at least three distinct clusters: (1) studies of cities and other communities; (2) studies of population processes, families, and marriage; and (3) studies of elites, stratification, and social mobility. In addition, scattered students of popular culture, of collective action, of industrialization, and of agrarian change use sociological models and procedures. On the whole, these varied investigators maintain closer ties to sociologists who are dealing with similar problems and with other historians who are interested in the same times and places than they do with each other. Within sociology, the fragmentation is equally great: some family sociologists do historical work, a number of political sociologists do historical work, and so on. Their common ground is shaky. When these sociologists get together, to be sure, they can swap tales about dealing with the historians in their areas of study. But their unity is fundamentally negative; it consists of not doing what most other sociologists do.

There is, then, no coherent field called "historical sociology," only a number of separate paths between history and sociology. Yet there are possible grounds for discussion and collaboration among sociologists who share an interest in historical work. First, most of them aim their attention at large structures and big processes: urbanization, the development of capitalism, the origins of democratic politics, the creation of world systems. Work on such structures and processes presents some common problems—problems of theory, method, and substance. Second, different sorts of historical materials raise common technical problems: the inference of processes and structures from data produced routinely by those very processes and structures; identifying and correcting the biases

of the authorities, bureaucracies, and elite observers that produced the bulk of the documents available for our use; negotiating between the categories people of a given time and place used in their everyday lives and the categories we need to make effective comparisons with other times and places, and so on. Finally, theories and models vary significantly in the extent to which they are historically grounded.

"Historically grounded" theories and models assert that where and, especially, when a process occurs significantly affects its character. Some sociologists, for example, propose models of industrialization in which the process is essentially the same whenever it occurs; the developmental models we discussed earlier tend to take that form. Others insist that early industrialization differs from late industrialization, because the presence of relatively industrialized countries constrains the industrialization of the latecomers. The latter models—whether correct or not—have the greater historical grounding. Sociology as a whole can only gain, I believe, from an increased historical grounding of its models and theories. So if the diverse investigators working at the edges of sociology and history band together to promote a systematic appreciation of the significance of time and place for social processes, I suppose it will do no harm to call their common effort "historical sociology."