THE AMERICAN AND THE GERMAN SOCIOLOGIST: A STUDY IN COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY

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While American sociology has been more and more interested in nearly all social processes (including the mechanical ones), curiously enough it has done very little about the systematic research into the sociology of the American sociologist, especially as an occupational type.[1] Since there are only a few studies of this kind, it is obviously apparent that there is an even greater dearth of the analyses which would deal with the comparative types of the American and "foreign" sociologists, especially of the Western European type who, we must stress, stand at the cradle of American sociology.[2]

There can be hardly any argument that American sociology, when compared to the European counterpart, has been more interested in transmitting sociology and applying it, rather than contributing to theoretical knowledge. And what has been contributed is little original and is usually only the extension of the imported theories. (This is glaringly evident from the veneration granted to such names as Max Weber, Pareto, Spencer, von Wiese, Durkheim, and others.)

For the purpose of our comparisons, we shall use mostly the German framework of sociology, as this dominant type, next to France and England, has been the most influential in the genesis of American sociology. This delineation is necessary as each Western European country has developed distinctive characteristics of its brand of sociology (and we could carry on an extended discussion of contrasting phases of sociology among the Western European countries themselves). More specifically, the rise of Germany's sociology to the present status of dominant empiricism was in large measure an outgrowth of its generations of intensive developments of philosophy, and particularly those of its theories of the state and government, while that of France (and especially since 1900) has been largely a reflection of the dominating influence of Durkheim and later on an elongation of his shadow.

The Impact of German Sociology

The prestige of German sociology in the United States has been especially very high. This is demonstrated by the fact that the founders of American sociology found their inspiration in the German universities or in the German sociological theories. Even today, we stand in awe of the great German sociologists (Max and Alfred Weber, Toennies, Sombart, etc.) and pay them deference not only by importing them or by developing their contributions within the American framework. Contrariwise, the German sociologists do not mind to look down on American sociology with a certain degree of unenthusiastic optimism which is more due to the consequences of World War II than to any real appreciation of American scholarship.

While analyzing American life, critically in, of course, an ancient

European tradition, the fact also remains that we have to bow to the German impact on American sociology. The German universities -- and thus also sociology -- won their undisputed preeminence in the 19th century as the expression of the national mind, the perpetuators of knowledge, and the transmitors of it -- and above all as the advancers of knowledge. This was derived from the idea of the university as the discoverer and generator of new knowledge that fostered the new philosophers and scholars. (It was after the example and under the impetus of the German universities that the English founded the University of London in 1828, and about the same time the ancient University of Paris was revivified: and ultimately even Oxford and Cambridge and the older Universities of America felt the profound effect of the German example).

In America, the newer universities founded in the last quarter of the century, were almost pure products of the German idea, and many of America's most distinguished and university minded professors of that time were trained in Germany. The impact of German sociology has been felt in America from the very beginning. We can go even a step further and claim, rather boldly, that a majority of American sociologists have made their reputation by being able to read foreign languages (especially German) and by adopting the theories of European sociologists, and thus becoming reputable American sociologists by the simple process of "acculturating" these imported theories, bringing them to the awareness of the mass of American sociologists (and sometimes even forgetting, rather conveniently, to give the proper credit in their footnotes). In this respect the influence German scholarship exercised over American sociology during the period between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I, and even today, was due to its theoretical excellence.[3]

Standardization

The first glaring contrast between continental and American sociology can be found in its standardization. Although there are several schools in this academic area dominated by the German concept of sociology, the fact remains that, by comparison, American sociology is still in a state of chaos.

This is due to the fact that, even today, sociology is taught frequently in American smaller and less well-known institutions by non-specialists, by members of the history, economics, political, philosophy, and even Bible departments, who have to learn what sociology is (if they ever do) as they go along, and in many cases, acquire their graduate degrees in the field after several years of teaching, instead of having been tested and trained in the subject before being allowed to instruct in it.[4]

It is important to note in this connection that the German universities are organized into 4 or 5 faculties: theology, law, medicine, and philosophy (the last frequently into mathematics and natural science as opposed to the humanities). In each there is usually only one chair devoted to such special disciplines (to limit the discussion) as sociology. Faculties are normally composed of full professors (ordinarii).

This very fact that there are chairs in sociology in Europe grants an academic status to this area of knowledge which can hardly be comparable to the uncertain status of sociology in America. Even if we disregard

such terrible examples as acquisition of degrees through "degree mills",[5] we are still confronted with the granting of degrees in sociology by the schools of education, the certification of high school teachers in some states (Connecticut to start with) to teach sociology without even having taken a single course in sociology, and the inclusion of sociology within the departments of social welfare, social work, economics, philosophy, and even theology. The division of American institutions into autonomous departments is a system foreign to the European mind, and, in turn, leads to parctices which are utterly incomprehensible to the European sociologist; since the continental sociology professor is fully autonomous in his professonial functions he cannot understand that the selection of the subject matter, of the course, or the textbooks in sociology should be often under the direct supervision and control of the departmental head of the Dean.

Sociology or "Preaching Science"

This lack of professional status has additional implications. With the exception of the most important American universities, which stress the empiric approach to sociology, most American institutions do not agree on what sociology is, and many of them still propound that it is "a preaching science".

This very disagreement on the very nature of sociology and its place in the academic curriculum has resulted in veritable worship of the leading European sociologists (Max Weber, Alfred Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Sombart, etc.), the copying and re-interpretation of their works.

We must not forget the theological and moralistic influences are still frequently dominant in the teaching of American sociology (as seen in the dismissals of sociology professors for "unorthodox" views on religion or sex). America's early colleges, Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale were founded on the conviction that the best way to build up a Christian civilization was to teach the Protestant religion (together with the classical languages, including Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament). Even when, at the beginning of the 18th century, the enlightenment pushed the old theological hierarchy to the defensive, the program of study in American colleges did not change considerably (although there were dissenting voices and institutions). Even today, with the assumption that sociology is primarily an empiric, descriptive science, many an American professor of sociology is to be the preacher of supposedly established verities rather than the leader in the search for truth, wherever and however it can be found. In addition, American institutions of higher learning have become increasingly expensive, and whether the money comes from private donors or from the government, in either case influences are exerted which are alien to the true nature of sociological search. Every society wishes its intellectual leaders to support its ideals, its prejudices and national aspirations, and in more than one case American sociologists have had to bow (like the Nazi and Soviet "sociologist") to power groups rather than being clearing houses in the strife of parties.[6]

The very diversity of the whole concept of sociology as well as the absence of any well-outlined role which it is to play in social life has made possible the invasion of quackery of all kinds, a turning away from the past in order to concentrate upon the pressing claims of the present

and the dreams of a golden future. Not only the salaries of the American professors are low and their social standing not too high, but in so many cases, sociologists (as all University professors) are regarded as mere schoolmasters, rather than advocates of knowledge.

The Granting of Status

In contrast the European professor possesses social standing, being a governmental "official", comparable to that of diplomats and civil servants. This honorific position is derived from the hierarchical structure of European society, with its feudal and monarchical tradition. The Professor possesses social standing because his guild had a recognized status in one of the intermediate castes. The American democracy, with a different national heritage, "would recognize no superior caste, and certainly not a professors' caste".[7]

If we disregard the Nazi interlude in Germany, the fact remains that the German professor is again one of the "untouchables" in the social system and hence is able to develop his theories without much hindrance. His very position allows him to promote sociology which encourages a respect for facts and acquires caution against prejudices that prevent the full acceptance of facts.

In America, however, the sociologists (as all intellectuals) do not cut the same public figure that they do elsewhere in the world. All visiting scholars always notice immediately that American professors receive less obvious deference than do intellectuals in their countries, although "empirical sociological surveys made in recent years suggest that the academic profession may well be one of the more highly respected professions in the United States. Apparently, the self-image of American professors, their own estimate of the attitudes that are held towards them, is at variance with the dominant attitudes that actually exist".[8]

Thus the terms like "egghead" and even "professor" have mixed connotations in the United States. Sociologists are frequently attacked as a result of their teaching and social activities, not only for their views but even more frequently for being intellectuals as such. (The tendencies associated with the name of the late Senator McCarthy leave no pleasant memories in this respect!).

The status granted, on the national and international level, to the German sociologist, has additional consequences which need to be noted. The European sociologist is expected to know, above anything else, his sociology: the related "educational" ("pedagogical") aspects count little, if at all. In America, however, the dominant theory of education requires that the teacher (whether professor or teacher) knows a great deal about behavior patterns, "group interaction", and "controlled aggression drives". If this mythical knowledge interferes with the learning of sociology, the consequences are important, since it is not so much important to know the subject-matter, sociology, as to know the theories of "education" propounded by the schools of education which are, presumably, able to solve all the teaching problems by insisting on knowing "how" rather than "what". Thus the typical German sociology professor (known to the author) is a man of many shortcomings, to be frank, who is pompous (although always very correct), indifferent to social graces, and to his social appointments.

Above all, he is indifferent to the ideas of juvenile or adult psychology, and (horror of horrors!) quite amused by the number of "consulting" tasks assigned to the American sociologists.

While the continental professor has the primary task of promoting research and playing the role of intellectual in his society, many an American sociologist, to survive in the academic world, learns very fast that these functions have to be geared into, and often subordinated, to the demands of what can be generally termed an "all-embracing college life", with its popularity contests, fraternity meetings, plus the guidance tasks, filing of reports on delinquent students, quodding those not paying their fees, those taking unauthorized vacations, and the like. In this respect, strange to say, a rather truthful total picture has been produced by films of college life produced by Hollywood, which feature a series of romantic escapades. punctuated with athletic races. The matter of fact is that for many students the mainly social activities of college life are challenging and are justified as the real "preparation for life" in a competitive society. (Wrote Woodrow Wilson in 1909: "The work of the college, the work of its classrooms and laboratories, has become the merely formal and compulsory side of life... a score of other things, lumped under the term 'undergraduate activities' have become the vital spontaneous, absorbing realities for nine out of ten men who go to college".)[9]

Variance in Training and Appointments

Americans have been bowing to the German scholars thanks to the general high academic reputation these sociologists have been able to retain in the academic world. One factor involved has been the more or less depersonalized selective system of appointments. The long road leading to an appointment to a German Sociology Chair (or even to the rank of a "Dozent" -- "Lecturer", in the American sense) is also very hard and most competitive; and the appointment in either of these categories is the culmination of careful checking on the individual's basic training in theory and in accomplishments (the contributions to sociological knowledge). But the American "instructor" has no equivalent in German universities. It often refers to an individual who is a graduate student, or one on the way to getting a Ph.D., and who might know very little about the subject he is teaching, the assumption being that he will learn it as he goes along and eventually will get his Ph.D. (or Dr. of Education). It is true that a Ph.D. degree is becoming more and more a sort of prerequisite to all professional ranks in better American institutions; but it is also true that many institutions carry on their teaching duties with a staff of untrained and even unqualified "graduate assistants" and by professors who know little about what sociology is, and who may even have been unable to secure a graduate Ph.D. degree.

In fact, the American "instructor" bears little if any resemblance to anything found in German universities. The academic status of the "privatdozent" (the nearest equivalent to this term) is more "assured and dignified than that of even (the American) associate professor without tenure in that he enjoyed perfect freedom of teaching (and) is as irremovable from office as the full professor".[10] His appointment carries no remuneration (until recently); he is granted the right of the "venia legendi" (permission to teach) on the basis of his scholastic merits (documented by a "Habilitationschrift" and a paper read to the faculty),

rather than the need to fill a teaching vacancy, or to induce him to register as a graduate student in order to justify the existence of graduate courses in sociology. The German "Dozent" must start his appointment with a Ph.D.; he can claim only the fees paid by the students of this "privatim" lecture course and seminars; and he receives a fixed salary only if he obtains a "Lehrauftrag" (commission to teach) in sociology.[11]

The full professors in Germany, selected from the highly trained "Dozents", thus form the nucleus of a small group that, roughly speaking, are surrounded by associate professors (extraordinarii) and assistant professors (Privatdozenten), over whom, however, there are no departmental heads or deans. The awarding of degrees and the admission or invitation of teaching personnel, regardless of rank, is decided upon by the whole faculty. In contrast, in America, all assistant and associate professors vote at departmental meetings (when they do), and have to give courses assigned to them by the Chairman or the Dean; this, in turn, leads to isolation as well as to inbreeding. In contrast, the German student must spend 2 or 3 years before he can be admitted to a teaching position (Dozentship) and before his appointment he is thoroughly tested in the knowledge of sociology. The young American graduate, by comparison, starts frequently as an instructor or assistant professor and is assigned a regular load of teaching hours, and is also, at the same time, expected to spend some of his "free time" preparing for a doctor's degree while learning about the field he is teaching.

Additional resulting implications are, however, involved. The thorough training that any sociology instructor in Germany has to have, especially in theory, produces, at the end of the academic training, outstanding sociologists who are, above everything else, interested in increasing sociological knowledge.

The Frontier Heritage

At this point, we should note the influence of the frontier mentality on the tendency to look down on the American social scientists with a definite amount of apprehension, sometimes reaching the level of near-contempt.

It is true that the phenomenon of anti-intellectualism has not been limited to America or to any age. In fact, if we look back to Athens as the great source of Western rationalism then we must note that it was there that Socrates had to drink the hemlock, and the charge against him was that he was an intellectual. But the American undercurrent of anti-intellectualism, definitely related to the general concept of sociology, has certain distinctive features.

America's 19th century intellectuals were mostly Eastern seaboard people, products of the great Eastern Universities (and even more often of European institutions), who came into conflict with the democratized frontier West. The tendency to discredit higher education was, as matter of fact, proclaimed as early as in the days of Andrew Jackson:

> Higher education was neither attainable nor useful to the ordinary American of Jackson's day. Nor did this ordinary American desire it. In fact, frontier experience had made him contemptuous of too much learning. Other qualities had served better in frontier life. Yet true democracy could brook no inequalities. Therefore it convinced itself that education was not a mark of superiority. So deep did this distrust of education sink into the soul of America that to this day most men do not regard as better than anyone else's the opinion of a highly educated person, unless, perhaps, that person's education is technical or practical, so that the lingering consciousness is able to appreciate it.[12]

On the whole, the large proportion of illiterates on the frontier viewed academic learning as useless and as being a handicap in the work of clearing forests, fighting Indians, and the like. Self-reliant and versatile by necessity, the frontiersman also distrusted the claims of the expert, and, because of his ignorance of any other ways than his own, he ridiculed the man of learning. In fact, much of the learning presented by scholars on the frontier appeared to be dry, cold and impractical. The democratic frontiersman also resented the frequent demands of the scholar for deference and respect.

The anti-intellectualism of the common man was also strengthened by unlettered preachers. The disparagement of learning by these men was the result of the conviction that head-religion was inferior to, and, in fact, antagonistic toward, heart-religion. The jealousy of trained preachers was even frequently expressed by the missionaries of the Congregational and Presbyterian sects, whose discipline required an educated clergy. (But the fact that the Baptists and Methodists came to stress education as the frontier was pushed back "suggests that the earliest indifference or antagonism toward education on the part of many in those sects was related to the crying need for preachers in the wilderness and the impossibility of supplying the need if insistence on trained men was maintained", declared Curti.)[13]

The surviving general atmosphere of suspicion toward the American intellectual in general, and toward the sociologist in particular, has made the American sociologist particularly vulnerable to laymen's attacks, which are hardly known or experienced in the German academic world. The sociologists, as teachers, are forced to be articulate and have a ready-made, captive forum of students to carry on; they naturally talk a lot and what they say is often quoted and even more often misquoted. Professonial statements suffer a peculiar disadvantage in that they are almost always taken out of a context which is not available to the casual listener who hears a concluding, or transitional, sentence without its surrounding qualifications. The American sociology professor, conspicuous by dealing with all social problems, including those which are considered "untouchables" by the general public, is consequently highly susceptible to being misunderstood. Being under frequent attacks, the American sociologist, instead of promoting original theories, as his German counterpart is prone to do, tends to spend a lot of this time defending himself and by insisting, rather hopelessly, upon an atmosphere of academic freedom in which to perform. Hence he lives frequently in a continued atmosphere of tension, or at best, within the framework of a peaceful coexistence between

the sociologist and his community which is often aroused by the spirit of creative research, by the spirit of systematic and critical analysis applied to social events. Most American communities, and especially in the areas dominated by provincial and religious atmospheres, prefer the sociologist not to spend his time on self-assigned or sponsored creative research but on the efforts which promote the "community spirit" or favor the approval of the established doctrines. In this case, the American sociologist is thus viewed as another publicly employed servant "Whose major demands should be confined to the realm of wages, hours, and working conditions".[14]

FOOTNOTES

1. Among the few valuable introductions to this area of knowledge, see: Leon BRAMSON: The Political Context of Sociology (Princeton University Press, N.J. 1961, especially chapter 4, "The Rise of American Sociology," pp. 73-95; BROWN, D.G., The Market for College Teachers, Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965, "an economic analysis of career patterns among Southeastern Social Scientists"; Earle EUBANK, "European and American Sociology: Some Comparisons," Social Forces, XV, 2, December 1936, pp. 147-154; Joseph S. ROUCEK, The Status and Role of American and Continental Professors, Journal of Higher Education, XXX, 5 May, 1959, pp. 260-265; Claude BOWMAN, The College Professor (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1938) analyzes the images of the professor presented in 19 magazines within the past five decades; Willard WALLER, The Sociology of Teaching (New York, Wiley, 1932) limits itself mostly to the elementary and high school teacher, but presents some pertinent comments on the college professor; Jacques BARZUN, Teacher in America (Boston, Little Brown, 1945); Logan WILSON, The Academic Man: A Study in the Sociology of a Profession (New York, Oxford University Press 1942); Roland L. WARREN, "The Sociology of Sociologists," American Association of University Professors Bulletin, XXVIII, 5 December 1942, pp. 651-658, & "Weapons of the Weak," Ibid., XXVII, 5 December 1941, pp. 553-567; Anonymous, How to become an 'Eminent' Scholar-Professor, Ibid., XXXI, Winter 1945, pp. 668-680.

2. Only limited contributions to this field have been made by BRAMSON, op. cit; Karl MANNHEIM, "German Sociology (1918-1933)," Politica, 1934, pp. 29-33 and his other works; Florian ZNANIECKI, The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge (New York, Columbia University Press, 1940); George SIMPSON, Sociologist Abroad (The Hague, Maritnus Nijhoff, 1959).

3. For the documentary evidence involved in this point, see: John A. WALZ, German Influence in American Education and Culture (Philadelphia, Carl Schurz-Memorial Foundation, 1936); Henry August POCHMANN, Bibliography on German Culture in America to 1940 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1953); POCHMANN & others, German Culture in America 1600-1900: Philosophical and Literary Influences (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1957). For a valuable criticism of the recent changes and the tendencies to return to the traditional German system see: H.T. BETTERIDGE, "The German Universities," Universities Quarterly, XIV, 3 May 1959, pp. 300-302;

The Heidelberg of the 1890's is brilliantly described by Lincoln STEFFENS, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens (New York, Harcourt & Brace, 1931); a portion Semester at Heidelberg is reprinted in A.C. SPECTORSKY, Ed., The College Years (New York, Hawthorn Books, 1958) pp. 69-74.

4. Joseph S. ROUCEK, "The European and the American Professor: A Study in Contrast", American Association of University Professors Bulletin, XXX, September 1944, pp. 3393-3399 (reprinted in the Education Digest, X, January 1945, pp. 5-7): ROUCEK, The Status and Role of American and Continental Professors, Journal of Higher Education, XXX, 5 May, 1959, pp. 260-65

5. AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION, American Degree Mills, A Study of their Operations and of Existing and Potential Ways to Control them (Washington D.C., 1959).

6. See: Robert M. MacIVER, Academic Freedom in our Time (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955); Richard HOFSTADTER & Walter P. METZGER, The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955).

7. John S. BRUBACHER & Willis RUDY, Higher Education in Transition, an American History (1636-1956)(New York, Harper, 1958); See also: Hugo MUNSTERBERG, American Traits from the Point of View of a German (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1901); Charles F. THWING, The American and the German University (New York, MacMillan, 1928).

8. Charles FRANKEL, "Conclusion: Critical Issues in American Higher Education", Ch. IX, p. 149-175, in Charles FRANKEL, Ed., Issues in University Education: Essays by Ten American Scholars (New York, Harper, 1959), p. 170.

9. Woodrow WILSON, "What is College for?"Scribner's Magazine, November 1959, p. 576. See also: Burgess JOHNSON, Campus Versus Classroom (New York, Iber Washburs, 1946).

10. Erwin PANOFSKY, "The History of Art", 82-111, in The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America with an Introduction by Crawford, W. Reed (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), p. 99.

11. Today, some Western German Universities pay their "Privatdozenten" a stipend "ex officio", and in recent years, these and "extra-ordinarii" have won the right to be represented on the faculty by delegates. For details, see: PANOFSKY, op. cit. p. 99.

12. Howard K. BEALE, A History of Freedom of Teaching in American Schools (New York, Scribner's, 1941) p. 76-77.

13. Merle CURTI, The Growth of American Thought (New York, Harper, 1952) p. 269.

14. Robert W. IVERSEN, The Communist and the Schools (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1958) ch. VII, "The Professor and the Party", p. 99-118, p. 149.