

Perspectives

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Chair's Message

Ruth Wallace
George Washington University

First of all, I want to congratulate our Perspectives editor, Charles Powers. Because he was willing to spend a considerable amount of time corresponding with theory section members, and because he is super-organized, he has managed to double the number of issues during his first year as editor. I should not be surprised, then, to find myself mailing this message by federal express in order to meet his next deadline!

I would like to thank Jonathan Turner for organizing an excellent program for the 1987 meetings, and for sharing his insights with me as I began to prepare for the 1988 meetings. Thanks also to George Ritzer, who, as secretary-treasurer, enabled us to keep the record straight for three years, and to outgoing council members Edward Tiryakian, Joseph Berger, and R. Stephen Warner for their vital contributions to the theory section. And finally, I want to congratulate Charles Lemert, who will succeed me in this office, Gisela Hinkle, our new secretary-treasurer, and Ira Cohen and James Coleman, our new council members.

The last issue of Footnotes described the theory section program for the 1988 ASA meetings which will be held in Atlanta at the Marriott Marquis Hotel from Wednesday, August 24 through Sunday, August 28. In 1988 our theory section day falls on the fourth day of the meetings, Saturday, August 27th. Because we have over 400 members, we are entitled to

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three two-hour slots for paper sessions, plus one more two-hour slot for the business meeting. By keeping the business meeting to one hour, we make it possible to have a one-hour round-table session. As those of you who were in Chicago for the meetings know, Jon Turner's careful planning paid off. We had a much higher attendance at the theory section sessions than expected. In fact, two of our sessions had to be moved to the grand ballroom to accommodate the overflow! This resurgence of interest in theory is very encouraging, and it was a frequent topic of conversation during the meetings. In order to avoid the overflow problem next year, I have already asked Janet Astner to assign us to larger rooms next year, and she has agreed to do so.

Approximately five years ago the theory section decided to devote two of our sessions to a mini-conference on a topic chosen by the chair. I have chosen "Feminism and Sociological Theory" as the theme of the mini-conference in 1988. The focus of the mini-conference will be on the implications for sociological theory of the growing body of feminist work. This mini-conference is an effort to bring the work of feminist thinkers into the mainstream of sociological theory. As organizer of the mini-conference, I will solicit some papers from sociologists who have done important work on this topic, but I will also welcome submissions, for I have decided not to make this a "solicited papers only" mini-conference. We will also have a general theory session completely open to submissions entitled "Sociological Theory," which Stephen Turner has agreed to organize, and a one-hour refereed roundtable session organized by Miriam Johnson.

The deadline for submission of papers to organizers is December 31, 1987. Papers for the mini-conference on feminism and sociological theory should be sent to me at Department of Sociology, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. 20052. Papers for the general theory session should be sent to Stephen Turner, Department of Sociology, Boston University, Boston, MA 02215. (After December 15 Steve's address will be Department of Sociology, University of South Florida, 140 7th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.) Papers for the roundtable session should be sent to Miriam Johnson, Department of Sociology, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. If a complete paper is not ready, a five page abstract will suffice for the roundtable submissions.

Are you looking for ways to increase the number of sessions devoted to theory at the annual meetings? Having served on the ASA Program Committee for the past two years, I want you to know that ASA members do have a chance to shape the program if they understand the time constraints on the committee. As soon as the president-elect is named (usually in June), she or he appoints the program committee. If you have an idea for a session or want to organize one, send the description of your topic with a rationale to the president-elect (Joan Huber) and/or a member of the program committee by the end of October. Why this early, almost two years before the meetings? Because the first two-day meeting of the program committee is usually held in November, at which time the topics for the thematic, special, and regular sessions are decided. I can assure you that all suggestions are considered seriously by the committee. For instance, in the announcement for the 1988 meetings you will see that there are regular sessions on such theoretical topics as cognitive sociology, sociology of Simmel, macro-micro linkages, theoretical perspectives on race, class, and gender, social theory, history of social thought, and the impact of Tocqueville on America. However, keep in mind that the planning is almost two years ahead. So if you have an idea for a session today, it's already too late for the 1988 meetings, and it's almost too late for the 1989 meetings, unless you act now, before the 1989 program committee meets in November, 1987.

Another way to increase the number of theory sessions, of course, is to recruit more members to the theory section. As of August 3, 1987 we had 498 members, and I know of a few who were recruited during the meetings, so we have passed the 500 mark by now. If we reach 600 by ASA's official count on September 30, our section will be entitled to one extra session at the 1988 meetings. We are so close to that goal now that I think it would be a mistake not to try for it. If one-fifth of our present members recruited one new member, we would have enough members to qualify for four sessions. Present members need only send \$5.00 to ASA to join the theory section, as the new \$7.00 section fee doesn't take effect until the next dues notice sometime in October. Many of us could concentrate on graduate students, who seem to be an untapped resource. Did you know that graduate students' dues for membership in ASA is \$26, plus an additional \$5.00 section fee? I would like to see more graduate students as members of our section, and I also want to give them a better chance to participate. Therefore I have decided that if we reach the 600 member goal by September 30, 1987, I will dedicate our fourth session at the 1988 meetings to graduate student papers, and Deena Weinstein has agreed to be the organizer of this session. As an added incentive only graduate students who are members of the theory section will be eligible to submit papers for this session. I will send a special memo to all members if we reach this goal, so that graduate students will have time to meet the December 31st deadline for papers. Enclosed is an application for membership which could be xeroxed if you need more of them. Please note that this is a 1987 application; if applications are received prior to October 1st, the membership becomes effective for the current calendar year, and the applicant will receive back issues for the journal they order, but she or he will also receive a dues notice for 1988 almost immediately. The bad news is that this may place too heavy a financial burden on graduate students, and therefore it may not be realistic to push for 600 members by September 30th. The good news is that if the goal of 600 is reached after September 30, 1987, Charles Lemert, our chair-elect, has agreed to have a graduate student paper session at the 1989 meetings in San Francisco. Please join our campaign to make the theory section more inclusive.

In Memory

Chair of German Theory Section Dies in Accident

In July, Hans Haferkamp, chair of the German Theory Section, died in an accident on his sailboat. Hans had been highly instrumental in development the joint American-German conference and, more generally, in encouraging contact between theorists throughout the world. He was a tireless worker and a fine colleague. World sociology will miss his hard work and dedication.

Having sailed with Hans and as an avid sailor myself, I can only say that if he had to die so prematurely, there is perhaps some consolation that he did so doing something which he loved and enjoyed.

Jonathan Turner (UC Riverside)

1987 ASA Conference

Just over 3000 people registered for the ASA meetings this year, and total attendance probably approximated 3500. People were more upbeat and enthusiastic than in recent years. This was particularly true of theory section members. All the theory sessions were well attended, and the mini-conference drew a spectacular 375 people. Uncharacteristic as it may sound for a convention, there was a very high rate of audience retention. Few people departed before the end

of any of the theory sessions; a sure sign that something unusual was happening.

Judging from the comments being made in hallways, people want to see us move beyond stale debates. The paper by Jonathan Turner and Randall Collins ("Toward a Micro Theory of Structuring") was well received because it represents an effort to move ahead through constructive engagement. Some people described the presentation as a paper accompanied by a dissenting view; just the kind of healthy sparring we need. Anthony Giddens, who presented in the same session, put other presenters on the defensive by asserting that there is no cumulative development in sociology. Most people seemed to reject Giddens's position but liked his combative stance.

One problem is that the central theoretical questions sometimes get lost in scholarly exegesis. A number of people commented that they would like to see us move toward shorter presentations followed by more debate. If the 1988 ASA meetings are indicative, the theory section is gaining real momentum. Interest is up and feelings of collegiality are strong.

1987 Theory Prize

Theory Prize Awarded to Norbert Wiley

The 1986-87 American Sociological Association Theory Prize has been awarded to Professor Norbert Wiley of the University of Illinois. This year's prize recognizes the contributions of Wiley's article, "Early American Sociology and the Polish Peasant," an historical and constructive examination of Thomas and Znaniecki's classic. Wiley's article appeared in Sociological Theory, 1986, Volume 4, Number 1, pages 20-40.

In his letter of commendation, Charles Lemert, chair of the Prize Committee, said: "You have managed to use historical exposition for constructive purposes, thereby providing others a model for theoretical work itself while, simultaneously, making a substantive contribution to our knowledge." An anonymous reviewer of the article added: "This is one of the best pieces of historical reflection ever done on a work of classical sociology. Wiley manages to show why this now-neglected classic was the dominant influence for the early decades of our discipline. And, as an unexpected bonus, he brilliantly shows how and why Thomas and Znaniecki's account of Polish-Americans was empirically wrong and that a more accurate empirical account would have even better supported their theory. A tour de force."

The Committee also awarded honorable mention to the work of Professors Stejpan Meštrović and Hélène M. Brown, of Lander College, for their article "Durkheim's Concept of Anomie as dérèglement" (Social Problems, Volume 33, Number 2, 1985, pages 81-99).

The ASA Theory Prize is awarded annually for articles, monographs, or book chapters, published or unpublished. The purpose of the Prize is to encourage the advancement of theoretical knowledge with special attention to the full range of theoretical approaches. This year's winners were selected from entries representative of virtually every major sociological perspective.

In addition to Lemert, who teaches at Wesleyan University, the members of the committee were: Randall Collins, the University of California at Riverside; James Duke, Brigham Young University; Gary A. Kreps, College of William and Mary; and Charles Smith, Queens College in the City University of New York. Charles C. Lemert can be reached at (203) 347-9411 (x2334).

International News

Report on the German-British Conference

In June, the Theory Groups of the German and British Sociological Associations held a joint conference in Bremen, West Germany. The theme of the conference was "social structure and culture." About fifty sociologists were in attendance. My impression of the papers and comments is that both German and British sociology have become heavily philosophical. Only a few -- such as S. I. Eisenstadt, Richard Münch, and Hans Haferkamp -- revealed positivistic tendencies. The theme of the conference perhaps encouraged more philosophical debate, but my informal discussions (debates) with the participants reinforced my impression that much European social theory involves commentary on either philosophical questions or on the "condition" of modern society. Presenters included Friedrich Tenbruck, Richard Münch, Zygmunt Bauman, Bernhard Giesen and Michael Schmid, Richard Kilminster, Mike Featherstone, Hans Haferkamp, Johannes Weiss, Klaus Eder, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Ullica Segerstråle, Luciano Gallino, Siegwart Lindenberg, Josef Bleicher, and Carlo Mongardini. (Additional program information is available by writing Perspectives.)

Jonathan Turner (UC Riverside)

Theory, Culture, and Society

Theory, Culture, and Society, published in associate with the Department of Administrative and Social Studies at Teesside Polytechnic in the United Kingdom, has been publishing a number of special issues that are of real interest. Number 3, 1986, is a special issue on French social theory, examining important trends to date. Articles include a treatment of Foucault, an analysis of structuralism, and an interview with Pierre Bourdieu, along with several other interesting papers. Numbers 2 and 3, 1987, constitute a double issue on the works of Norbert Elias. These papers cover major aspects of Elias's professional life and many aspects of his seminal work on the civilizing process. They are sure to improve our understanding and stimulate critical reflection. Theory, Culture, and Society is a journal that merits the attention of American theorists.

The Practical Relevance of Theory

Theoretical Perspective for Voluntarism
George K. Floro (Sul Ross State University)

Creating a theoretical perspective is one form of intellectual labor in sociology and how it is done merits attention as well as the outcomes in social thought. What I will do is sketch alternatives for doing it in one area of research: voluntarism.

Scholars doing this work differ in style of theory building, that is, in the sources used to learn from, in the dimensions of collective life on which they see voluntary participation, in how they provide for affirmative and critical sociologies since some types of voluntarism are highly affirmative and others are very threatening, and in how they attempt to connect voluntarism to what is generally important in contemporary society. Any contributor's work in the area could be profiled on this outline but space does not permit that in this short summary.

For convenience Parsons is featured in the discussion. The major concept in Parsons' early writing is "voluntaristic action" (Sciulli,

ASR 1986). It is to be illuminated as a "distinctive" and "innovative" concept by learning from a body of respected scholarship. Many of the ideas for a perspective in the study of voluntarism come out of much more modest efforts--some form of empirical observation and experience in collective life. In the Parsons perspective, the commonplace is to be avoided like the plague. Louis Wirth, who was committed to a wider range of learning opportunities, challenged the claims for "voluntaristic action" in a review of Parsons' The Structure of Social Action. (Sciulli responds to the critics of this concept.)

Parsons eventually became interested in the professions and professionalism (rather than voluntarism as a distinctive approach to work). Apparently Parsons saw "voluntaristic action" as the only alternative in contemporary societies to authoritarianism on the one hand and non-rational action on the other. Professional structures steadied the somewhat vulnerable "voluntaristic action": action with "symbolic" means, rather than over-formalized means, and toward "qualitative" and "worldly" ends (in contrast to ultimate ends).

The professional structure seems to be a weak link with the larger social order, at least if one sees it in the history of voluntarism in American society. The mainspring to voluntarism in American society since Alexis de Tocqueville's early study was "democracy"--social and political democracy. So it was in the work of Jane Addams and Louis Wirth. Robert N. Bellah and his associates offered "civic republicanism" as an alternative in Habits of the Heart. David Sciulli, also responding to a more conservative era, suggests that Parsons could be updated or his work expanded with a "societal constitutionalism" connection (Gerstein and Sciulli, Perspectives, 10:1). (My own judgment is that it is best to speak only of "voluntary participation" and look for the sources of social satisfaction in work and serious leisure that sustain it, rather than to look for a political or ideological source.)

Like most current scholars Parsons conceives of voluntarism on an action dimension, although few may have the means-ends action model that he adopts. Most current action-oriented scholarship in the subject area may be partial to management and to political and economic analysis--what one finds in much contemporary social science. Ferdinand Toennies seems to be a better theorizer for the study of voluntarism; he recognizes the will or volition as being as important as action. Variables with the volitional component are likely to be potent in the study of different types of voluntarism, such as life-sharing voluntarism, which may predominate in the service field; protective or sacrificial voluntarism; and both violent and non-violent forms of militant voluntarism. Unfortunately Toennies has been neglected in studies of voluntarism.

For the study of voluntarism, the basic weakness in Parsons' work is that it is not on the precise social resource dimension of important in voluntarism. Parsons' sociology is a study of normative group life, where status and norms or rules promise security or must be arranged to do that. In contrast, the precise social dimension for the study of voluntarism is a reward dimension and the promise of voluntarism as a distinct approach to work. It promises a revitalization of the collective life by restoring a sense of dignity. (A social problem on that dimension is prejudice or abuse.)

Parsons' concept of "voluntaristic action" should be applied throughout human collective life, to all forms of work and serious leisure; not merely to volunteers or voluntary associations or only to American society. There may be a tendency to assume that the "voluntary spirit" is a unique phenomenon in America. There is also a

tendency to ignore the militant forms of it and to confuse life-sharing styles with the protective style which is linked with altruism.

The work of Parsons and many other sociologists tends toward a neutrality and objectivity. But voluntarism needs both critical and affirmative scholarship. Affirmative sociology, as in the work of Charles Horton Cooley (see my new book, Sociology for Life), is neglected as if it inevitably must lead to mere sentimentality or worse. That is a real weakness for a sociological study of voluntarism.

A quick summary of major approaches: Alexis de Tocqueville had a subject to learn from--American society which he immersed himself into while guided by a set of political issues and principles of participation. But these had to be illuminated by what was observed everywhere. Robert N. Bellah and associates attempt to adopt a similar strategy although the outcomes or conclusions do not relate as directly to voluntarism. Jane Addams and Louis Wirth had compatible theory developing strategies, both going from local centers to larger circles and eventually to all of mankind. The major concept (for voluntarism) was social participation--to the level of mutual learning. It was the major variable in sociology. They found it in democracy at its best.

Most theory building in the study of voluntarism today is in the style of behavioral science. The subjects in everyday life may tend to be neglected. Theoretical perspective building also may not be the major goal. The source of learning is primarily in empirical inquiry (around empirical issues that surface in professional research) and in the similar studies by other behavioral scientists. The most important function of monitoring what others are finding in empirical inquiries may be to check upon one's own work.

Conference News Midwest Meetings (April 1987)
Robert Blain (Southern Illinois Univ at Edwardsville)

There were ten sessions with "theory" in the title and four others that would generally be identified as theoretical. I was unable to attend all these sessions, but I would like to offer a few general observations. My impression is that theory at the Midwest meetings reflects that state of sociology as a whole; highly diverse, reflective of larger trends in American society, fragmented. Theory seems to lack a clear identity and purpose. The old perspectives and paradigms keep re-appearing, mixed with current social issues. But where is it all going? Are we getting anywhere, or just running in place?

Maybe it was the Easter weekend and good weather in Chicago, but the theory sessions I attended had very small audiences. Maybe as theorists we lose our audiences by relying too heavily on written words. Nothing is more deadly boring than listening to someone read a paper. Maybe we should be more conversational and use more graphs and pictures and simulations. Having only 10 or 15 minutes to make a presentation could be very healthy for us, though presenters at times seem to be trying to cram hour-long papers into the smaller time frame.

I think a critical need for us today is to have a clearer sense of purpose. This is reflected in the implied application in several of the session titles. Bravo! Let's keep asking ourselves what our theories are good for. The most significant session at the meetings, in my judgement, was not a "theory" session at all. It was the

Development of Sociology in the People's Republic of China (attendance: about 6 U.S., 6 Chinese). With the largest nation in the world opening its doors to us, we have an excellent opportunity to reflect on the nature and purpose of sociological theory today.

Calls for Papers

The Sociological Quarterly invites the submission of manuscripts for a special issue on gender and aging. Papers should have a strong theoretical orientation whether or not they are data-based. Papers or proposals may be offered for editorial consideration. Address all correspondence to: Judith A. Levy, Associate Editor, The Sociological Quarterly, School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago, P.O. Box 6998, Chicago, IL 60680.

The Race and Ethnic Study Group of the Department of Sociology of Texas A & M University is sponsoring a conference on Race and Ethnic Relations in the 1990's. The conference is to be held February 11-12, 1988. Persons wishing to attend should contact William Kuvlesky, Department of Sociology, Texas A & M, College Station, Texas 77843.

The 1988 conference of the Internat Org for the Study of Group Tensions will focus on "Problems of Racial, Ethnic, and Other Special Groups." Papers should be sent, by Jan 15, 1988, to: Joseph Gittler, Anthro/Soc Department, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.

The 1988 Southwester Sociological Association will be held in Houston next March. The general theme for the meeting is "Social Science, the Scientific Revolution, and the American Founding." A list of sessions and organizers is available by writing Perspectives or from Teresa A. Sullivan, Department of Sociology, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712-1088.

Job Announcements (send in announcements for the newsletter)

The Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, invites applications for one or more positions beginning September 16, 1988. All areas and orientations will be considered. Applications are especially encouraged from persons in historical/comparative, life course, organizations/occupations, and sociology of law/criminology. Applications for Assistant Professor are due by October 15 and for Associate Professor are due by October 1. Direct all inquiry to David Knoke, 909 Social Sciences, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

Book Announcements (Notify Perspectives of new publications)

John D. Baldwin, George Herbert Mead: A Unifying Theory for Sociology, Newbury Park CA: Sage, 1987.
Charles H. Powers, Vilfredo Pareto, Newbury Park CA: Sage, 1987.
David Willer, Theory and the Experimental Investigation of Social Structures, New York: Gordon and Breach, 1987.

Get Well!!

Charles H. Page

In 1887, the French government recognized sociology by establishing a chair for Emile Durkheim. Durkheim died 30 years later, in 1917.