THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

J. M. Barbalet, Australian National University

Sociology is a relatively new comer to Australian higher education. The university system began in 1892 with the opening of the University of Sydney, but the first undergraduate department of sociology was not established until 1959 at the University of New South Wales. While sociology has not gained a secure footing in the more prestigious universities (it is still not possible to take a graduate degree in sociology at the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, or Western Australia), it is well established within the larger university system and draws a large number of students. The Australian Sociological Association (ASA) has 523 members, 88 of whom declared sociological theory to be an area of interest.

Both Australian sociology and Australia itself have been shaped by immigration. The first European settlement of Australia — beginning from the end of the eighteenth century — was predominantly British and Irish. Since 1919, immigrants have come from Eastern and Southern Europe, and, since the 1970's, from the Middle East and South East Asia. Australia's racial and ethnic diversity, its varied political institutions, economic activities, and settlement patterns have given Australian sociology a unique texture of elements.

Immigration into Australian sociology has been a movement from sociology from cognate disciplines and a movement into Australia by foreign sociologists. The two main themes of Australian sociology have been immigration and inequality. Space does not permit a full treatment of both, and, as the range of theoretical concerns has been wider within the study of inequality, it is that which will be discussed here.

The Australian ethos is egalitarian. Until the publication of Humphrey McQueen's *A New Brittanica* (1970), Australian historians had assumed that their society was classless. They contrasted this with the rigid British class system and emphasized the leveling consequences of Australian settlement patterns and trade unions. Sociological studies of Australian society, on the other hand, have always sought to identify the sources and dimensions of Australian inequality (Mayer, 1964). The first systematic study of social class in Australia was conducted by a team from the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne (Oser and Hammond, 1954; Oser and Emery, 1954).

In *Equality and Authority* (1970), Sel Enkel, Professor of Sociology at New South Wales, gave a Weberian treatment of social inequality. He argues that class is more significant than status in social differentiation, but that the effects of class inequality is less marked in Australia than many comparable societies, largely because of cultural egalitarianism and institutional mechanisms of redistribution. He examines a number of loosely connected topics, including political authority, the structure of the economy, and the formation of elites. Although his book is not clearly focused, his writing is theoretically aware and analytically astute; it came at the beginning of several different strands of research on social inequality, four of which will be discussed here.

Perhaps the most important of these is the work of Bob Connell (1977), who moved into sociology from political science. Connell has developed a neo-Marxian approach to Australian class analysis, which attributes less importance to the material structures of class organization than to political and cultural hegemony. He and Tony Irving applied this approach in challenging traditional Australian approach to history in *Class Structure in Australian History* (Connell and Irving, 1980).

The Department of Sociology of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University is the site of the second and third approaches. The second was led by Leonard Broom, who came to Australia from the United States in the 1960s, and later by Frank Lancaster Jones. They emphasize social mobility as a means of understanding inequality and conducted major national occupational mobility surveys in 1965 and 1975 (Broom and Jones, 1976; Broom et al., 1980). The third approach is that of John Higley, who...
THEORY SESSIONS IN LOS ANGELES

This year, the Theory Session meets on the last day of the convention, Tuesday, August 9, 1994. Since immediately following the ASA meeting, the Section plans a theory conference at UC — San Diego, I decided not to hold a fall "mini-conference" at the ASA. Instead, I have worked with leaders from other sections to organize, what I believe will be stimulating panels on "Theory in Historical Sociology" and "Culture and Theory." The papers and discussions for each are listed below. I hope that members will agree that each panel promises to be an important and interesting session. Thea Skocpol, Theory Section Chair

THEORY IN HISTORICAL
SOCIOLOGY

Organizers: Ann Shola Orloff, University of Wisconsin, Madison and Thea Skocpol, Harvard University

Presider: Thea Skocpol, Harvard University

Organizer: Jack Goldstone, University of California, Davis

CULTURE AND THEORY

Organizers: Michele Lamont, Princeton University and Thea Skocpol, Harvard University

Presider: Michele Lamont, Princeton University
3. Culture(s) We Use: Marshall Brinton, David R. Hall, and Rosemary Powers, University of California, Davis.

Discussion: Jeffrey C. Alexander, University of California, Los Angeles

PRACTICING THEORY IN SAN DIEGO

In August the Theory Section voted to hold a theory conference immediately following the 1994 ASA meeting in Los Angeles. The sense of the meeting was that such a gathering would focus broadly on looking ahead at theory’s place in the world. The conference, co-sponsored with the Department of Sociology, UC — San Diego, will be held on the UC — San Diego campus. The program committee includes Bob Connell, Harvey Goldman, Michele Lamont, Mary Rogers, and Stephen Turner.

The committee hopes that this conference will reflect what is on the minds of people who study theory — do theory, or otherwise shape its institutional, cultural, and political status around the globe today. Currently the committee is organizing the program around the proposals that colleagues submitted last month. The next issue of Perspectives will include the preliminary program.

The next issue of Perspectives will include housing information and other logistical details about "Practicing Theory." For those traveling around between Los Angeles and San Diego, AMTRAK offers a fare of $31.00.

If you have questions or suggestions about the conference scheduled for August 16-17, contact the committee members. They welcome your input.

DEADLINE FOR THEORY PRIZE NOMINATIONS — APRIL 1, 1994

Nominations are sought for the annual Theory Prize awarded by ASA. Theory Section. This prize recognizes an outstanding work that has made a major contribution either to the development of contemporary sociological theory or to our understanding of classical theory. For 1994, the prize will be selected from books published in English during the years 1990, 1991, 1992, or 1993. Nominations are encourage, to be submitted by members of the section; self nominations are acceptable. To have a book considered, please arrange to have three copies sent, along with a letter of nomination, briefly outlining the book’s contribution to sociological theory. Send the books and the letter to the Chair of the 1994 Theory Prize Committee, Professor Bob Connell, Stevensen College, University of California, Santa Cruz, California 95064. Professor Connell’s phone is (408) 486-3657, and his FAX is (408) 459-5554. Prize Committee Members are Bob Connell, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Stephen Turner, University of Pennsylvania, and Stephen Turner, Stanford University, Stephen Kalberg, Boston University, and Stephen Warner, University of Illinois at Chicago.
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continued

came to the Australian National University from the University of Texas at Austin in the 1970s. He conducted research on the Australian elite (Higley, Deacon and Smart, 1979) and collaborated with G. Lowell Field on a major restate-
ment of elite theory (Field and Higley, 1980).

The fourth strand might be called 'the Australian leg of the Erik Wright world
modernism.' Researchers at the University of Queensland under the direction of John
Western have subjected Marxist and Weberian concepts to the methods of survey research and
regression analysis (cf. Baxter, Emmison &
Western, 1991).

A range of theoretical positions have been developed around the question of inequality in
Australia, but Australian theorists are also mak-
ing contributions in other areas. In the history
of theor, there are Pusey's (1987) work on
Habermas, Game's (1993) on phenomenology
and the critical deconstruction of sociological
and citizenship. Another new area of interest
includes the macro-sociology of emotion
(Barbalet, 1992). There is also a growing move-
ment toward policy formation and assessment, a
movement which is likely to strengthen as the
pool of research funds continues to shrink and
academic career opportunities contract.

Even though Australian sociologists are con-
cerned about loss of research funds and acade-
ic positions, the future of theoretical sociolo-
gy in Australia is not bleak. This brief survey
should make it clear that Australian social theo-
ry continues to reflect the vitality of the immi-
grant society of which it is a part.

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PAST THEORY PRIZE WINNERS


LIKELY PERTINENT INFORMATION

THEORY JOURNAL IN AUSTRALIA


TAS PICKS UP PERSPECTIVES


CALL FOR PAPERS

Nihilism and Transnationalism" will be the theme of an international conference to be held at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, October 15-17, 1994. The organizing committee seeks papers from a wide range of perspectives, including those which address historical, comparative, cultural, economic, institutional, or other dimensions. The overarching aim of the conference is to establish connections between the two phenomena in a way that would benefit from comparative research. Send proposals and abstracts by March 1, 1994 to — Mohamed A. Bamyeh, Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, MA 01854. FAX (978) 934-3823.

THEORIST WINS AWARD


BOOKS TO CONSIDER


The substantial successes of the social sciences have been discredited, even for many social scientists, by a wave of postmodernist critiques which Michael A. Fain puts under the heading of "postmodernism." He subjects a number of these critiques to thoughtful counter-arguments; he argues that social scientists need to overcome their failure of nerve based in part on "math phobia," and that the embattled advocates of interpretationism and relativism should declare an inextinguishable and open-ended truce.
Moody: Let's discuss teaching theory to undergraduates, for many theories it puts bread on the table.

Doubt: Let's start with something that Max Weber said, "To present scientific problems in such a manner that an unstated but receptive mind can understand them and - what for us is alone decisive - can come to think about them independently it is perhaps the most difficult pedagogical task of all" ("Science as a Vocation" in Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, edited and translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills [New York: Oxford Press, 1946], p. 154).

Moody: I like it. I sense that students are more interested in substantive topics than in general theory. They are more interested in careers or the family than they see in the micro-macro link or the relative merits of neo-functionalism and postmodernism. I teach theory more successfully when I use it to explain an issue in a substantive course than when theories themselves are the subject of the course.

Doubt: I have had the same experience, which led me to develop a course that focuses on a common interest - American social character. To start, we read Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation" and "The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology.

Moody: But Weber did not theorize about American social character, did he? I remember some unkind comments that Weber made concerning the typical attitude of American university students toward their professors; they treat their professors, Weber said, as if they were green grocers.

Doubt: True. After Weber, though, we read David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd, which ruthlessly employs a Weberian methodology to analyze American social character. Three ideal types, tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed, are used to develop not casually adequate levels of understanding, but adequately meaningful levels of understanding. Students themselves enjoy employing these ideal-types. That is, students enjoy doing theory. For instance, it is interesting to contrast "Feather Knows Best," where the dominate and most successful mode of conformity is inner-directedness, with "Family Life," where the dominate and most successful mode of conformity (as portrayed by Michael Fox) is other-directedness. Reading Weber allows students to develop a critical appreciation of Kuhnian analysis.

Moody: What do you do next?

Doubt: Well, we repeat the pattern. First we read selections from Karl Marx and then C. Wright Mills White Collar. The refrain that Mills repeats throughout his study of American social character is that middle-class America exemplifies a lower-class relation to both the proletariat and the capitalist. ("Thirty Something," by the way, provides beautiful examples of this ambivalence. Michael, for instance, envoys and authors Miles; Hope is a halfhearted activist whose first duty is to the family.) After reading Marx, students, moreover, see that Mills is not such a good pupil of Marx. In place of White Collar, one could also use Franklin F. Puzer's Black Bourgeois.

Moody: So this course is really a course on classical and contemporary social theory.

Doubt: Right. We repeat the pattern. Before reading Habits of the Heart, we read not only Alexis de Tocqueville but Leslie Doddheim. There is film named "The Incredible Bureaucratic Machine," which provides a great target for Habits of the critique. One can also be postmodern. Before reading Baudrillard's America, first read Lyotard.

Moody: Gee, how do students handle Lyotard and Baudrillard?

Doubt: They like Baudrillard better than Lyotard, which makes me wonder if there is not something to postmodernism.

Moody: I start my theory course with a longstanding rejection of Peter Berger's statement that sociology is "a way of seeing." 1 teach that sociology is more a way of writing (and talking) about the world. There is no evidence I know of to support the notion that we "see" in a special way, but enough evidence that we write funny. I get students to appreciate sociological theory by requiring them to describe and explain aspects of their social worlds of particular interest by using theoretical concepts and propositions. I want them to read critically and analytically, but subordinate this to trying to write theoretically.

Doubt: What are the results?

Moody: All too often, my reach exceeds their grasp. But, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, most students catch on. Their ability to write sociologically is always limited by their general writing ability. There have been some students, however, who have learned to write better through having to write sociologically, contrary to popular assumptions about sociological writing.