

PERSPECTIVES

The Theory Section Newsletter

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THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

J. M. Barbalet, Australian National University

Sociology is a relative newcomer to Australian higher education. The university system began in 1852 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 (TASA) has 520 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 1945, 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 society a unique texture of elements.

Immigration into Australian sociology has been a movement into 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 Britannia* (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 otherhand, 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 (Oeser and Hammond, 1954; Oeser and Emery, 1954).

In *Equality and Authority* (1970), Sol Encel, 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-Marxist approach to Australian class analysis, which attributes less importance to the material structures of class organization than to political and cultural hegemony. He and Terry 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 1973 (Broom and Jones, 1976; Broom et al., 1980).

The third approach is that of John Higley, who

Pearls & Scraps

"A moral rule is not moral unless it is accepted as obligatory, unless the attitude toward it is quite different from that of expediency. But at the same time it is also not truly moral unless obedience to it is held to be desirable, unless the individual's happiness and self-fulfillment are bound up with it . . . not only desirability, but even happiness, comes back -- as a concrete state of the individual who is integrated with a set of social norms" (Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, [New York: Free Press, 1968], p. 387).

"Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus . . . any consensus on the rules defining a game and the 'moves' playable within it must be local, in other words, agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation" (Jean-Francois Lyotard in James Farganis, *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Postmodernism* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993], p. 384).

THEORY SECTION NEWS

THEORY SESSIONS IN LOS ANGELES

This year, the Theory Section 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 full "mini-conference" at the ASA. Instead, I have worked with leaders from two other sections to organize what I believe will be stimulating panels on "Theory in Historical Sociology" and "Culture and Theory." The papers and discussants for each are listed below. I hope that members will agree that each panel promises to be an important and interesting session. Theda Skocpol, Theory Section Chair

THEORY IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

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

Presider: Theda Skocpol, Harvard University

1. The Theory of Democratization and the Fallacies of Under-Theorized History. Randall Collins, University of California, Riverside.
2. Myth versus Practice in Historical Explanation: A Provocation. Richard Biernacki, University of California, San Diego.
3. The Logic of Small-N Analysis: A Response to Lieberson. Philip S. Gorski, University of California, Berkeley.
4. General Theory and Narrative Method in Historical Sociology. Edgar Kiser, University of Washington, Seattle and Michael Hechter, University of Arizona, Tucson.

Discussion: Jack Goldstone, University of California, Davis

CULTURE AND THEORY

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

Presider: Michele Lamont, Princeton University

1. What is Agency? Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische, New School for Social Research
2. Meaning and 'Interpretive' Cultural Studies in Sociology: Toward a Concept of Practical Meaning. Orville Lee III, University of California, Berkeley
3. Culture(s)' Structure(s). Marshall Battani, David R. Hall, and Rosemary Powers, University of California, Davis.
4. Institutions and Cultural Interlock. Jeffrey K. Olick, Columbia University.

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 should focus broadly on looking afresh 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 travelling round-trip 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 10-11, 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 A.S.A. 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 encouraged from 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, Stevenson College, University of California, Santa Cruz, California 95064. Professor Connell's phone is (408) 459-3837, and his FAX is (408) 459-3334. Prize Committee Members are Bob Connell, University of California, Santa Cruz, Mabel Berezin, University of Pennsylvania, Joseph Berger, Stanford University, Stephen Kalberg, Boston University, and Stephen Warner, University of Illinois at Chicago.

THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

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 restatement of elite theory (Field and Higley, 1980).

The fourth strand might be called "the Australian leg of the Erik Wright world marathon." Researchers at the University of Queensland under the direction of John Western have subjected Marxian 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 making contributions in other areas. In the history of theory, there are Pusey's (1987) work on Habermas, Game's (1991) on phenomenology and the critical deconstruction of sociological theory, and Barbalet's (1988) on T.H. Marshall and citizenship. Another new area of interest includes the macrosociology of emotion (Barbalet, 1992). There is also a growing movement 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 concerned about loss of research funds and academic positions, the future of theoretical sociology in Australia is not bleak. This brief survey should make it clear that Australian social theory continues to reflect the vitality of the immigrant society of which it is a part.

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THEORY SECTION NEWS

Continued

PAST THEORY PRIZE WINNERS

Last August the editors of *Perspectives* were asked to publish a list of previous winners of the Theory Section Prize, but we have found that establishing this list has not been as simple as we had hoped. We present our partial list, along with a request for the names and titles of missing years: 1980, David Rubinstein; 1981, no prize awarded; 1982-1986, unknown; 1987, Norbert Wiley. "Early American Sociology and the Polish Peasant." *Sociological Theory* 1986, vol 4, #1: 20-40; 1988, unknown; 1989, Daniel Chambliss. "The Mundality of

Excellence: An Ethnographic Report on Stratification and Olympic Swimmers. *Sociological Theory* (Spring, 1989); 1990, Stephen Kalberg. "The Rationalization of Action in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion." *Sociological Theory* (Spring, 1990); 1991, Alan Wolfe. "Mind, Self, Society, and Computer: Artificial Intelligence and the Sociology of Mind." *American Journal of Sociology* (March, 1991); 1992, no prize awarded; 1993, Michael Macy, "Social Learning and the Structure of Collective Action." *Advances in Group Processes* (In Press).

LIKELY PERTINENT INFORMATION

THEORY JOURNAL IN AUSTRALIA

Thesis Eleven is an international and interdisciplinary journal with a central focus on theories of society, culture, and politics, and the understanding of modernity. Located in Melbourne, Australia, *Thesis Eleven* is committed to a pluralism of approaches and to making previously untranslated texts by leading European theorists available to English readers. Recent and forthcoming papers include: Cornelius Castoriadis, "Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition, Luc Ferry, "The Three Faces of Modern Thought," Pauline Johnson, "Quest for the Self: Feminism and Romanticism," and Agnes Heller, "The Destruction of the Intimate Sphere." Published triannually. Yearly rates: Individual \$28, Institution \$65. MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142. TEL: 617-253-2866. FAX: 617-258-6779.

TAS PICKS UP PERSPECTIVES

A series of essays and commentaries, which appeared in *Perspectives* in 1993, have been re-published in *The American Sociologist*, Vol. 24, No. 2. Janet Saltzman Chafetz's "Sociological Theory: A Case of Multiple Personality Disorder," Charles Camic's "Talmudic Exegesis or Identification with the Agressor," John Miley's "On Chafetz on Theory," Charles Smith's "What Disorder?: A Response to Chafetz," Bert N. Adam's "Creative Disorder: A Response to Chafetz," David Sciulli's "Does Chafetz Need Any Defense?: All Over But the Shouting," and Keith Doubt and Richard Moodey's "The Editors Talk" are assembled together under the title "Positivism Again - A Symposium." The issue is now in the libraries.

CALL FOR PAPERS

"Multiculturalism 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 articulate connections between the two phenomena in a way that would benefit from comparative research. Send proposals and abstracts by March 1, 1994 to - Mohammed A. Bamyeh, Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, MA 01854. FAX (508) 934-3023.

THEORIST WINS AWARD

The Mid-South Sociological Association has selected Stanford M. Lyman's study, *Militarism, Imperialism, and Racial Accommodation: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Early Writings of Robert E. Park* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992) for its book award as the outstanding work in sociology for 1993.

BOOKS TO CONSIDER

What's Wrong with the Social Sciences: The Perils of the Postmodern, by Michael A. Faia. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993. 244 pp.

The substantial successes of the social sciences have been discredited, even for many social scientists, by a wave of anti-scientific critiques which Michael A. Faia puts under the heading of "postmodernism." He subjects a number of these critiques to thoughtful counter-criticisms; 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 structuralism should declare an immediate and open-ended truce."

Dogmas & Heresies

"And if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul must be immortal, and one must take courage and try to discover - that is, to recollect - what one doesn't happen to know, or (more correctly) remember, at the moment" (Plato, *Meno* [Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1956], p. 139).

"In a perforated history, therefore, the visual field is broken up so that elements of the narrative are experienced as uncanny, a haunted realism. What is thereby made possible is the experience of something for the first time that at the same time seems to be already known, known before - what Freud describes as 'the return of the repressed'" (Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* [Newbury Park: Sage, 1992], p. 125).

THE EDITORS TALK

Moodey: Let's discuss teaching theory to undergraduates; for many theorists 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 untutored but receptive mind can understand them and – what for us is alone decisive – can come to think about them independently 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. 134).

Moodey: I like it. I sense that students are more interested in substantive topics than in general theory. They are more interested in crime or the family than they are 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."

Moodey: 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 greengrocers.

Doubt: True. After Weber, though, we read David Reisman'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 causally 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 "Father Knows Best," where the dominant and most successful mode of conformity is inner-directedness, with "Family Ties," where the dominant and most successful mode of conformity (as portrayed by Michael Fox) is other-directedness. Reading Weber allows students to develop a critical appreciation of Reisman's analysis.

Moodey: 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 love/hate relation to both the proletariat and the capitalist. ("Thirty Something," by the way, provides beautiful examples of this ambivalence. Michael, for instance, envies and abhors 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 E. Frazier's *Black Bourgeois*.

Moodey: 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 Emile Durkheim. There is film titled "The Incredible Bread Machine," which provides a great target for *Habit's* critique. One can also be postmodern. Before reading Jean Baudrillard's *America*, first read Lyotard.

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

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

Moodey: I start my theory course with a longstanding rejection of Peter Berger's statement that sociology is "a way of seeing." I 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 much 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?

Moodey: 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.