

FEATURED ESSAY

Sociology as a Vocation

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What does it mean to live for sociology, today? In attempting to answer this question I return to Max Weber's famous lectures delivered toward the end of his life—one on science as a vocation and the other on politics as a vocation. He presented "Science as a Vocation" in November 1917 toward the end of World War I and the more pessimistic "Politics as a Vocation" in January 1919 after Germany's defeat.² The essays themselves exemplify Weber's methodology—interpreting social action within the external conditions that shape it. Weber not only explicates the meaning of "vocation"—what it means to "live for" as well to "live off" science and politics—but situates their pursuit within historical and national contexts. He explores the possibilities of an "inner devotion" to science or politics in Germany as compared to the United States and Britain. Yet neither here nor elsewhere does Weber turn his sociology of vocation back on to sociology itself. He does not advance from *sociology of vocation* to *sociology as a vocation*, which is the endeavor of this essay, an endeavor that draws on but leads us beyond Weber.

Consonant with Weber's own life, I shall argue that sociology sits uncomfortably between science and politics. Twisting between science and politics—since he could not marry the two—he presented them as

two spheres that must be kept apart. Weber failed to grasp sociology's place *between* science and politics for two reasons: first, sociology as a discipline was still embryonic and pre-professional. It needed to be safeguarded from politics. Second, he had not developed a coherent view of civil society populated by institutions that could ground a standpoint between science and politics.³

Yet, and here is the paradox, his conception of sociology as an interpretive understanding of value-oriented social action calls for its own value standpoint since sociology cannot be its own exception. As a form of social action it too must be impelled by value commitments. Weber fully understood this. Indeed, he was so insistent on the ethos of science precisely because he feared that sociology might be overrun by arbitrary value commitments, commitments that are nevertheless essential to its pursuit. The tension between science and politics was, therefore, complicated by a second tension, that between fact and value, or more broadly between instrumental rationality and its underpinnings in value rationality. But without a conception of civil society, he had no way of collectively mooring those values, and so they are instead reduced to an individual existential choice. The completion of Weber's program and the sustainability of sociology depend on its connection to civil society.

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² For the dating of the lectures and their biographical and historical situation, see Schluchter (1968: Chapters 1 and 2).

³ One should note, however, that in 1909 Weber submitted a proposal for sociological research into three areas: the press, voluntary associations, and the relations between technology and culture, which suggests he did have an interest in both the public sphere and civil society, even if he didn't use such terms (MW:420).

Irreducible to economy and polity, civil society is the institutional birthplace and support for diverse values. It is the standpoint from which sociology evaluates the world, just as the market is the standpoint of economics and the state the standpoint of political science. Sociology arises with civil society and dissolves when civil society recedes. But civil society is not some harmonious antidote to the colonizing powers of state and market. It is itself the site of divisions, exclusions, and dominations, reactionary as well as progressive movements, all of which is reflected in the plurality of sociologies. Civil society grounds two types of value commitments: *anti-utopian sociology* rooted in a critique of the over-extension of state (totalitarianism) and market (neoliberalism) and a *utopian sociology* that projects a vision of a collectively organized society. The history of sociology can be seen as a fluctuating debate between its utopian and anti-utopian tendencies, classically represented by Marx and Weber.

Weber's view of sociology reflects the specific circumstances of the academic field and civil society of his time. A very different perspective emerges with the opening up of the university and the consolidation of a conformity-producing civil society, sometimes called mass society. We may say that sociology's point of arrival—its golden years—came after World War II, particularly in the United States. As a new and optimistic science it flowered with the expansion of higher education. This was sociology's messianic moment captured, on the one side, by the utopian structural functionalism and modernization theory that regarded the United States as the promised land and, on the other side, by its anti-utopian critics who condemned U.S. imperialism, class domination, racism, and patriarchy.

Today we live in a different epoch when the university and civil society are in retreat, assailed by neoliberal rationality (Brown 2015). Sociology finds itself embattled in ways reminiscent of the world of Max Weber. It is swimming against the tide of marketization that is flooding the university. Retreating into a professional cocoon or servicing the new economy would falsify our traditions of anti-utilitarianism and threaten our utopian imagination. To survive we

have to reassert our roots in civil society. This is a moment defined by Bourdieu, Polanyi, and Du Bois—the first defending the autonomy of the academy and sociology in particular, the second providing the tools to analyze the epic battle between society and the market, while the third helps us place sociology in its global context.

Weber's admonition to insulate science from politics reflects sociology's period of inception and has to be reconsidered in subsequent periods and in other places. To reify insulation as though it has universal and unchanging validity—a sort of sociological "originalism"—is to contravene Weber's sociological method that instructs us to delineate the particular context within which his prescriptions hold, and imaginatively reconstruct them for the present. It is necessary to examine how the relation between politics and science shifts and with it, sociology.

Thus, I will argue with Weber against Weber. That is to say, the meaning of sociology as a vocation actually changes with the context of its pursuit: in the period of inception it meant the defense of its autonomy; in the second, self-confident period, it assumed an almost religious character; while in the present period, when sociology finds itself under assault, it calls for engagement. Before proceeding to these periods, however, we must first define "vocation" and then "sociology"—what it is that continues in and through variation.

The Meaning of Vocation

In Weber's view being in the modern world requires us to face two inexorable conditions: the advance of the division of labor and a plurality of incommensurable values. Durkheim's response was to reconcile these conditions by showing how the *perfection* of the division of labor calls forth and in turn is driven by a specific collective consciousness. Marx, on the other hand, demands the *abolition* of the division of labor as inimical to human freedom.

Weber accepts neither solution: the division of labor is debilitating, but it is here to stay. The best we can do is imbue specialized occupations with some immanent meaning through passionate commitment. In other words, we turn it into a vocation, pursuing

it as an end in itself. The prototype is the Calvinist entrepreneur devoted to the “irrational” pursuit of profit for profit’s sake. Unlike Lutherans who find it sufficient to passively accept their calling, the Calvinist is consumed by the anxiety of not knowing whether he or she is saved or damned. Fate is predetermined but unknown, leading to a desperate search for signs of salvation in the striving for profit and ever-increasing profit, which is the source of the spirit of capitalism. The elusiveness of success does not lead to resignation but to the redoubling of efforts. Hence the meaning of vocation—*commitment without guarantees*.

Equally, for the scientist, “passionate devotion” to the rigors of scholarly pursuit is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the elusive inspiration that “depends upon destinies that are hidden from us” (SV:136). The scientist has to be preoccupied with the puzzles of a research program as though “the fate of his soul depends” (SV:135) upon their solution, but without any guarantee of success and, furthermore, in the knowledge that whatever discovery he or she might make will be “surpassed and outdated” (SV:138).

These are the internal tensions inherent to science, but there are external uncertainties too. The aspirant scientist faces different institutional challenges, depending on the context. In a prophetic analysis, Weber describes the U.S. academic career as driven by the pecuniary nexus while in Germany academic life is still held in thrall to feudal hierarchy. Weber warns his audience that if they aspire to an academic career they will have to live with the arbitrary judgements and prejudices of students, colleagues, administrators, and governments, all tending toward mediocrity. As a vocation science is beset by uncertainty both in its external conditions as well as in the tensions internal to the scientific process. But these very uncertainties drive the commitment.⁴

The same is true of the politician who is driven by devotion to a cause, knowing that “the final result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning” (PV:117). So “passionate devotion” to a cause must be balanced by a “feeling of responsibility” and “sense of proportion.” Like scientists politicians have to comprehend the structures within which they act—the legislature, bureaucracy, and party organization. Comparing the institutional configurations in the United States, Germany, and Britain, Weber recognizes the limits of each: leadership democracy with a machine (U.S.) or leaderless democracy ruled by professional politicians without a calling (Germany). Weber regarded British parliamentarianism as offering the best chance for true leaders to emerge. If devotion to a cause, albeit moderated by a certain realism, is not strong enough then these institutions will be corrupting. Politics, says Weber in a pessimistic finale, is the “strong and slow boring of hard boards” (PV:128).

We can now move from Weber’s sociology of vocation—contradictory commitments pursued under external uncertainty—to the vocation of sociology. What drives our commitment to sociology? We have already suggested that sociology’s standpoint in civil society leads in two directions: an anti-utopian defense of civil society and a utopian reconstruction of civil society. Starting with Marx, Durkheim, and Weber and moving through Simmel, Polanyi, Du Bois, Parsons, Bourdieu, and Hochschild, western sociology is marked by an abiding rejection of utilitarianism, the reduction of human action to economic rationality. While the defense of liberal democracy and its freedoms has figured prominently in Soviet and even post-Soviet societies, the animating force behind western sociology has consistently been the opposition to the overextension of market logic. In his 1895 inaugural address at Freiburg University, marking his assumption to the chair of political economy at the tender age of 31, Weber himself foresaw the dangers of the rise of economics, critical of the way it obscured its underlying commitments to utilitarianism. Already then he warned: “in every sphere we find that the economic

⁴ There is now a more general literature on the way uncertainty—as long as it is neither too great nor too little—can elicit commitment through the organization of social games that give meaning to ostensibly meaningless work. See, for example, Sallaz (2009), Sharone (2013), and Snyder (2016).

TABLE 1:
Internal Tensions Defining Sociology as a Vocation

	Scientific Orientation		Political Orientation
Instrumental Rationality	PROFESSIONAL	↔	POLICY
	↕	↔	↕
Value Rationality	CRITICAL	↔	PUBLIC

way of looking at things is on the advance” (FA:17).

Alongside and in tension with sociology’s anti-utopian moment is its utopian moment—sociology’s commitment to the reconstruction of civil society, whether it be Marx’s communism, Durkheim’s guild socialism, Polanyi’s communitarian socialism, Parsons’ social system, Habermas’s redemption of the life-world and undistorted communication, or De Beauvoir’s mutual recognition. Even Weber, who largely fought on the anti-utopian front, with his insistent critique of rationalization, could nevertheless write: “man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible” (PV:128). These, then, are the presuppositions of sociology—what it most fears in the world and what it most desires.

Given its critical stance our science has to continually guard against the normative foundations that impel it and threaten to overwhelm it. But we can overreact to this threat. As Alvin Gouldner (1962, 1968) argued many years ago, the long-standing mythology of “value-free science” needs to be replaced by a value-committed science. More broadly, we can say that sociology has historically had to weather the antagonistic interdependence between instrumental rationality and value rationality. This tension is cross-cut by a second one between a scientific orientation and a political orientation, between understanding the world and the desire to change it. Sociology’s value stance—its utopian and anti-utopian dispositions—easily morphs into a political project, just as political projects inform the science we conduct. Stephen Turner (2014) has shown how U.S. sociology has swung between these antitheses—professionalism and reform—and how the presence of

women and feminist sociology pushed the discipline toward engagement, leading the recovery from the doldrums of the 1980s.

These tensions are inherent to the practice of sociology, so we should wrestle with them rather than bury them. As I have argued elsewhere, we should recognize how these internal tensions have led to four divergent types of sociology: professional sociology that recoils from politics and represses value commitments; critical sociology that interrogates and explicates the value foundations of science; policy sociology, committed to deploying science in the service of solving social problems; and, finally, public sociology that enters into a conversation with wider publics about alternative orders informed by science. The tensions inherent to sociology reveal themselves in struggles among these positions within the academic field, struggles that are further influenced by external conditions as they vary over space and time. In the remainder of this essay I trace changes in the vocation of sociology by examining the articulation of these four types of sociology in three historical moments: *inception, arrival, and engagement*.

Moment of Inception: Defending Sociology

At the end of the nineteenth century sociology barely existed as an academic discipline. It faced the challenges of birth. First, there was the contempt of other disciplines for this upstart dancing on the fence between science and humanities, between explanation and interpretation. Weber after all came to sociology from political economy. Second, its substance was not esoteric but challenged common sense, drawing defensive reactions and accusations of dilettantism. Weber himself repeatedly entered the

public domain on such issues as labor policies and the new constitution after World War I, but his expertise carried doubtful legitimacy.

Sociology also faced challenges stemming from its distinctive character as a social science. For Weber all science depended on simplifying the infinite manifold that is the empirical world. In his view the natural sciences simplified by searching for regularities, a largely inductive enterprise. By contrast the cultural sciences simplify the world through the adoption of values that focus our orientation to research. At the same time, those values, while necessary, should not distort the scientific enterprise—a difficult tension to navigate. Weber used the notion of ideal type to weld together value commitment and empirical analysis. “Substantively, this construct in itself is like a *utopia* which has been arrived at by analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality . . . An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*)” (OSS:90, emphasis in the original).

Today we might extend the idea of the ideal type to the scientific paradigm (following Thomas Kuhn), or a research program (following Imre Lakatos). In either case science advances by putting on blinders—wrestling with a specific set of puzzles or anomalies defined by a taken-for-granted framework, including a taken-for-granted set of values. Weber himself offers a premonition of the scientific paradigm and its revolutions:

All research in the cultural sciences in an age of specialization, once it is oriented towards a given subject matter through particular settings of problems and has established its methodological principles, will consider the analysis of data as an end in itself. It will discontinue assessing the value of the individual facts in terms of their relationships to ultimate value-ideas. Indeed, it will lose its awareness of its *ultimate rootedness in value-ideas* in general. And it is

well that should be so. But there comes a time when that atmosphere changes. The significance of the unreflectively utilized viewpoints becomes uncertain and the road is lost in the twilight. The light of the great cultural problems moves on. Then *science too prepares to change its standpoint and its analytical apparatus* and to view the streams of events from the heights of thought. It follows those stars which alone are able to give meaning and direction to its labors. (OSS:112, emphasis added)

A clearer statement of the value foundations of social science one cannot find, but what remains missing is any sense of the *community* of scientists, whether working together or in opposition to one another, to support or overthrow this or that research program. True to his methodological individualism, Weber conceives of science and scholarship as an individual accomplishment.

Furthermore, if values are foundational to sociology—not just as an object of investigation but as a necessary underpinning of the investigation itself—then science edges toward politics. Value relevance stems from value commitments that can make sociology vulnerable to politicization and, thus, provoke state interference. In Germany the university was subject to keen oversight by the Minister of Education who had the final say on all academic appointments, leading Weber to publicly defend the autonomy of the university and the threatened careers of its budding sociologists—Michels, Sombart, and Simmel among them (Shils 1974). Within the academic world itself, Weber’s position was controversial as he faced utopianism from both left and right, both of which called for the politicization of the university (Ringer 2004).

In contrast to Durkheim, Weber was adamant that while social science rested on values it could not determine what those values should be. What science might tell us are the appropriate means to pursue a given end and with what consequences. There is, therefore, a place for policy sociology, advising government as to how it might pursue given goals, but its role is not to define the goals themselves. Sociology can clarify the implications of adopting a particular

TABLE 2:
Parallel Tensions within Weber's Science and Politics

	SCIENCE	POLITICS
Instrumental Rationality	Research	Ethic of Responsibility
	↑	↑
Value Rationality	Values	Ethic of Absolute Ends

value stance, whatever it may be—socialism, liberalism, anarchism—but still cannot determine that choice. The best we can do is engage in rational discussion about the implications, clarity, and justification of our values.

There were occasions in which Weber engaged in such value discussion, most famously in his Freiburg address of 1895 when he attacked economists for obscuring the value foundations of their science by claiming value neutrality. His essay on "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality'" also remonstrated against inferring what ought to be from what is, attacking the hidden value assumptions behind the idea of "progress." For the most part, however, Weber sought to keep value discussion under wraps, focusing on the methodology and pursuit of the social sciences rather than their destabilizing value foundations. He fought many battles within the newly created German Sociological Association for fear it would be overrun by values at the expense of research—a mark of sociology's youth. Once science established itself, however, it became important to restore open discussion through what we may call a critical sociology, a dialogue between its utopian and anti-utopian moments.

The dependence of research on value commitments finds its parallel in politics in the relation between an "ethic of responsibility" and an "ethic of absolute ends." On the one hand, the politician has to be driven by a cause, an ethic of absolute ends grounded in unshakable goals and compelling visions. On the other hand, a true politician, mindful of the cause, must follow an ethic of responsibility, that is, temper the pursuit of a cause with a sense of realism that weighs up and takes into account the consequences of that pursuit. These two ethics are not "absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute the genuine

man—a man who can have the 'calling for politics'" (PV:127). Here the sociologist enters, calibrating the consequences of and strategies for political intervention. The task of the social scientist qua policy scientist is to develop a sense of what is possible and impossible in any given political situation.

Just as Weber had little to say about the institutional basis of value discussion within the academic sphere, so he was equally reticent about the discussion and crystallization of values in the wider society. He was suspicious of political leaders who could easily manipulate the "irrational sentiments" of the "inarticulate mass." He was fearful of civil society—the fount of public values—that was blossoming with social movements, alongside the rise of the social democratic party and trade unions. Weber sought to protect the university from the encroachment of civil society.

For Weber the idea of public sociology was an oxymoron since, as far as he was concerned, there was no genuine public. "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations" (SV:155). Yet, in his own practice he often addressed publics on sociological matters—the students who listened to his great lectures on science and politics, the Austro-Hungarian officers who listened to him dissect the dangers of socialism, the readers of his numerous contributions to newspapers, including his five essays on the New Political Order, published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1917.

His practice here was ahead of his theory. The concept of public sociology—public discussion of ends informed by the study of

value-oriented action—could not appear without the simultaneous recognition of civil society, a realm separate from economy and polity. Civil society is the substratum that facilitates debates about values, goals, and aspirations of the collective, what we now call, following Arendt and Habermas, the public sphere.

Moment of Arrival: Messianic Sociology

Weber was writing in a period when sociology was just emerging and the university was under threat from a burgeoning civil society as well as an encroaching state. Critical and public sociologies had yet to be consolidated. For this we would have to wait until the middle of the twentieth century—sociology's golden decades after World War II with an epicenter in the United States marked by the euphoria of victory over fascism and the targeting of the cold war enemy, the Soviet Union, and its ruling ideology.

At the heart of sociology's renaissance, nationally and globally, were Talcott Parsons and his colleagues at Harvard. In their vision the United States was the lead society, a claim that underpinned their modernization theory, according to which the rest of the world should follow in the tracks of the United States. This imperial vision was expressed in numerous works, not least in the encyclopedic volume on the history of social theory, edited by Parsons, Naegele, Pitts, and Shils (1961), that sought to demonstrate that Parsonsian structural functionalism was the culmination of western social and political thought.

The epilogue to this volume was a long essay, subsequently published as a separate book, by the erudite and influential Edward Shils, entitled "The Calling of Sociology" (1961a). According to Shils, Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) "brought the greatest of partial traditions into a measure of unity" (1961a:1406), an arrival that coincided with the rise of the consensual society.

Modern society, especially in its latest phase, is characteristically a consensual society; it is a society in which personal attachments play a greater part than in most societies in the past, in which the

individual person is appreciated, in which there is a concern for his well-being—not just in a veterinary sense, but as a moral personality. The humanitarianism of the present age, which extends beyond the boundaries of national societies; the growing acknowledgement as well as demand for the moral equality of races; the welfare policies and dreams of states; the very desire to please; the greater concern for the claims of the living than for the claims of the dead—all these features of contemporary Western, and increasingly of the modern sector of non-Western, societies disclose a concern with happiness of the individual human being and an appreciation of the moral dignity of his interior life. (Shils 1961a:1410)

This was sociology's Durkheimian moment when it saw itself as the expression and educator of the collective consciousness. Sociology comes to fruition, Shils avers, with its focus on "civil society" and the social problems that had arisen in connection with urbanization and immigration.

In order to prove their rights to existence, sociologists sought to find a sphere of events left untouched by the already accredited social sciences. The inherited distinction between the state and civil society fitted this need very well. (Shils 1961a:1434)

Thus, in the vision of the leading political sociologist of the time—Seymour Martin Lipset—political sociology focused on the social bases of liberal democracy and how these may be threatened by "extremist" politics whether of the right or the left.

Sociologists could express the virtues of civil society because, Shils claimed, they were inside the world they studied. "The theory of action sees itself as part of what it is trying to understand. Thus, sociological theory is not just a theory like any other theory; it is a social relationship between the theorist and the subject matter of his theory. It is a relationship formed by the sense of affinity" (1961a:1420). The relation between sociologists and the people they study exemplifies Parsons' (1951) "complementary role

TABLE 3:
Shils' Calling of Sociology

	Scientific Orientation	Political Orientation
Instrumental Rationality	PROFESSIONAL (Research and Theory)	POLICY (Manipulative Sociology)
Value Rationality	CRITICAL (Alienated Sociology)	PUBLIC (Consensual Sociology)

expectations"—a relation of reciprocal sympathy and understanding. By contrast, Shils regards policy sociology with suspicion. It is a sociology with manipulative intent that denies the "mutuality inherent in the theory of action," an instrumental relation that subverts "the identity of the theorist and the subject of theory" (1961a:1420). The technological application of sociology is at odds with the democratic society that respects the dignity of the individual. It should never be a tool for technocrats to rule society.

But Shils reserves the greatest contempt for critical theory, or what he calls "alienated" sociology, with its Hobbesian view of society, centering on conflict and elite manipulation of the masses. In this connection he devotes a special section to Marxism, which he says has failed to hold "the imagination of morally sensitive and intelligent young people because its political implications became too rigid and simplistic" (1961a:1423). Sociology is displacing Marxism as a result of the latter's association with tyranny as well as its intellectual inadequacy. By contrast sociology holds a far greater critical potential. "It appeals more to the mind of the contemporary intellectual by the freedom of experience it permits; it allows a man to make his own personal contact with reality, to test it by his own experience, and to criticize it in a way that does more justice, as he sees it, to that experience" (1961a:1423-4). In *The Structure of Social Action*, Parsons had relegated Marx to a form of utilitarian individualism, and in 1965 he could still speak of Karl Marx as "probably the greatest social theorist whose work lies entirely within the nineteenth century" (Parsons 1967:135). This obituary of Marxism is ironic in the light of its resurgence just a few years later.

Shils (1961b) made his views on critical sociology widely known with an acrimonious

review of C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Mills had written a troika of books—*The New Men of Power* (1948), *White Collar* (1951), and *The Power Elite* (1956)—that saw the United States as dominated by an unaccountable power elite that suppressed society's deep internal divisions. The labor movement had been co-opted, the middle classes absorbed, and intellectuals had become auxiliaries of a cohesive ruling class with uncontested power. This anti-utopian vision of the United States was an alternative to the one celebrated by Parsons et al. whose work Mills (1959) attacked as vacuous "grand theory" aided by a bureaucratically compromised "abstracted empiricism." Shils, in turn, would subject Mills to withering contempt—an obstinately alienated intellectual, out of touch with society and with sociology. Indeed, according to Shils, Mills was as removed from society as were the derogated servants of power. The following decades would demonstrate that Mills was far more in touch with U.S. society than Shils, and his popularity would soar as the influence of structural functionalism declined.

Curiously, Shils did find something valuable in the sociological imagination, namely the idea that sociology can and should reach and educate public opinion. For Shils sociology was fast becoming an "act of communion between object and subject" (1961a:1411). No less than Mills, Shils was committed to public sociology: "The proper calling of sociology today is the illumination of opinion. Having its point of departure in the opinion of the human beings who make up the society, it is its task to return to opinion, clarified and deepened by dispassionate study and systematic reflection" (1961a:1441). It was a strange, illusory public sociology—a spontaneous, unobstructed conversation between the academic world and its publics with a strong anti-communist bent.

Shils subscribes to the same four-fold division of sociology—professional (sociological research and theory), policy (manipulative sociology), critical (alienated sociology), and public (consensual sociology)—but in a messianic vein. In his imagination and in the imagination of structural functionalism more generally, sociology could claim to be the civil religion of liberal America, reflecting and promoting its defining collective consciousness. It was the counterpart to and sworn enemy of Soviet Marxism that similarly claimed to represent a collective consciousness, that of the Soviet people and by extension the rest of the world. Utopian though it was, Shils' public sociology also had its darker side. As a leading figure in the Congress of Cultural Freedom, an international anti-communist front sponsored by the CIA, he was deeply involved in Cold War politics, destabilizing radicalism, especially in the "New Nations" of the Third World, and promoting conservatism through such magazines as *Encounter*.

It was not long, however, before history caught up with structural functionalism. Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970) indicted structural functionalism (and indeed Soviet Marxism) as being out of touch with the societies they claimed to represent. In the United States, Gouldner's critique of the domain assumptions of mainstream sociology mirrored the rising civil rights movement, anti-war movement, student movement, and Third World movement. These movements exposed the dominant sociology as projecting a particular ideological vision of society, belying its claims to value neutrality.

Still, despite Gouldner's warning, sociology did not die, but continued its ascent as the critical theory he advocated—that now included feminism, Marxism, and critical race theory—became widely adopted, inspired by the social movements of the era. The classic of the Marxist renaissance came from Barrington Moore, a Soviet specialist reemerging as a comparative historian and author of the magisterial *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). Together with E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), he reinvented the meaning of class in historical perspective. This was followed by a wide range of

research, conducted in the trenches of the academy, advancing Marxist theories of class exploitation, the labor process, the state, social movements, patriarchy, racial domination, imperialism, and so forth. This critical theory, however, was no less messianic than the structural functionalism it was replacing, having a similar idealist presumption that intellectuals, especially sociologists, expressed the latent aspirations of a broad unnamed public, often of Third World provenance—an illusion largely sustained and promoted by their isolation from society.

The euphoria of sociology—whether it spoke in the name of a universal collective consciousness or that of a particular race, class, or gender—was encouraged by the rapid expansion of higher education in general and of sociology in particular. Parsons' sociology was the new science of the era, seeking to subsume the neighboring disciplines of anthropology, psychology, political science, and even economics under its expansive mantle. With the upsurge of protest movements, sociology turned from a utopian endorsement of the United States to its anti-utopian critic. The legitimacy and the influence of the university were taken for granted, encouraging on the part of its scholars an exaggerated sense of their importance. Sociologists assumed that their ideas would insinuate themselves into the wider society and there inspire social change. There was no anticipation of the subsequent assault on the idea of the university or its reduction to market forces. Nor was there any intimation of the marginalization of sociology that would accompany the neoliberal offensive against civil society.

Moment of Engagement: Sociology as a Combat Sport

The 1960s and 1970s were golden years for sociology—it captured the imagination of the epoch, first the post-World War II euphoria and then the sixties' social movements. To live for sociology in this period was to indulge in a certain illusory optimism of the power of ideas that makes little sense today. It was a time of the expanding university, flush with public funding, and its occupants reflected this in their missionary zeal

TABLE 4:
Sociology as a Bourdieusian Field

	Autonomy	Heteronomy
Consecrated	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
Challengers	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

for a better world. We live in a very different world in which the university is in retreat, as it becomes a capitalist institution driven by market forces. Our era belongs neither to Weber, Durkheim, nor Marx but to Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Polanyi, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

Sociology can take an instrumental turn: either retreating into its professional shell in the hope that the storm will dissipate or competing in the market by selling its expertise in policy research. But such a move may come at the expense of its value stances, sociology's critical and public impulses. Indeed, Max Weber himself feared such a process of "rationalization" in which a logic of means and efficiency dominated the discussion of ends. A similar fear lay at the heart of the Frankfurt School from Horkheimer and Adorno to Marcuse and Habermas.

A more recent representative is Pierre Bourdieu, who defines sociology as a combat sport in which public engagement becomes a defense of the profession. His position stems from a broader concern to uphold the autonomy of cultural and scientific fields against the corrosive influence of markets. Even though Bourdieu does not apply his field analysis to sociology, were he to do so he might arrive at the same internal tensions as we have found in Weber and Shils. Bourdieu's analysis of fields also works along two dimensions: relations of dependence (autonomy vs. heteronomy) and relations of domination (consecrated vs. challengers), giving rise to the same array of sociologies—professional, policy, public, and critical.⁵ Note that the distinction between the consecrated and their challengers is a social relation of domination among individuals holding different positions in the field rather than

a relation of domination between types of rationality, between instrumental and value rationality. Such a relation of internal domination is integral to any field, but what disfigures the field are forces of "heteronomy," encroachments from without, whether they come from commodification or "mediatization."

The astonishing rise of Bourdieu, nationally and globally, followed and deepened his critique of neoliberalism. Early in his career he was committed to the development of a professional sociology, defined as a sharp break from common sense and applied sociology (Bourdieu [1968]1991). This was Weber's knowledge for knowledge's sake. As he became a more prominent figure, especially with his ascent to Professor in the Collège de France in 1981, Bourdieu repudiated his earlier hostility to "reform sociology" and took up policy research, especially with regard to higher education. During his last decade, hostile to the French government's adoption of neoliberal austerity measures, he took sociology to the streets (Bourdieu 1998). This public turn was a desperate move, contradicting his theory of symbolic domination—his anti-utopian sociology—that claimed that the dominated cannot understand their own subjugation. He attacked outside pretenders—the doxosophers—who distorted sociology from without as well as the "opportunists" who subverted it from within (Bourdieu [1996]1999). Facing enemies on all sides he struck alliances wherever he could, especially with social movements fighting the effects of neoliberalism (Bourdieu [2001]2003). He became the most renowned and influential public sociologist of our era, but, like Weber, his theory lagged behind his practice—he could not explain how people could grasp the conditions of their own subjugation and contest marketization.

Bourdieu attacked the "tyranny of the market" but without an adequate theory of

⁵ Most pertinent for our purposes is Bourdieu's treatment of the scientific field (1975), the literary field ([1992]1996), and symbolic domination and scholastic fallacies ([1997]2000).

marketization. Here the theoretical baton is passed on to Polanyi (1944)—now a canonical figure in economic sociology—who examined the devastation that comes with the commodification of labor, money, and nature, so-called fictitious commodities. His analysis resonates with the sociology of today: the commodification of labor that has left a defenseless precariat in its wake, the commodification of money that has led to the rule of finance and the ruin of national economies, the commodification of nature that has led to the destruction of water supplies, the spoliation of land, and climate change. Together they threaten human survival on the planet. Polanyi did not anticipate another (third) wave of marketization—he thought humanity would never make the same mistake again—because he did not develop a theory of capitalist accumulation that would explain the forces behind marketization.

Nor did Polanyi foresee the commodification of knowledge: how the university would itself become subject to the same distorting market forces. The university is fast losing its public character. With the disappearance of the funding it once took for granted, it has had to sell itself by charging students rising fees, begging for contributions from donors and alumni, seeking corporate investment, creating public-private partnerships, speculating on its real estate, and turning the university into a hedge fund by leveraging its “brand.” Such revenue-raising is supplemented with cost cutting through online education and cuts in wages, salaries, and benefits for its employees, and by replacing expensive tenured faculty with much cheaper contingent faculty. With commodification comes dispossession. The university has been increasingly hijacked by a class of “spiralists”—circulating administrators and their management consultants, concerned more with finance than education and research, who thereby threaten the very functions they are hired to protect. We can no longer take the university for granted—it has to become an object of investigation as well as a launching pad for investigation.

Polanyi’s anti-utopian project that analyzes the forces of marketization gives rise to a utopian project—the societal counter-movement to marketization. Here

he sets the terms of a sociological research program emanating from a critique of his ideas. His view of society as a harmonious and resilient force capable of resisting commodification has to be replaced by the notion of a precarious and contested civil society. His reduction of state to society has to be replaced by a complex array of relations that vary over time and between countries. His counter-movement has to be replaced by theories of social movements as responses to marketization and how they may lead in the direction of greater freedom (socialism) or lesser freedom (fascism). There is no shortage of professional sociology working within such a framework, whether self-consciously Polanyian or not. Indeed, the expansion of our subdisciplines—reflected in the last half-century of growth in the sections of the American Sociological Association—reflects the plurality of standpoints to be found in civil society, each a potential arena of resistance to the rising tide of commodification, each a flourishing area of research.

Critical sociology has conventionally served to interrogate the assumptions of professional sociology, especially its claims to value neutrality. We will always have need of sociologists who query the foundations of our research and compel us to be more reflective about who we are and what we do, especially in an era of the commodification of knowledge. But critical sociology should also direct its focus outward, placing value commitments front and center of explorations of alternatives to the existing world. The power of market society makes the existing world appear natural and inevitable, and sociology’s historic task is both anti-utopian, explaining how we get trapped by domination, and utopian, exploring alternative visions. To make those visions plausible it is important to work from the concrete, from the actually existing, to tease out principles behind institutions that challenge marketization. Exemplary here is Erik Wright’s (2010) work on real utopias—participatory budgeting, cooperatives, universal guaranteed income—all of which contest the supremacy of market forces driven by the exigencies of capitalism.

Subservient to the logic of the market and losing the trappings of welfare, the state is

less inclined to strike an alliance with sociology than it was in the Keynesian era. Policy sociology, therefore, has to seek out partners in the world of progressive foundations, ready to support programs that critically examine the corrosive effects of the market such as the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration at the University of Southern California or the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University, Chicago. Ruth Milkman and Eileen Appelbaum (2013) pioneered the investigation of new California legislation for paid family leave, encouraging the adoption of similar legislation in other states. Yet, at the same time, they hold on to a critical perspective that sees the outcome of legislation as largely reproducing social inequality. Theda Skocpol's *Scholar's Strategy Network* is a more ambitious and wide-ranging effort at policy advocacy and critique.

Finally, there is public sociology, not always easy to distinguish from policy sociology, especially when the latter is unwelcome in the corridors of power. The goal of public sociology is to develop a conversation between sociologists and publics about the direction of society. Shils' "calling" had public sociology at its core—sociology spontaneously expressed a singular collective consciousness. Subsequent history showed just how illusory this public sociology was—the collective consciousness proved to be far more divided and far less open to sociology than Shils claimed. To sustain a presence in the public sphere, sociology has to compete with corporate interests and powerful media hostile to its message as well as with other disciplines, notably economics, political science, and psychology, that are far more consonant with the reigning common sense. The situation requires a distinction between two types of public sociology.

In its "traditional" form public sociology catalyzes public discussion through the writing of books and contributions to the official media (radio, television, newspapers) or the ever-expanding blogosphere and digital media. What headway can a sociology critical of the market make in a public sphere colonized by powerful market forces? When economists such as Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty join forces with Pope Francis

and Bernie Sanders to condemn market-induced inequality, one might suspect that the balance is tilting back to sociology. For all the controversy they sometimes raise, recent ethnographic work shows how effective they can be in raising public awareness. For example, Matt Desmond's *Evicted* describes in pain-inducing detail the consequences of an unregulated housing market, drawing attention to the exploitative relation between rentiers and tenants.

Alongside traditional public sociology, there is an "organic" public sociology, involving an unmediated face-to-face relation of sociologists with publics such as trade unions, religious organizations, or neighborhood associations. This subterranean form of public sociology is often more effective and longer lasting. With the effervescence of civil society, registered in such social movements as the Occupy movement, Black Lives Matter, or the Dreamers or in the rise of social movements hostile to the regulatory state, sociology's public face can gain more prominence. But the populist upsurge—in Europe and not just North America—can assume a reactionary as well as a progressive character, and here too public sociology has a battle to join. We have thought too little about the challenge of addressing publics that are hostile to our values.

Undoubtedly the most effective public sociology has been feminist inspired. Whether this concerns the domestic sphere or the labor market, whether education or politics, whether patterns of divorce or dating, whether adoption or abortion, sexual violence or transgender relations, feminist sociology has made inroads into public consciousness, by way of both sympathy and reaction. No less important is the silent revolution within sociology that the feminism movement has wrought, leaving no area untouched. Beyond the inclusion of gender, and along with critical race theory, feminism has compelled the recognition of "standpoint" and the fact that we are never outside the world we study. In short, we should not forget that public sociology carries a two-way influence, from publics to sociology as well as sociology to publics.

As the market invades and transforms the university, there is one arena over which we

still have a measure of control. That is teaching. Max Weber had an instrumental view of teaching in which students are passive receptacles, susceptible to political manipulation. The lecturer, therefore, has to keep his values to himself and focus on the transmission of specialist knowledge. This is how many still think about teaching, whether it be conveying the basic ideas and discoveries of our discipline, often formulated in textbooks, or by developing special vocational programs in such topics as criminology or health. You might say that the former is a professional approach to teaching whereas the latter is a policy approach to teaching. A critical approach teaches our students to interrogate the foundations of our discipline, pointing to new foundations accompanied by alternative visions. Here we highlight the value premises of the material we teach, deliberately chosen to reveal the plurality of value premises even within our own discipline.

But there is also teaching as public sociology in which students are themselves constituted as a public. In this mode, teaching is a three-level dialogue: a first dialogue between teacher and students that takes that very pedagogical relationship as point of departure with a view to exploring the lived experience of students, enriching it with sociological studies; a second dialogue among students in which they learn about themselves through engaging one another; and a third dialogue of students with publics beyond the university. Deepening students' understanding of their changing relation to their own institution by placing that relationship front and center of sociological analysis might also enlist them in a common project of defending the university and advancing sociology.

The university will be overrun and destroyed by market forces if there is no resistance. Sociology is well-positioned to partake in such resistance, but it cannot accomplish this by itself. The counter-movement to the rationalization of the university requires not only the reassertion of values in its midst and thus the building of alliances across disciplines and across schools, but also the building of collaborations with publics outside the university—publics tied to institutions that are suffering a similar fate to the university itself. Sociology

can build allies within the university, but no less important it needs to recognize that the university cannot stand apart from society; it must be accountable to society if it is to win back legitimacy as a public institution.

But our discipline has also to be broadened in another way. If sociology is to treat the causes and consequences of commodification of labor, nature, money, and knowledge, it has to deal with migration and precarity, environmental degradation, finance capital, and intellectual property as *global* phenomena. Sociology has to become global not only in its product but also in its production. Weber's sociology was panoramic but ultimately rooted in German society, while structural functionalism believed in its own spurious universalism. Today we have to be more humble and recognize our fraught position within a globalizing world with a plurality of sociologies, each with their own national or regional base, located in a very unequal and hierarchical global field composed of universities gaming world rankings, searching out fee-paying students, and creating networks of global campuses. Increasingly, competition for "world class" status divides higher education into two worlds—elite and non-elite—each rapidly receding from the other. Playing in the global field of higher education undoubtedly has its down side for the subordinate players who have to follow in the tracks of northern "distinction," trying to publish in northern journals run by northern academics, drawing them away from their own national and local publics. On the other hand, their presence—if organized—can bring pressure to bear on northern sociologists to shed their provincialism and work toward a global community of critical thinkers. Postcolonial thought, or southern theory, as Raewyn Connell (2007) calls it, demands that we both recognize and transcend our own limited perspectives. This will be necessary if we are to tackle the global challenges of today.

But for such a sociology to take root we will need a civil society of global dimensions, something that neither Polanyi nor Bourdieu could imagine, notwithstanding the former's grasp of the internationalization of capitalism and the latter's promotion of an "international of intellectuals." In this

regard, if there is one sociologist whose trail we might follow it is W.E.B. Du Bois, who began by studying the world market in slavery, created the first laboratory of scientific sociology, and wrote a brilliant comparative history of reconstruction in the American South. Discriminated against in the academic field, he took his sociology to wider publics, developing a critical stance toward the U.S. state, becoming a communist and a Pan-Africanist, and living his last years in postcolonial Ghana. In recovering his pioneering role in the formation of U.S. sociology, Aldon Morris (2015) opens the door to viewing Du Bois as also the most contemporary of sociologists, his colonized status at home leading to an expansive global vision we so badly need today.

Conclusion: Sociology without Guarantees

Reared in the halcyon days of the 1960s and 1970s, now observing a discipline in retreat, disillusioned patrons like Alain Touraine and Immanuel Wallerstein say we should dissolve sociology into a broader social science. They argue that there is no justification for the separate disciplines whose *raison d'être* lies in the conditions of the second half of the nineteenth century, the separation of state, economy, and society. Perhaps an argument could be made that these distinctions did begin to blur in the advanced economies of the post-war period, and an integral social science perhaps made sense then. Indeed, Parsons tried to pioneer such a social science with sociology at its center. More recent proposals for an integral social science tend to bury the sociological tradition rather than elevate it. Given the power and legitimacy of economics, today any singular social science would be dominated by economics and lose sociology's distinctive utopian and anti-utopian commitments.

The distinction between market, state, and society rather than being anachronistic has been given renewed significance by the advance of marketization. We are indeed returning to the nineteenth century, within which Weber's two essays become especially pertinent. Still, for all the parallels, we are

not living in the nineteenth century; the passage of the twentieth century has not been in vain. With all its regressions, at least in the north, it did create a thriving university and an expansive civil society—a legacy now under threat but far from dissolved. From the messianic period sociology inherited aspirations for a better world that holds state and market in check.

In this context, therefore, the sociological tradition must not be abandoned but revitalized. It will be a sociology without guarantees, summoning up the courage to contest this latest wave of marketization that threatens to overwhelm not just ourselves but the human race. Weber's "polar night of icy darkness and hardness" (PV:128) may lie ahead, but that possibility only makes the ongoing commitment to sociology more imperative.

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