SOCIOLOGY AS A THEORY BUILDING ENTERPRISE

Detours from the Early Masters

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A review of sociologists' excuses for not developing laws or principles that are the equivalent to those in the natural sciences is undertaken. This review is placed in the context of the vision of sociology's early masters who believed that laws of social organization could be articulated. The failure of modern theorists to build on this vision over the last 50 years is highlighted by an examination of some of the basic principles of social organization that the early masters articulated. These principles, it is argued, constitute sociological laws that are equivalent to those in the natural sciences.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Sociologists often feel somewhat embarrassed in the presence of "hard scientists." Even within the social sciences, sociologists sometimes appear defensive when comparing their conceptual accomplishments to those of economists and psychologists. Much of this discomfort stems from the lack of mature theory in sociology. Indeed, what pride can we take in our theoretical accomplishments when compared to those in physics and biology? Where are sociology's equivalents to Einsteinian or Darwinian theory? Or, if we come closer to home, where is our theoretical answer to even the admittedly parochial principles of behaviorism or those of classical economics?

Sociologists often take solace by noting the advancement in quantitative data analyzing techniques, even though these represent simple elaborations of the correlational analysis developed by a British agronomist, Karl Pearson. While many of these techniques represent number-crunching razzle-dazzle,

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we can still take pride in the methodological and statistical advancements in sociology. These advancements, however, only throw into bolder relief the lack of well-developed, formal, and interesting theory in sociology. And so, at a time when our theory-testing capacity has taken great leaps, the last 50 years have seen comparatively few major theoretical developments in American sociology.

Such a conclusion is perhaps unduly harsh. One might point to a number of theoretical developments in diverse areas. For example, labeling theory, Parsonian action theory, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, role theory, critical theory, and exchange theory all contain uniquely American elements. Yet if we examine these theoretical "schools of thought," many are little more than meta-theoretical supposition, others are warmed over versions of the great European thinkers of the last century, and still others represent restatements of Meadian social psychology. There are, of course, exceptions,[1] but theory in contemporary America (and things are are even worse in Europe) does not reveal the formality or power of theory in other sciences, nor does it excite, to any great degree, the minds or imaginations of those who are most capable of testing theories.

Why should this be so? Why should Auguste Comte's dream of a "science of society"—indeed, a "social physics"—have come to a state where those of different philosophical and meta-theoretical persuasions argue past one another (or, even worse, only talk with those of their kind), where one must go begging to find an abstract theoretical principle, or where many empiricists simply view theory as irrelevant to their desire to crunch numbers in new ways? In a word, what went wrong?

To answer this question, we need to address several issues. First, we must review the various explanations that sociologists offer as a defense, or as an excuse, for their theoretical failings. Second, we must go back to the hundred years before the last 50—that is, to the period between 1830 and 1930—to discover if sociology "got off on the wrong theoretical foot" or simply lost the inspiration and genius of its founders. For if sociology is to make any pretense at being or becoming a science, it will have to come to grips with the reason for our implicit embarrass-

ment when in the presence of hard scientists. This embarrassment stems from our lack of an accepted body of theoretical principles that allows us to explain why events in the social world should occur.

EXPLANATIONS FOR SOCIOLOGY'S THEORETICAL FAILINGS

The most frequently cited reason for sociology's theoretical failings is its position as a nascent science. Such a view represents, in reality, an excuse, because formal sociology is 150 years old and because humans have been thinking about themselves and their condition for centuries. As long as sociology remains comfortable with this view, it will become old, while remaining scientifically immature.

A second reason for sociology's failings comes from those who believe that sociology has an insufficient data base for either inducing theory or testing its implications. This view is based on a false conception of theoretical activity, for, in reality, much theory is generated without intimate knowledge of "the facts." Moreover, those who are buried in mounds of data are rarely able to abstract above those facts. Indeed, conceptual and theoretical skills are much different, requiring different mental processes, from data-gathering skills. Thus, if sociology waits for the accumulation of more "facts," it will continue to inspire new data-analyzing techniques, but it will thwart sociology's development as a science organized around basic theoretical principles.

A third explanation for sociology's failings comes from those, such as Merton (1968), who argue for middle-range theories as the necessary prerequisite for more general theoretical principles. This advocacy has, since the demise of Parsons' grand intellectual scheme, dominated sociology. Unfortuantely, the middle-range strategy has not been implemented in the way Merton intended. Rather than theories of limited range, in terms of their level of abstraction and breadth of coverage, we have generated a series of highly specific theories in a number of diverse substantive areas which are, in many ways, little more

than collections of generalizations of empirical findings. Instead of well-developed theories of generic and basic processes, such as conflict, cooperation, socialization, accommodation, assimilation, dissociation, and the like, and instead of theories on basic types of social structures, such as hierarchies, ecological systems, communities, organizations, or groups, we have "theories" of family, criminal gangs, finance units in organizations, economic development, ethnic minorities, and the like. These are not middle-range theories; they are places where one might test a theory. To paraphrase Homans (1961), they are "where one studies, not what one studies." Thus, the middle-range strategy has created a series of interesting empirical generalizations, typically presented as a causal model or some other correlational device, *as if* they were theory. As a result, sociology often confuses the procedures for testing theories with the process of constructing theory.

Still another explanation for why sociology has so little theory comes from diverse camps, all of which view the "natural science" conception of theory as impossible in analyzing the social world. There are those who believe that human behavior and organization contain the capacity for spontaneity and indeterminism, with the result that there are no timeless or universal patterns of organization describable in terms of abstract laws (Blumer, 1969); still others argue the position that each historical epoch reveals its own laws of organization, thus rendering the search for panhistorical or universal laws fruitless (Appelbaum, 1978). Another group of scholars believes that the methodological problems of humans studying humans are so great as to make deductive theory and its definitive refutation a virtual impossibility. Or, at the very least, these facts require as a first priority the discovery of the laws of human thought, cognition, and consciousness, because all knowledge about patterns of social organization is mediated through such mental processes (Cicourel, 1973, 1964).

These explanations arrest our theoretical imagination. They imply that abstract theory cannot be developed for social phenomena; or if it can, then it must wait for a more adequate data base, a body of middle-range theories, a prior theory or philosophy of cognition, and worst of all, an unspecified number

of years until intellectual maturity sets in. These explanations are feeble and incorrect excuses. Theory in other sciences has often come early in the history of a discipline; it has frequently come without extensive catalogues of facts; and it has had to overcome methodological obstacles equal to those in the social sicences. (We could view the fact that we are humans studying humans as an *advantage* rather than a handicap, because we can intuitively achieve familiarity with our data.)

If we go back to the beginnings of sociology, we can find little trace of current methodological inhibitions. Indeed, the first sociologists were filled with optimism in the post-Newtonian era. They believed that universal laws of human organization could be discovered, and they acted on this belief. The result was that, by 1930, sociology had a legacy of 100 years of bold and venturesome theoretical activity by men who were not intimidated by the complexity of phenomena, who recognized that no theory can control for every variable, and who were willing to guess and be proven wrong. While we still revere Marx, Durkheim, Mead, and a few others, we do not look at them in the way that they looked at themselves, or at each other. We view them through the eyeglasses of our theoretical inhibitions, with the result that we do not ask: What are the universal theoretical principles developed by our first masters? What was our theoretical legacy in 1930? Rather, we trace the connections between schools and the "intellectual milieu of their times" (Coser, 1977; Nisbet, 1966). We debate over Durkheim's "real meaning" of the concept of anomie (Lukes, 1973). We argue over how much Weber reacted to "the ghost of Marx" (Bendix, 1968). We debate the fine points and nuances of Marx, much like pedantic religious scholars who pore over the sacred text (Hook, 1974; Ollman, 1976). In other words, we concern ourselves primarily with distracting details while we ignore the essence of any science—the development of abstract theoretical principles.

The profound tradegy of all this concern with scholarly minutiae is that many of these giants of our past had developed some basic theoretical principles that we tend to ignore. Why have we ignored the important part—that is, the theoretical principles--of our first 100 years? Part of the answer resides in our fear of abstraction; another part comes from our current

obsession with causality; yet another part stems from our desire to find statistical significance on a subject matter that does not matter; and, most tragically, a large part of the answer results from our political bias and the blind rejection of scholars whose politics do not correspond with our own.[2]

If we are willing to reject current explanations for sociology's theoretical shortcomings, then we must ask: Where did sociology go wrong? What happened to distract the sociological imagination? The answer to these questions resides in our first 100 years as a formal discipline; and, thus, we need to examine the theoretical strategies, as well as the abstract principles, of our early masters in order to see what they presented to us by 1930. Only in this way can we understand the theoretical events of the last 50 years in American sociology.

THEORETICAL STRATEGIES OF THE EARLY MASTERS, 1830-1930

In Table I the theoretical strategies of sociology's most prominent early masters are presented.[3] In particular, we have emphasized the views of Comte, Spencer, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, and Mead with respect to the following strategic considerations:

(1) *Abstract Principles:* Should, or can, sociological theory resemble theory in physics? Can we develop abstract statements of fundamental relations among social phenomena, without regard to causality and without concern for historical epochs?
(2) *Causality:* To what extent should sociological theory be concerned with discerning the causes of phenomena? Must sociology's abstract statements uncover causal connections?
(3) *Typology and Classification:* To what degree should sociological theory employ abstract or concrete typologies of social phenomena? Should these be constructed prior to theoretical statements?
(4) *Structural Affinities:* Should sociological theory be devoted to understanding the co-variance of specific types of social structures (such as how changes in the economy are associated with changes in kinship and religion)? Or should theory seek to under-

stand the more abstract properties of social interaction and organization common to all types of social structures (such as the principles of hierarchy, ecological distribution, mobility, and the like)?

(5) *Meta-theoretical Supposition:* To what extent must sociology begin with a series of assumptive statements on the "nature of social reality" before theory can be developed? Can theory be developed only after creating an extensive metaphysical system?

(6) *Induction versus Deduction:* Should detailed observations of social events precede and inspire the development of theory? Or should theory be articulated first, and then tested against the empirical facts?

Of course, these issues are not mutually exclusive, but concentration on some as opposed to others will have profound consequences for the kind of theory which will be articulated. If one scholar believes, for example, that a well-developed set of meta-theoretical assumptions must precede the articulation of abstract principles, whereas another insists that typologies must precede causal statements, the form, style, and substance of their respective theories will differ. And so would the theories of scholars emphasizing different combinations of these five strategic issues.

Table 1 allows us to compare the diversity of strategies of our first 100 years with those of the last 50. In general, the first self-conscious sociologists, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, advocated a sociology based on the Newtonian vision of science. This strategy emphasized the search for the laws of social organization and change, without overconcern with causality. Comte (1851-1854), in particular, saw a concern with causality as hindering sociological theory:

> The first characteristic of Positive Philosophy is that it regards all phenomena as subject to invariable natural *Laws*. Our business is, —seeing how vain is any research into what are called *Causes*, whether first or final,—to pursue an accurate discovery of these Laws, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number. By speculating upon causes, we could solve no difficulty about origin and purpose. Our real business is to analyse accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relations of succession and resemblance. The best illustration of this is in the case of the doctrine of Gravitation [emphasis in original].

TABLE 1

Diverse Theoretical Strategies of the Early Masters

	Degree of Emphasis on:					
	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
Auguste Comte (1798-1857)	sociology can emulate physics and seek invariant laws of the social universe	concern with causality will detract from the search for laws	useful in describing stages of societal development	useful in showing how structures change together during societal development	organismic analogy: social phenomena reveal systemic properties	theory must be based on observation, and vice versa
Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)	sociology must seek the laws of the social universe, as these can be deduced from the law of cosmic evolution	should be concerned with causality, but must be secondary to search for laws	useful in describing stages of societal development and in capturing the cyclical dynamics of social systems	useful in creating a data base for inducing and testing theories. Engaged in a life-long effort to describe social structures of diverse types of societies	(1) organismic analogy: social phenomena reveal systemic properties (2) implicit functionalism: appropriate to analyze needs of the social system met by a particular structure	theory must be based on observation, and vice versa
Karl Marx (1818-1883)	laws of distinctive historical epochs can be discovered and used to analyze events in that epoch. Universal laws for all times and places cannot be discovered.	must be concerned, since laws will be causal statements of economic determinism	not as important as laws which describe the dynamics of a historical epoch	will reflect causal connections. Can be used to discover laws of each epoch.	(1) dialectics: structures contain the very properties that lead to their transformation (2) conflict-change: change is the result of conflict among super- and sub-ordinate classes	laws of a historical epoch can be induced from observations of the relations of production, and/or through praxis

Spencer did not hold such an extreme view, although his concern was always in exposing the "relations of affinity" of social phenomena. Despite modern commentators' misplaced emphasis, neither Comte nor Spencer placed a heavy emphasis on typologies. True, Comte (1830-1842) articulated a "law of three stages" and Spender (1874-1896) presented two basic typologies, one distinguishing "militant" and "industrial"[4] social forms and the other the stages of social evolution from "simple" to "compound,"

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
					(3) sub-super-structure: economic variables determine cultural and social patterns	
Max Weber (1864–1920)	not concerned	should trace the causal relations among social phenomena	typologies, or ideal types, are the essence of sociological description	the goal of sociology is to show how empirical structures covary, and if possible, are causally connected	(1) action is meaningful and must be understood at this level (2) action creates emergent patterns which are amenable to sociological analysis	conceptual work is to be induced from a careful examination and comparison of empirical cases
Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)	regularities in human organization can be articulated	first and final causes must always be assessed--that is, the antecedent conditions and functions of a phenomena must be determined	useful in capturing the variable states of phenomena	necessary to discovering social patterns. Few such affinities actually articulated	(1) organismic analogy: phenomena reveal systemic properties (2) explicit functionalism: necessary to determine the integrative needs served by social phenomena	observations on empirical and historical events to form the basis for causal and functional statements

through "doubly compound," and to "trebly compound."[5] Such typologies were used to describe certain structural affinities during the course of social structural evolution; and, in fact, Comte and Spencer were far more interested in describing the shifting relations among basic economic, political, family, community, legal, and religious structures during societal evolution than in elaborating taxonomies.[6] Such structural regularities, both felt, were evidence of the operation of universal and invariant laws. With respect to meta-theoretical considerations, Comte and Spencer employed the "organismic analogy" to emphasize the systemic character of social phenomena; and contrary to

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)	sociology can emulate physics and discover the invariant laws of social organization and change	analysis of one-way causality will inhibit sociological inquiry. Must focus on mutual connections of phenomena.	useful in describing variable states of phenomena	social phenomena vary together, and hence, empirical descriptions of the patterns of co-variance critical to sociological analysis	(1) social phenomena reveal equilibrium tendencies (2) change reveals cyclical patterns	theory must be based upon observations, and vice versa
Georg Simmel (1858-1918)	laws of sociation can be discovered. Little concern with explicit articulation.	not concerned	not concerned	necessary to unraveling the basic forms of social interaction. Few actually developed.	social phenomena reveal underlying forms which can be described	implicit inductive emphasis
George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)	the fundamental nature of the relationship between individuals and patterns of social organization can be articulated. Little concern with formal laws, however.	not concerned	not concerned	not concerned, except to show that mind, self, and society are interrelated	(1) mind and self are behaviors (2) social organization cannot exist without mind and self, and vice versa	advocated neither, but scheme is implicitly deductive

many commentators, neither Comte nor Spencer viewed "society as an organism."[7] In regard to the issue of induction versus deduction neither Comte nor Spencer would phrase the issue in this way. As Comte (1830: 42) emphasized, "If it is true that every theory must be based upon observed facts, it is equally true that facts cannot be observed without guidance of some theory." Or, as Spencer emphasized in the introduction to his often-ignored *Descriptive Sociology* (1873-1934) and throughout *Principles of Sociology* (1876-1896), theory and observation must be in constant interaction, with each checking the other. But both emphasized that idle observation, or "raw empiricism,"

would inhibit the development of sociology. As Comte (1830: 242) stressed:

> The next great hindrance to the use of observation is the empiricism which is introduced into it by those who, in the name of impartiality, would interdict the use of any theory whatever. No longer dogma could be more thoroughly irreconcilable with the spirit of the positive philosophy. . . . No real observation of any kind of phenomena is possible, except in as far as it is first directed, and finally interpreted, by some theory.

Thus, in looking at sociology's theoretical beginnings, there was an initial emphasis on the search for abstract laws under the minimal meta-theoretical assumption that social phenomena reveal systemic properties. Concern for causality and typologies was viewed as secondary to the goal of articulating abstract principles. Empirical descriptions revolving around structural affinities during societal development were to be the data base for testing and at times inducing abstract theoretical statements. From this initial strategy, however, sociological theory was to diverge in the works of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Pareto and Simmel were to retain some of this early vision—in particular, Pareto—but it was Durkheim, Weber, and Marx who were to guide sociological theory in the early twentieth century away from its early strategy. This divergence from the early strategy of Comte and Spencer is, as we will come to see, one of the major reasons for the lack of well-developed sociological theory in sociology.

By reading down the columns and across the rows of Table 1, this shift in theoretical strategies becomes clear. Those scholars, who are most revered in contemporary theoretical circles, became increasingly concerned with causality, typology, and descriptions of structural affinities. Thus, Durkheim's concern with cause in *The Division of Labor* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897), as well as in his explicit advocacy of functional analysis (1895), redefined Comte's positivism in such a way that the concern for laws recedes, and the very thing that Comte feared most—a concern for "first" and "final" causes—resurfaces. Weber's approach similarly advocated the importance of causality, best exemplified in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

Moreover, under Weber, theory became increasingly taxonomic and classificatory, emphasizing ideal types and the discovery of the "place" of a phenomena in relation to an "ideal" or "pure" form (Shils and Finch, 1949). Marx's advocacy was also to arrest sociology's concern for universal abstract principles, with its advocacy of laws of historical epochs. As a philosopher, Mead (1934) was not concerned with theory per se, but with discovering fundamental truths—a concern which could have become the basis for abstract theoretical principles, except for the fact that many interpreters of Mead, e.g., Blumer (1969), took his thought in a more atheoretical direction. And those scholars who advocated strategies that were compatible with Comte's vision—men such as Pareto and Simmel—were ignored for many of the early decades of this century. When their work was finally introduced, it came in overly functional trappings.[8]

The result of this shift in theoretical strategy has been for theory to be dominated by an overconcern with tracing causal connections among specific empirical phenomena. And it is during this period that sociology became the repository for "theories of _____ (fill in a substantive area)." Such "theories" have been useful for applied and practical purposes, but all too often they are insufficiently abstract and too narrow to be the organizing principles of a science. Only in the last decade or so has there been a renewed interest in developing more abstract principles that cut across and subsume these more specific generalizations of various substantive fields. This rediscovery of Comte's and Spencer's early advocacy needs to be assessed in relation to the theoretical legacy of sociology's first 100 years.

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE EARLY MASTERS

THE MISGUIDED REVERENCE OF THE MASTERS

One of the problems with developing abstract theory in sociology is the tendency to evaluate theory in terms of sociology's current obsession with multivariate analysis. The goal of multivariate analysis is to "explain" amounts of variance in some empirical phenomena. Concern is with statistical controls and

the introduction of additional variables in an effort to increase the amount of variance explained. These concerns underscore the descriptive nature of multivariate techniques, but unfortunately, the "models" constructed from these techniques are often viewed as theory. But, in point of fact, these models are descriptions of empirical events in particular contexts at particular points in time. They rarely model generic properties of all social systems in all times and places, with the result that they are not sufficiently abstract to constitute laws of human organization.

Yet we tend to view suspiciously theoretical activity that seeks to reduce the number of variables, that does not attempt to control for every specific empirical condition, that ignores causal connections, and that seeks only to state the fundamental affinities of generic social processes. Indeed, sociologists are likely to view such theoretical activity as "simplistic," as too "detached from the empirical world," as "untestable," and so on. But theory in the respected sciences is simplifying, detached, and often untestable when first formulated (and, at times, not testable at all directly, only indirectly). Thus, even if sociology had its Einstein, it is likely that the sociological equivalent of $E = mc^2$ would be criticized as too abstract and simplistic; it would be criticized for its lack of "operational definitions"; it would be seen to ignore the significance of a plethora of empirical variables; and it would be attacked for ignoring causality. We would, one suspects, not recognize sociology's Einstein. Such has been the "progress" of sociology over the last 50 years.

In many ways, it can be argued that we have had several "sociological Einsteins" and have simply not fully appreciated their importance. Spencer, Marx, Durkheim, Pareto, Simmel, and Mead did indeed unlock many of the basic mysteries of the social universe, and they did articulate as abstract laws some of the fundamental processes in this universe. Over the last 50 years modern sociology has given considerable credit to these giants of our past; but unfortunately we sometimes do not take these figures seriously as theorists—that is, as scholars who saw at least some of the basic properties and processes of the world and who articulated some of sociology's basic laws. Rather, we tend to revere them for the wrong reasons—Durkheim for his causal analysis, Weber for his descriptive-analytical powers, Marx for

his dialectics, Pareto for his concept of "nonlogical action," Mead for his philosophy of self, and so on. Or we debate the "real meaning" of concepts such as "anomie," "egoism," "alienation," "class," the "I and me," and so on for virtually any term used by the first masters.

Thus, we have often been both uncritical and atheoretical in our analysis of the masters. One way to begin a reassessment of these masters is to examine some of the basic laws of human organization that they uncovered. These laws denote certain properties of the social world as basic and generic—that is, as inherent in human organization in all times and places. From the viewpoint of our current multivariate mania, these laws may seem too simplistic, excessively abstract, and unconcerned with causality. Yet these are the characteristics of theory as opposed to current empirical descriptions that masquerade as theory.

SOME LAWS OF HUMAN ORGANIZATION AND INTERACTION

One way to assess the accomplishments in American sociological theory for the last 50 years is to compare current efforts with the cumulative legacy of the most important of the scholars listed in Table 1. In summarizing this legacy, as it stood in 1930, the intent is to answer a hypothetical question: What if Comte's early advocacy had been followed? What would sociology's theoretical legacy look like if it were to be translated into abstract theoretical principles? While Marx, Durkheim, or Mead might complain about such an exercise as it relates to their work, it is likely that it would have been performed by their contemporaries *if* Comte's version of positivism had held sway beyond 1850 or *if* Spencer's advocacy had stimulated students of theory.[9] Thus, what is being proposed is merely a belated effort at what should have been done many decades ago.

What basic properties of the social world did the first masters perceive to be the most generic and fundamental to human organization? If we approach the masters with this question, four basic processes were seen as fundamental to the social world: (1) differentiation, (2) integration, (3) disintegration, and (4) interaction. Attention on the first three represented the European contribu-

tion, while concern with the last was distinctly American. The most abstract principles formulated with respect to these processes are summarized below.

(1) The Process of Differentiation

Whether the scholar be Spencer, Marx, or Durkheim, social thinkers all recognize that differentiation of social units in social systems represents a basic property of the social world. And while different scholars focused on diverse aspects of this process, their combined legacy, when viewed from the most abstract level, can be summarized as three basic laws of social differentiation:

(1) The greater is the degree of productivity in a social system, the greater is the level of differentiation in that system (Marx, 1848, 1867; Spencer, 1874-1896).
  (1a) The level of productivity is a positive function of (a) the availability of relevant resources (Spencer, 1874-1896) and (b) the level of relevant technology (Marx, 1867).
(2) The greater is the level of competition for resources in a social system, the greater is the level of differentiation in that system (Spencer, 1874-1896, 1862; Durkheim, 1893).
  (2a) The level of competition is a positive function of (a) absolute population size (Spencer, 1864-1867, 1874-1896), (b) rate of population growth (Spencer, 1864-1867; Durkheim, 1893), and (c) degree of ecological concentration of a population (Durkheim, 1893).
(3) The greater is the degree of differentiation in a social system, the greater is the degree of differentiation along functional, ecological, and rank dimensions.
  (3a) Functional differentiation will initially occur along the (a) regulatory and (b) productive axes, and only after (a) and (b), along the distributive axis (Spencer, 1874-1896, 1864-1867).
  (3b) Ecological differentiation will initially occur along the productive axis, and only later, along the regulatory and distributive axes (Spencer, 1874-1896).
  (3c) Rank differentiation will initially occur along the productive and regulatory axes, and only later, along the distributive axis (Marx, 1867, 1848).

The first principle states that productivity and differentiation are fundamentally related; the second argues that competition and differentiation are related; and the third principle denotes the nature, form, and direction of differentiation. This last principle requires some elaboration. Borrowing from Spencer (1874), three functional axes of differentiation are distinguished, with the "regulatory" pertaining to those units involved in controlling internal processes and relations with the external environment, with the "productive" denoting internal processes that generate the substances on which system units persist, and with "distributive" concerning the flow of materials and information within the system. From Spencer, but also Marx (1867), and, to a lesser extent, Durkheim (1893), differentiation also is seen to have an ecological dimension, with the productive axes dictating the ecological distribution of system units. From Marx (1867, 1848) and to some extent from Spencer (1874-1896), Durkheim (1893), and Pareto (1916), differentiation is considered to have a hierarchical dimension, with the productive axes being initially most related to its form.

Several observations should be made on these and subsequent principles. First, they are highly abstract, as any law of social organization must be. While Marx, Spencer, Durkheim, and others tended to focus on societal social systems, their principles can apply to other types of systems—groups, organizations, communities, and the like. Second, the principles are considered to be true for all times and places, although specific empirical conditions and events will influence the weights of the variables (but they will not obviate the fundamental relationship). Third, these principles are not concerned with causality (this is an empirical question), but with establishing that certain properties of the social universe—patterns of differentiation, productivity, competition, for example—are fundamentally related. Such a concern is what Comte had in mind when he emphasized that "our real business is to analyze accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by natural relations of succession and resemblance." While such principles may seem obvious, simplistic, and nonempirical through the prism of multivariate mania, they are in form (and, most certainly, content) what the laws of sociology will look like. Their empirical implications can be

studied with multivariate techniques as deductions are made to concrete empirical systems, whether nation-states (Nolan, 1979), administrative bureaucracies (Blau, 1974), or communities (Hawley, 1950). But these empirical implications, and the multivariate techniques that tease them out, are *not* theory. The theory must be highly abstract and state the nature of relations among only a few generic variables. This fact is too often ignored in sociological theorizing—again, one of the unfortunate events of the last 50 years in American sociology.

(2) The Process of Integration

All scholars of the nineteenth century were vitally concerned with the processes of integration in society. Despite the surface differences in their analyses, three laws of social integration in differentiating social systems emerge from their collective work:

(1) The greater is the degree of differentiation in a social system, the greater is the degree of centralization of regulatory processes in that system (Spencer, 1874-1896; Pareto, 1916; Durkheim, 1893).
  (1a) The degree of centralization is a positive function of (a) the degree of external (or perceived) threat to a system (Spencer, 1874-1896; Simmel, 1956) and (b) the degree of dissimilarity of system units (Spencer, 1874-1896; Marx, 1848).
(2) The greater is the level of structural differentiation in a social system, the greater is the degree of mutual dependence and exchange of resources among differentiated system units (Spencer, 1874-1896; Durkheim, 1893).
(3) The greater is the level of structural differentiation in a social system, the greater is the degree of generalization of evaluational cultural symbols, the greater is the degree of specificity of norms within and between system units, and the greater is the degree of consolidation of similar specialties into collective units (Durkheim, 1893).

These principles stress that in differentiating social systems, integration, centralization, mutual interdependence and exchange, generalization of values, normative specification, and subgroup formation are fundamentally related in the social universe. As with the principles on differentiating, the presumption is that

they apply to all differentiating systems and that they transcend particular historical epochs. Moreover, as deductions to specific contexts are made, empirical variables will be added as the unique features of situations are encountered (although the postulated relations are unaltered).

(3) The Process of Disintegration

The process of integration involves the structuring of relations among differentiating units, whereas the process of disintegration denotes the destructuring of such relations. All major theorists of the last century viewed human organization as revealing an inherent dialectic between processes of integration and disintegration. Indeed, a separate theory of change and stasis was not required, because social change and stability reflected the balance between these two basic processes—an analytical insight often ignored in American sociology over the last 50 years. At the most abstract level, three laws of disintegration are evident in the work of the first masters.

(1) The greater is the degree of generalization of evaluative cultural symbols without compensating normative specification and/or organization of specialties into collective units, the higher are the rates of deviance in that system and the more prevalent are disintegrative processes (Durkheim, 1897, 1893).

(2) The greater is the degree of inequality in the distribution of scarce resources in a differentiating social system, the greater is the degree of resistance by those segments low in resource shares in that system and the more prevalent are disintegrative processes (Marx, 1848; Spencer, 1874-1896; Pareto, 1916).

  (2a) The degree of resistance is a positive function of the degree of centralization of power (Pareto, 1916; Spencer, 1874-1896; Marx, 1848).

  (2b) The degree of resistance is a positive function of the degree of rank differentiation (Marx, 1848).[10]

(3) The less is the degree of centralization of regulatory processes in a differentiating social system, the less is the capacity for control and coordination in that system and the more prevalent are disintegrative processes (Durkheim, 1893; Spencer, 1874-1896; Pareto, 1916).

Proposition 1 states Durkheim's argument on "anomie" and "egoism" (1893, 1897). The second proposition incorporates two distinctive lines of thought—(1) Pareto's, Marx's, and Spencer's recognition that centralized power (one type of resource inequality) inevitably generates resistance and counterpower; and (2) Marx's arguments on class formation and conflict. The third proposition emphasizes that decentralization decreases integration at the point where regulation, coordination, and control of units breaks down. Thus, both centralization and decentralization of power reveal inherent disintegrative processes. These propositions allow for understanding of disintegrative (and hence, change) processes in many types of systems; and while specific empirical conditions will determine the weights of the variables, the postulated relations among them remain unaltered.

(4) The Process of Interaction

With the possible exception of Simmel, European theory had been predominately macrostructural in its emphasis; and when it did seek to understand the connections between the individual and society, it was noticeably inadequate. Indeed, it is painful to read Spencer's utilitarianism,[11] Marx's psychological ramblings,[12] Pareto's discussion of "sentiments" and "residues,"[13] Durkheim's late fumbling on the mind,[14] and Weber's advocacy and abandonment of "action."[15] Only in the work of Mead (1934), who synthesized the work of others, was the fundamental nature of human interaction and how it is connected to ongoing patterns of social organization to be captured. Indeed, in Mead's work are a series of implicit principles that grasp the fundamental nature of individual interaction and social organization.

(1) The more an actor must consummate impulses in organized social contexts, the more developed are the behavioral capacities for role-taking, mind, and self (Mead, 1934).
(2) The more an actor can role-take with another actor and use the information thus gained as a source of self-control and self-evaluation, the greater is that actor's capacity to interact and cooperate with others (Mead, 1934; Simmel, 1956).
(3) The more an actor can role-take simultaneously with multiple others and generalized perspectives, and use the information thus

gained as a source of self-control and self-evaluation, the greater is that actor's capacity to interact and cooperate with others in diverse, complex, and extended patterns of social organization (Mead, 1934).

In these principles, Mead argued that the acquisition of the crucial capacities for role-taking, mind, and self (proposition 1) occurs primarily in accordance with the principles of behaviorism,[16] since mind, self, and role-taking bring about increased adjustment and adaptation to organized social contexts (the ultimate reinforcer). Propositions 2 and 3 document Mead's and, to a lesser extent, Simmel's recognition that patterns of social organization are possible only by virtue of role-taking with another actor, multiple others, and varieties of "generalized others" and the use of the information from these various types of others for self-evaluation and self-control. While Mead enumerated many more specific principles,[17] these three are the most abstract and document the fundamental relationship in the social universe between the behavioral capacities of individuals for mind, self, and role-taking, on the one hand, and extended patterns of social organization, on the other.

In sum, these 12 principles, and many more specific ones which could be derived, on the processes of differentiation, integration, disintegration, and interaction formed in 1930 a solid foundation for sociological theorizing over the last 50 years. If these and related laws could have served as a *starting* point for theorizing during the last decades, sociological theory would be far more advanced; and sociology as a scientific enterprise would be more respected by the hard sciences. And Comte's dream of a social physics—that is, a sociology organized around the fundamental laws of the universe—would be much closer to realization. Such a conclusion can serve as a preface to a brief review of sociological theorizing in America in the last 50 years.

THEORY IN AMERICA OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS

It would be wrong to argue that the theoretical legacy of the first masters has been lost completely. Marx, Durkheim, Weber,

Simmel, and Mead have certainly been influential in modern sociological theory. But the strategy of Comte, Spencer, and Pareto has been altogether ignored and the substance of Spencerian sociology has not been fully appreciated by a discipline that is repelled by his politics. This selective attention to sociology's theoretical legacy has caused modern theory to lose touch with the vision, substance, and excitement of sociology's theoretical beginnings. In its place we have seen two lines of theoretical activity over the last 50 years: one directed toward the development of general theoretical "orientations" or "perspectives," and the other toward specific theories of some substantive area. Each of these directions inhibits theoretical development in sociology, because neither is guided by the strategic vision of the first sociological masters. Each of these directions is examined below.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

There have been a number of efforts to divide contemporary sociological theorizing into diverse "paradigms," "schools of thought," and perspectives (Turner, 1974; Mullins, 1973; Ritzer, 1975). While each of the various efforts along these lines divides sociological theory into somewhat different camps, all seemingly recognize that certain general orientations dominate theoretical activity. Following Turner (1974, 1978), five general theoretical approaches in American sociology can be distinguished in terms of their strategic emphasis and substantive concerns: (1) functionalism, (2) conflict theory, (3) exchange theory, (4) interactionism, and (5) ethnomethodology.

These schools of thought can be analyzed in terms of their strategic emphasis as were the masters in Table 1. In Table 2, functional, conflict, exchange, interactionist, and ethnomethodological theorizing are summarized with respect to their emphasis on the discovery of universal laws, causality, typologies, structural affinities, meta-theory, and induction versus deduction.

Substantively, each theoretical perspective is guided by certain assumptions listed in the column on meta-theory in Table 2. Moreover, various perspectives emphasize certain processes as more fundamental than others. Following Spencer and Durk-

TABLE 2
Diverse Theoretical Strategies of Dominant Orientations

	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
Functionalism	sociology must do considerable preliminary conceptual work before these can be adequately articulated	the discovery of how system parts cause variations in states of system whole is essential	the development of typologies that capture the variable features of the social world is a necessary prerequisite for theory	description of empirical correlations among structures is essential	implicit organismic analogy: social phenomena must be analyzed as systems of interrelated parts, with assessment of consequences of parts for social whole	both induction and deduction are essential, although emphasis tends to be on developing abstract statements from which deductions to empirical cases are to be made
Conflict Theory	disagreement over this issue: (a) Marxists stress temporal boundaries of abstract laws; (b) non-Marxists more concerned with laws of conflict	conditions causing conflict are the major focus of theoretical activity	not considered vitally important, although typologies on types of conflict abound	essential to understanding conditions producing conflict	(a) dialectic: distribution of power in structures produces conflicts (b) conflict-change: conflict is major source of system change	rhetoric of deduction, but most analyses confined to empirical descriptions of specific empirical cases—historical and contemporary

heim, functionalism stresses the process of integration. In the Marxian tradition, conflict theory focuses on the change-producing consequences of conflict. Following Mead, interactionists stress the process of role-taking, mind, self, on the one hand, and social organization, on the other. Emerging somewhat independently from the early masters, exchange theory examines the processes of interaction, conflict, and integration in terms of the exchange of valued resources, particularly power. And, from European phenomenology and early interactionists, ethnomethodology suspends assumptions about processes emphasized by the other perspectives and focuses instead on the processes by which people create and maintain a sense that they share a common reality.

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
Exchange Theory	abstract principles of exchange process are essential to theoretical activity in sociology	causality is less essential than explanation by "covering laws" of exchange	few	few; concern is more with articulation of laws	social reality is structured around the exchange of rewards	emphasis is on deductive explanation
Interactionism	disagreement over this issue: (a) some argue that creative capacities of actors render the search for laws either useless, or always provisional; (b) others see the development of the laws of socialization, social control, and interaction as essential	causes of various personality types and modes of interaction are central to analysis; heavy emphasis on causes of deviance and personality	few	few; concern is with micro processes	social reality is built from, and maintained through, symbolic interaction	emphasis is on induction from empirical observations

What is most noticeable about the dominant orientations is (1) their emphasis on one process to the exclusion of others, and (2) their failure to implement Comte's and Spencer's dream of a science of society. Except for exchange theory, concern with developing abstract principles is not great; and even when principles are sought, the emphasis is on a narrow range of phenomena —whether exchange, conflict, symbolic interaction, functions, or "folk methods." Additionally, the analysis of even these narrow processes does not go significantly beyond the insights of the early masters.

As long as dominant theoretical orientations partition theorists' imagination—that is, as long as sociologists go around proclaiming themselves to be ethnomethodologists, Marxists, ex-

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Abstract Laws	Causality	Typologies	Structural Affinities	Meta-theory	Induction vs. Deduction
Ethnomethodology	disagreement, although majority hold that laws of inter-subjectivity and "folk methods" can be discovered	cause of use of various "folk methods" is a dominant concern	virtually none; emphasis is on processes in situations	none; emphasis is on processes in situations. Existence of social structures is bracketed out of analysis	social reality is constructed from methods used by people to construct a sense, or presumption, that they share the same world	emphasis on induction of folk methods from actual empirical observations

change theorists, symbolic interactionists, and the like—we cannot achieve theoretical maturity. For the masters have already given us insight into the basic processes of the social world; what has been needed for over 50 years is a concerted effort to integrate their principles. General perspectives have not achieved this end, primarily because they are parochial, forcing thinkers to put on intellectual blinders.

SUBSTANTIVE THEORIES IN AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

In any science, empirical inquiry must be directed toward more general implications—that is, toward the development or confirmation of theory. Research in sociology, however, is primarily atheoretical. In one sense, there is nothing wrong with atheoretical research; descriptions of events, situations, and people are essential, particularly for informed policy decisions in government. Yet sensing the atheoretical, and hence unscientific, nature of their work, sociologists frequently attempt to construct what can be called "theories of" some substantive area. For example, sociology has seen theories of marital discord, juvenile delinquency, urban growth, demographic transitions, suicide, gerontology, middleman minorities, Chicano oppression, black oppression, sexual discrimination, prejudice, split labor markets, industrial capitalism, community power, and so on. Such theories are the equivalent of biologists constructing theories of hedgehogs, pine trees, fungi, and other specific types of species in the world

of organic life. They are, in a word, theories about nongeneric structures and processes. And, when examined closely, they represent little more than empirical descriptions dressed up in theoretical wrappings.

This is not to say that these substantive areas are not worthy of empirical investigation. Hedgehogs, trees, and fungi are legitimate topics of inquiry in biology; as are suicide, delinquency, black oppression, and other phenomena in sociology worthy of inquiry. But these phenomena should not require their own special theories. Rather, they are empirical events where one tests abstract theories about more generic processes. Sexism and racism, for example, are empirical manifestations of a more generic set of processes; and thus, we should not have theories of sexism or racism, but theories on resource distribution, or some such generic process, from which we make deductions to specific empirical events, such as patterns of sexual and racial discrimination.

Such is rarely the case in sociology. Instead, we are typically given a causal model, often complete with statistical razzle-dazzle, on some substantive area. Thus, sociology often substitutes for a "theory of" some substantive area "a model of" that same area. For example, sociologists are more likely to formulate a causal model of suicide, family stability, occupational mobility, juvenile delinquency, organizational growth, or any specific empirical event in the social world. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with such models per se; indeed, they represent refined efforts at empirical description. The problem comes only when sociologists begin to believe that such models are theory. They are not and cannot become theory, because they are tied to classes of observables in specific times and places. Theory must be more abstract, for it must transcend particular times and places. Most substantive theories in sociology cannot do so by virtue of the fact that they are confined to a particular set of empirical events.

Yet some substantive theories show more promise as a basis for generating abstract theoretical statements. This is because they focus on more generic social processes that transcend the specifics of a concrete society or subpopulation at particular points in time. For example, theories and models of "collective behavior,"

"socialization," "deviant behavior," "human ecology," "intergroup relations," and "social differentiation," and the like offer much more potential for building sociological theory, because each appears to address a basic process of social organization. Theories of this stripe are probably what Merton (1968) had in mind when he advocated theories of the middle range. Unfortunately, such theories are far less prevalent than theories and models of specific empirical events. But if sociology is to develop as a science, it must begin now to be more critical in distinguishing theories of basic processes from empirical descriptions disguised as theories.

SOME PROMISING NEW DIRECTIONS

In viewing the last 50 years of theoretical activity in American sociology, then, two clear trends are evident:

(1) Concern with classification, causality, and meta-theoretical perspectives has taken precedence over the search for the laws of social organization.
(2) Concern with empirical description of empirical events has dominated the sociological imagination.

Yet, over the last decade, and particularly in recent years, there has been a slight increase in concern with discovering the laws of social organization. Whether at the micro- or macro-level, a number of scholars have begun to address issues that are reminiscent of our first masters' concerns: (1) What are the basic properties and processes of the social world? (2) Can these properties and processes be expressed as lawlike relations? (3) How can the fundamental insights of the early masters be revised and extended? Had such questions dominated the sociological imagination 50 years ago, sociologists would feel more comfortable around "real scientists." Yet this incipient theoretical renaissance should be embraced, no matter how belated its emergence.

While many of their "new" theoretical discoveries can be found in the work of the first masters, the recent work of Peter Blau (1977) on macrostructures and Ralph Turner (1979, 1978,

1968) on microinteractive processes are two conspicuous examples of theoretical activity that is in the tradition of sociology's beginnings. For our purposes, the particulars of their approach are less important than the strategy that each employs. While Blau works in the tradition of Spencer, Durkheim, and Marx in his concern with macrostructures and the process of integration differentiated social systems, and while Turner works in the tradition of Mead in his analysis of interaction, role-making, and self-role integration, the basic thrust of their respective works is similar: to uncover the basic and generic properties of the social world and to articulate these properties as a series of abstract principles. In this effort there is not a great deal of meta-theoretical agonizing, causality is secondary to the discovery of fundamental affinities in the social world, typologies are few or nonexistent, and descriptive accounts are used to tease out the more general and generic properties of the social world.

It is in this kind of effort that we will rekindle the sociological imagination to help us recapture our lost heritage. For what sociology lacks is the vision of its early masters; and it is comforting to know that at least a few scholars understand what a science of society should be. Our detour from the legacy of the masters is hopefully over and we can begin to become a real science—that is, a discipline committed to developing the laws of social organization.

NOTES

1. For example, Blau (1977), Emerson (1972), and Turner (1979, 1978, 1968) all represent important and unique extensions of theoretical leads provided by sociology's early master.

2. In particular, the work of Herbert Spencer has been ignored for "political reasons."

3. Some might want to add theorists to this list, such as Cooley, Park, Sumner, Ward, Veblen, and others. But these figures are less important than those listed in Table 1, because their ideas are contained in the thought of those listed in the table.

4. In particular, this typology is consistently misinterpreted. Spencer did not view this as an evolutionary or developmental distinction, but as a means describing phases of centralization and decentralization.

5. This is the evolutionary typology, and, curiously, it is rarely discussed.

6. In particular, one should examine the 16 volumes of Spencer's *Descriptive Sociology*. Or see the last volumes of Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (1874-1896).

7. Only in Spencer's first, and immature work, could this connotation be remotely argued. See *Social Statics* (1850).

8. See Parsons (1951, 1937) and Homans (1951).

9. Because Spencer never wanted, nor held, an academic position, he never had students to carry on and defend his work.

10. Marx also sought to specify the conditions under which rank differentiation is translated into conflict, a form of the more generic and abstract variable "resistance." See Turner (1978) and Dahrendorf (1959) for a list of these more specific principles.

11. See, for example, *Social Statics* (1850). His *Principles of Psychology* (1870-1872) is very sophisticated but is psychological, rather than social psychological, in nature.

12. See *The German Ideology* (1846), for an illustration.

13. See *Treatise on General Sociology* (1916).

14. See, for example, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), *Primitive Classification* (1903).

15. See, for illustrations, Max Weber (1964).

16. Mead's analysis of this process of socialization is, of course, more detailed. For a summary of Mead's principles on socialization, see Turner and Beeghley (forthcoming).

17. See Turner and Beeghley (forthcoming) for a list.

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