DEVELOPING CUMULATIVE AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH METATHEORIZING

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ABSTRACT: *A particular strategy for metatheorizing is proposed. This strategy is designed to produce better theory and is to be distinguished from alternative types of metatheorizing that do not generate testable propositions. This strategy involves extracting the key processes, and their relations, from existing theories in order to create analytical models that express the dynamic processes contained in each theory. Then, these models are reconciled and used to produce abstract principles which, it is argued, can produce testable hypotheses guiding empirical research. This strategy is illustrated by an analysis of three theories of geopolitics.*

META-ANALYSIS AND OVER-REFLECTION

I would hypothesize that the level of self-reflection in a scientific discipline is greatest at the extremes. Those sciences that have developed considerable cumulative knowledge are secure enough to examine themselves or, as is more often the case, let others look over their shoulder. Those sciences that have failed to develop cumulative knowledge are sufficiently anxious about their failings to ponder what went wrong. As a most immature science, sociology has become somewhat obsessive in its self-reflection. Indeed, thinking about ourselves has become a viable career path for many sociologists who devote their time and energy to "meta" analysis of the discipline as a whole (metasociology) or its theoretical corpus (metatheory). While this kind of reflection is, at times, useful and productive, it can also become a self-sustaining and self-escalating exercise with little payoff for the cumulation of knowledge. To state the matter in the extreme: the more we talk about ourselves and our theories, the more uncertain we become about what it is that we are supposed to do; and the more uncertain we are, the more we create academic markets for metasociologists and metatheorists.

We are not as bad as some disciplines, such as social anthropology, which appear to have become so philosophical and relativistic that they now have little faith in the possibilities of social science. Within sociology, there are many who continue to seek theoretical cumulation, but there are growing numbers who appear con-

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tent to push the discipline toward relativism, solipsism, and nihilism: to the point where nothing is universal, where all is contextual, and little can be systematized.

This kind of intellectual movement is given structural support by the proliferation of subfields that allow sociologists to "do their own thing" without paying attention to common disciplinary canons (Turner 1989, Turner and Turner 1990). Desperate for dues-paying members, the American Sociological Association, along with the regional associations, have accommodated such pluralism by viewing all intellectual activity as equally good and useful so long as its practitioners pay dues and come to meetings. The low cost of most sociological activity provides yet another structural support: when costs are low, dependence on external centers dispensing resources is also low, with the result that there are no external controls from disciplinary centers on what sociologists do (Fuchs and Turner 1986). The collapse of the grant market reinforces this situation. For as monies for sociological research decline (mostly as a result of broad budgetary cuts, but partly in response to the perceived triviality of much sociological research), the power of the purse strings is lost; and sociologists begin to do whatever they like, as long as it is cheap (thereby reinforcing, I suspect, the perception that much sociological work is trivial). Academia represents another structural support for intellectual diversification. The 1960s' liberalism, flexibility, and tolerance for almost anything occurred at the same time that sociology was rapidly expanding, creating opportunities for faculty to develop new, low-cost intellectual niches. And these academics also generated new markets for their work, leading to the massive proliferation of specialty journals (over 200 are published in the U.S.) and new specialized associations (which only made ASA and the regionals more fearful of losing members and, hence, more willing to accommodate intellectual diversity, no matter what its merits).

I dwell on this proliferation of subfields because it has created not only a host of new markets for ever more specialized and diverse intellectual products but for the production and distribution of metasociology and metatheory. If the discipline is scattered all over the intellectual map, then it needs metasociology to assess the situation; if theory is minimally cumulative and the arena for diverse theoretical "paradigms" and "traditions" that lob intellectual insults at each other, then theorists need metatheorists to tell them about their plight. Ironically, a good many efforts at metasociology and metatheory do not help resolve the divisions; they exacerbate them. Many metasociologists and metatheorists extol the virtues of diversity, which assures them of future markets for their services but also aggravates the intellectual disintegration of the field. Thus, the result is for meta-analysis to legitimate and sustain sociology's descent into relativism, solipsism, and "do-your-own-thingism." Of course, some efforts at metasociology and metatheory do clarify issues and suggest solutions to the difficulties in making sociology a cumulative science. But this analysis, itself, becomes a topic for further meta-analysis, thereby assuring that constructive meta-analysis is buried under mounds of reflexive discourse.

Is there any way out of this orgy of reflexivity? For the discipline as a whole, I suspect that it is now impossible to put Humpty Dumpty back together again

(Turner 1989; Turner and Turner 1990). We were a fragile intellectual egg to begin with; once we fell off the wall, centrifugal forces were unleashed and, then, supported by wave upon wave of meta-self-reflection. It is unlikely, therefore, that these forces can be reversed. For theory, however, there is some hope, because a few scholars are doing creative and cumulative work. True, they represent a minority among those touting textual analysis, honoring historical figures, doing discourse, proposing presuppositions, iterating ideologies, propheting philosophies, and otherwise escaping explanation of events in the empirical world. Yet, this minority has drawn upon early theories and/or developed new ones that, to me at least, indicate the potential for a cumulative theoretical sociology. Can metatheory help to bring out the potential of these efforts at cumulative theorizing? My answer is a qualified "yes"; it is to elucidating the capacity of certain types of metatheorizing to facilitate theoretical cumulation that I now turn.

WHEN METATHEORY IS USEFUL

At one time, I had little to say that was positive about metatheory (Turner 1985a, 1990a, 1990b). My feeling was that metatheorizing pulled us into unresolvable philosophical issues: hero worship of the early masters; textual analysis as an end in itself; history of ideas; proposals for presuppositions without propositions; and endless discourse. Indeed, it seemed to me that too much sociological theory is talk about talk, and then further talk about the talk we just had. The word "discourse" became as popular as the term "paradigm"; theory had become a sea of words. This trend in theory further separated theory and research, not the closest companions to begin with. As a consequence, this separation encouraged (a) the flight of theory into the nest of philosophy and literature and (b) the burrowing of empirical research into the dust bowl.

I still feel that the above observations represent the current state of affairs for sociology in general and much metatheory in particular. Yet, George Ritzer's (1991b) more recent analysis, coupled with his attacks on my extreme position (1987, 1989, 1991a, 1991b), have forced me to reconsider my old argument. Ritzer (1991b) now makes a distinction among three types of metatheorizing: M_u, or metatheorizing directed toward understanding a theory in its historical, cognitive, contextual, and organizational context; M_p, or metatheorizing designed to analyze existing theories and use them to build better theories; and M_o, or metatheorizing designed to produce an overarching framework that transcends and interprets existing theories. M_u and M_o are my targets; they are not likely to generate theory. While I have performed this kind of analysis (e.g., Turner and Maryanski 1979; Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1989; Turner and Turner 1990; Turner 1985b, 1991), I do not kid myself that I am contributing to the cumulation of scientific knowledge when doing M_u and M_o. M_u and M_o are certainly worthwhile intellectual endeavors, best left to philosophers and historians; but even if sociologists insist upon performing this activity, we should not view it as particularly useful in developing cumulative scientific sociology. Of course, if one's goal is to

produce nonscientific knowledge, and this is the goal of most M_u and M_o types, then my criticism is irrelevant, except in this sense: if sociology is not going to be a science, it has little importance within academia and virtually no relevance outside the ivory tower. This latter issue of relevance is particularly significant, and I will return to it later. For the present, let me turn to M_p metatheorizing.

As long as I associated all metatheorizing with M_u and M_o, I found it objectionable as theory, and I was insulted when my work was considered metatheoretical by others. But I now see that I am indeed doing M_p, because most of my work in theory involves detailed analysis and synthesis of existing theories (e.g., Turner 1984, 1987, 1988). My goal has been to transcend theoretical camps— paradigms, if you will—and extract and synthesize key concepts and propositions to produce a better theory. Thus, I pronounce myself a M_p and, like anyone who has made new self-discoveries, I am proud of it. M_p analysis can produce cumulative theory that is useful and relevant to the outside world. Indeed, I believe that we understand our universe to a far greater extent than we often recognize, but we fail to realize this fact because we have not pulled together existing theories. Thus, when done well, M_p offers one of our brightest hopes for making sociology a cumulative science and, as I will note later, for making sociology useful to practitioners.

With this confession out of the way, let me offer some proscriptions and prescriptions about how best to perform metatheorizing. First, here are some proscriptions or metatheoretical taboos (Turner 1990a:39):

1. Avoid talking about theorists; instead, talk about theories.
2. Avoid discussions of intellectual context, place, and time; instead, discuss social processes denoted by concepts, models, and propositions.
3. Avoid debates over philosophical issues; instead, commit one's energies to the simple assumptions that there is a world out there and that it can be understood with concepts, models, and propositions.
4. Avoid commitments to ideologies; instead, develop concepts, models, and propositions that denote operative processes in the universe (there will always be someone to expose ideological biases without your help).
5. Ignore the particulars of history; instead, examine those more general and generic processes that cut across time and place (leave something for historians to do; or, if history is used, let it involve an empirical test or assessment of a theory or model).

When proposing such proscriptions, I am usually accused of being naive and unsophisticated. But most scientists are naive, and this is a good thing, because my impression is that the more philosophically sophisticated theorists are, the less likely they are to explain how and why generic processes in the social universe operate. So, the key to being a good M_p is to be naive and unsophisti-

cated about philosophical/historical/contextual/literary issues. What, then, is a M_p supposed to do? Here is my list of prescriptions (Turner 1990a:40–41):

1. Evaluate the clarity and adequacy of concepts, propositions, and models.
2. Suggest points of similarity, convergence, or divergence with other theories.
3. Pull together existing empirical (including historical) studies to access the plausibility of a theory.
4. Extract what is viewed as useful and plausible in a theory from what is considered less so.
5. Synthesize a theory, or portions thereof, with other theories.
6. Rewrite a theory in light of empirical or conceptual considerations.
7. Formalize a theory by stating it more precisely.
8. Restate a theory in better language.
9. Make deductions from a theory so as to facilitate empirical assessment.

No single metatheorist could perform all of these activities, of course, but the point is that there is much for varying types of M_ps to do. This kind of metatheoretical work will produce, I believe, cumulative theory that is useful not only for researchers but practitioners as well. I will illustrate this M_p strategy in the next section with a review of three theories of geopolitics: two from sociology's early period and one from a contemporary theorist. In providing this illustration, I hope to demonstrate at least some of the nine prescriptive steps listed above, although a complete metatheoretical analysis is impossible in a short essay. In offering this illustration, my goal is to demonstrate the utility of M_p analyses not only for building more robust theories but also for their application in the practical arena.

ILLUSTRATING M_p ANALYSIS

Three Theories of Geopolitics

Since humans settled into permanent communities some 12,000 to 18,000 years ago, relations among such settled populations have been one of the central dynamics of human social organization. Economic exchange, political coalitions, interpopulation migrations, and most important, conflict and war have been prominent features of human organization. Yet, surprisingly, sociologists have not devoted as much effort to the dynamics of geopolitics as they have to internal social processes. Even the advent of world-systems analysis (e.g., Wallerstein 1974) has underemphasized the importance of war and the use of coercion to control territory. There are, of course, exceptions to this assertion (e.g., Mann 1986; Collins 1986:145–208).

Yet, two of sociology's early masters, Herbert Spencer and Max Weber, both

developed theories of geopolitical processes within their more general discussions of political institutions (Spencer [1888] 1898:229–643) and communities (Weber [1922] 1968:901–955). These two early theories have a somewhat different focus, but together they present a robust and still relevant conceptualization of geopolitical processes. Thus, sociology had some early theoretical leads, but these were not followed (Collins 1986, is an exception with respect to Weber). The reason for this failure to pick up on these theories is the result of the way that theorists generally perform metatheory. When M_o and M_u dominate efforts, the concepts and propositions of one scholar are not likely to be extracted and blended with those of another in order to produce a better theory. Spencer, of course, is an underutilized source of theoretical insights, whereas Weber has been studied to death without extracting the key elements of the geopolitical theory. Collins (1986) is the only theorist to have consistently done so; others, such as Skocpol (1979), have used the ideas in Weber's geopolitical theory, but with an emphasis on intrasocietal dynamics (in Skocpol's case, the concern being with revolution).

What I propose, then, is that we examine Spencer's, Weber's, and Collins's theories in terms of a M_p strategy and see what "laws" of geopolitical processes can emerge. In this way, I can illustrate the viability of metatheory concerned with actually explaining something in the real world.

Spencer's Theory of Geopolitics

One approach that I find useful in metatheorizing is to begin analysis by constructing analytical models (Turner 1984, 1985a, 1988). Such models allow for the visual representation of (1) key concepts, (2) direct, indirect, and reverse causal relations among these concepts, and (3) robust configurations of dynamic social processes. In Figure 1, I have constructed such a model for Spencer's theory of geopolitics. This model does not represent all of Spencer's theory of human organization (see Turner 1985b, for a review of the more general theory): only that portion of his work pertaining to geopolitics is delineated.

As the model portrays, growth in the size of a population initiates a series of processes that influence the mobilization of power, the level of conflict, the extent of territory, and the diversity of subpopulations within this territory. The central process is the logistical loads created by a larger population. If these loads become too great, the population "dissolves." For Spencer, then, logistical loads generate selection pressure to create structures that can produce (what he termed "operative functions") and distribute ("distributive functions") sufficient quantities of goods and services to support the growing population and that can coordinate and control this population ("regulatory functions"). Spencer's arguments always involve reverse causal effects; hence, the development of operative, regulatory, and distributive structures initially reduces logistical loads which, in turn, allow the population to grow further. At some point in these cycles, the high levels of differentiation of operative, distributive, and regulatory structures increase logistical loads and the potential for dissolution.

Figure 1
Spencer's Model of Geopolitics

Of critical importance in this dynamic situation is the level of "internal threat" created by mounting logistical loads as these are aggravated by inequalities. These processes lead to the concentration of power which, in the long run, increases inequality, internal threat, and logistical loads. Indeed, Spencer argued that centers of political authority often "manufacture" internal threats in order to legitimate their consolidation of power. Power is also concentrated under conditions of external threat, and, much like internal threat, centers of power often manufacture such threats to justify further regulation and control of system processes.

These internal processes are, Spencer implicitly argued, important elements of geopolitical dynamics. Concentrated power per se, but especially under conditions of either or both external and internal threat, will initiate conflict with neighboring populations. The likelihood of success in such conflicts will be an inverse function of the military strength of neighboring populations and a positive function of the productive and distributive capacities of the population in question. Success in war has, Spencer argued, some ironical consequences: (1) as territories increase in size, logistical problems of control, communication, transportation, and administration escalate; (2) as the span of territory increases, especially as the result of annexation ("compounding" in Spencer's terms) of conquered populations, the diversity of the population increases and poses increased internal threat which, in turn, escalates logistical loads; (3) compounding of populations, per se, increases population size which, regardless of internal threats, increases logistical loads; and (4) population growth through compounding tends to concentrate an increased proportion of population members (due to migration) which then creates a new source of internal threat, and hence, escalated logistical loads.

These cycles, as they increase logistical loads, lead to ever greater concentrations of power; and, as power is concentrated, it is used in waves of further external conflict, thereby escalating even more those cycles of increasing logistical loads. At some point, these loads become too great, and the empire implodes back upon itself or dissolves from (a) internal conflict, (b) overextension beyond the productive, administrative, and distributive capacities, (c) confrontation with a powerful enemy, or (d) some combination of (a), (b), and (c). Indeed, once this process of collapse begins on one front, the others tend to "kick in" and accelerate dissolution—as can currently be observed in the Russian empire.

Thus, over 100 years ago, Spencer presented us with a highly sophisticated model of geopolitics. In formalizing his theory as an analytical model, I have refined and extended his ideas, but I have not violated Spencer's clear intent. Such conceptual extension is necessary, I believe, if we are to perform M_p and "ready" a theory for its reconciliation with other theories in order to produce a better theory. For if a theory is preserved in its unique vocabulary and confined to the contextual issues of the time in which it was written, each theory will be different and, hence, reconciliation of existing theories will be difficult, if not impossible. Thus, in presenting theories, especially old ones like Spencer's, it is necessary to couch concepts in more contemporary terms and, perhaps, extend concepts in order to clarify their importance. Of course, those performing M_u

despise this kind of activity because they are not interested in developing science; when I or any other M_p rephrases concepts and pulls them out of their historical context, we deny M_us their subject matter. But the goal of science is to be cumulative, and if theories are to be synthesized in ways that generate more powerful explanations, they must be restated. In the discussion of Spencer above, I have retained much of his vocabulary, but I have added concepts, such as "logistical loads," because this points to the convergence of Spencer's analysis with more recent theories of geopolitics. I have not distorted Spencer's intent; rather, I have used a more parsimonious and currently relevant set of terms to express Spencer's argument. Let me now turn to Weber's theory, presenting it in the same manner as Spencer's and, as a result, preparing it for further M_p activity.

Weber's Theory of Geopolitics

Max Weber's ideas on geopolitics appear in his discussion of political communities and domination (Weber [1922] 1968:901–955), where the notions of class, status group, and party are outlined. As a result, the theory of geopolitics is often overlooked or underemphasized. In Figure 2, I have constructed an analytical model of the theory I was able to extract from Weber's analysis.

Like Spencer, Weber sees the dynamics of internal stratification and power as intimately connected to the activities of a society vis-a-vis other societies. But his analysis is more focused on the issue of legitimacy of political authority—an issue that Skocpol (1979) extended in her analysis of states and revolutions. But, if we shift the focus to external geopolitical processes and see them as our explanatory goal, then the analysis of internal stratification processes can be viewed in a new light.

Weber argued that political legitimacy is an inverse function of the degree of inequality, especially if inequalities produce charismatic leaders who call into question the legitimacy of political authority and mobilize opposition to such authority. Like Spencer, Weber recognized that external threat and competition with other societies are important forces. However, for Weber, these forces have the contradictory consequence of directly legitimating the activities of political authority as it tries to reduce internal and external threats, while indirectly undermining such authority by creating conditions favoring the emergence of charismatic leaders and opposition. In particular, systems under high levels of external threat, revealing high levels of inequality and minority-group formation, will evidence the most potential for internal collapse of political authority.

The decisive dynamic in this volatile mix of internal forces revolves around a set of geopolitical processes. The critical issue is this: can political authority generate and sustain prestige in the external system of societies? For Weber, there are two avenues for maintaining prestige: (1) war and conquest; and (2) economic and political co-optation. The former is most likely when economic/productive units are dependent upon political authority (for their charter, their market privileges, their resources, etc.), whereas the latter is more likely when the productive sectors are independent of political authority and only need it to
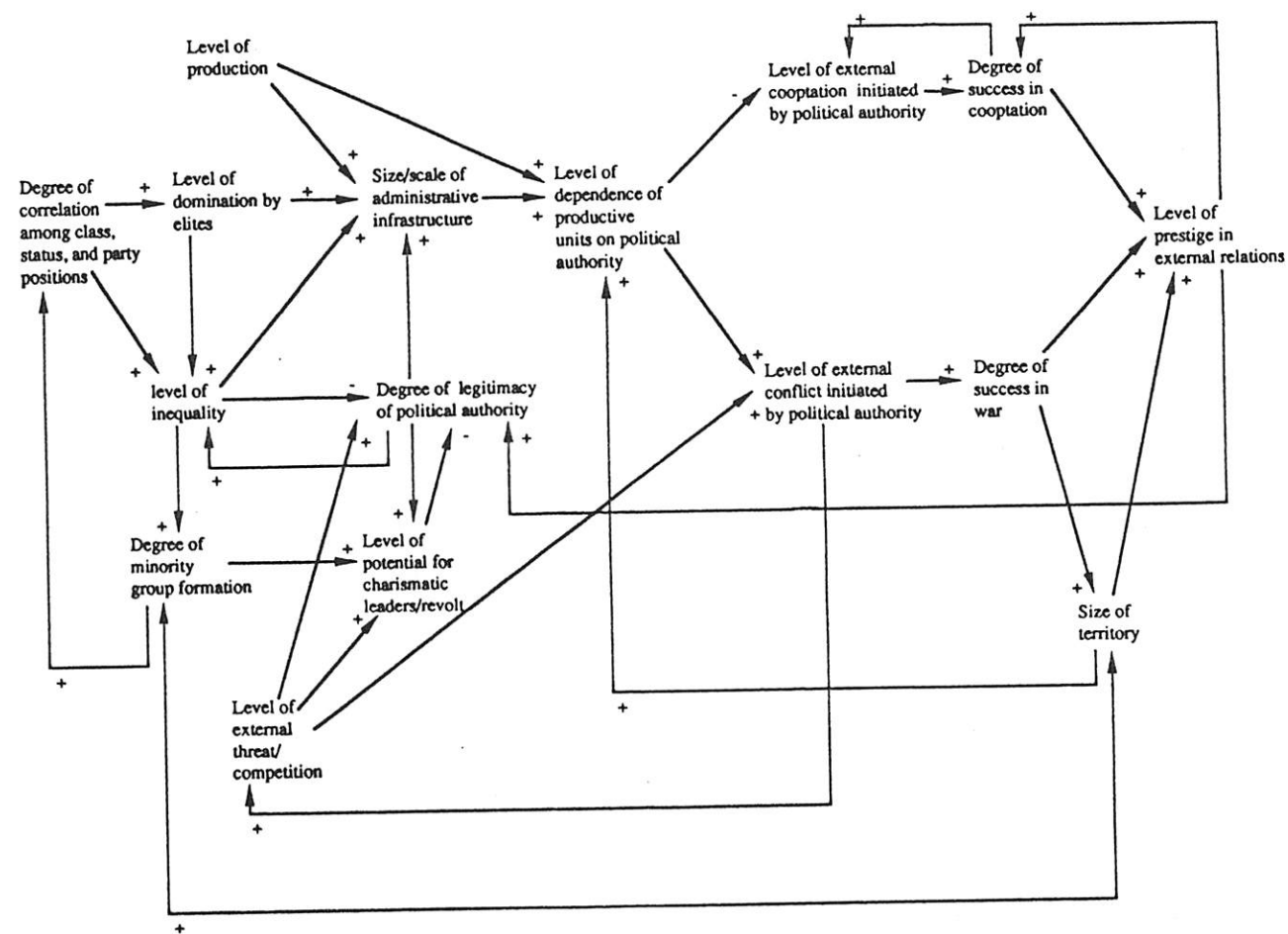
Level of
production

Degree of
correlation
among class,
status, and party
positions

Level of
domination by
elites

Size/scale of
administrative
infrastructure

Level of
dependence of
productive
units on political
authority

Level of external
cooptation initiated
by political authority

Degree of
success in
cooptation

Level of
prestige in
external relations

level of
inequality

Degree of legitimacy
of political authority

Level of external
conflict initiated
by political authority

Degree of
success in
war

Degree of
minority
group formation

Level of
potential for
charismatic
leaders/revolt

Level of
external
threat/
competition

Size of
territory

Figure 2
Weber's Model of Geopolitics

pave the way (administratively and economically rather than coercively) for access to foreign markets and resources. In either case, co-optation and conflict bring prestige to political authority when successful; conversely, a crisis of legitimacy will emerge when such efforts are unsuccessful.

This crisis, or potential for crisis, pushes political authority toward "face-saving" efforts to garner prestige. If there is high external threat and potential for revolt led by charismatic leaders, successful external conflict can be used to regain prestige and mitigate internal sources of strain. But, if such efforts are unsuccessful, then the loss of prestige rapidly delegitimates political authority in concert with those internal forces producing charismatic leaders. Hence, revolt and revolution are, as Skocpol (1979) emphasized, the frequent aftermath of failed military adventurism. Co-optation is a somewhat less volatile process because political authority is not directly on the line as is the case when war is initiated. When co-optative efforts are successful (i.e., productive units enjoy success in external relations and the government is seen as facilitating this process), prestige is forthcoming and legitimates political authority, while encouraging further efforts at such co-optation ("Japan, Inc." is perhaps the best example today, as was the United States forty years ago). When prestige is lost, it works against political legitimacy, but less dramatically than when a war is lost.

As with Spencer, Weber implies that success can be a double-edged sword because military success expands territories and increases ethnic diversity in ways that fuel inequality and promote the emergence of charismatic leaders who challenge authority. Moreover, the more successful a political community in conquering its neighbors, the greater is the external threat from those neighbors now prepared to confront military expansionism (indeed alliances among them may form), with the result that the potential for losing a war increases, especially as internal inequalities and ethnic diversity promote internal dissent and conflict.

Thus, Weber's model adds a number of crucial forces to Spencer's model. The most important of these is the legitimacy of political authority, which is always in a precarious state of managing internal tension and conflict on the one hand, and initiating external geopolitical activities on the other. Internal conflicts can motivate efforts to undertake external conflict and conquest, but this process is always a high-stakes game, and inevitably produces conditions (such as ethnic diversity, increased inequality, and hostile neighbors) that can undermine the capacity for future success in war and, hence, continued legitimacy. Thus, in Weber's model, geopolitics are intimately connected to internal processes of domination. Let me stop here and turn to Collins's model before attempting to pull these theories together into a more powerful statement.

Collins's Theory of Geopolitics

Randall Collins (1986) acknowledges his conceptual debt to Weber, but in his own metatheoretical style (being a fellow M_p traveler), he extends Weber's analysis and produces a highly sophisticated theory that adds (unknowingly, I think) elements from Spencer's theory. I have modelled his theory in Figure 3.
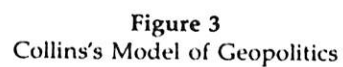
Figure 3
Collins's Model of Geopolitics

In Collins's model, political empires are created by war or external conflict, and the capacity to win wars is a function of the resource and marchland advantage that a population enjoys over its potential enemies. Resource advantage is, in turn, related to (1) the level of natural resources, technology, production, and wealth formation and (2) population size as these work to concentrate coercive power *relative to* that of potential enemies. Marchland advantage is related to the extent to which a nation-state has (1) natural buffers (mountains, ocean, large deserts, and the like) and (2) few enemies on most of its borders, with the result that it can pursue conflict on one border at a time. When a nation-state has a resource and marchland advantage, it will be successful in external war. Just why or when a resource and marchland advantage will be used to initiate war formation is not specified in Collins's model, although Spencer and Weber provide some clues.

The degree of success in war is related to marchland and resource advantage, coupled with mobilization of superior coercive power relative to one's neighbors. Again, just why coercive power is mobilized is not specified, although Collins implies that wealth formation intrinsically causes power to become concentrated. But once empire-building is initiated, the size of this empire is related to the degree of success in war, with the latter a function of the ability to (1) sustain a marchland and resource advantage, (2) prevent diffusion of superior military technologies to potential enemies, (3) avoid a showdown war with another empire, and (4) limit logistical loads that increase as territory is expanded (because of long and costly lines of communication, transportation, and administration from a home base as well as increased diversity of subjugated and restive subpopulations). At some point, overextension is reached, and this leads to a lack of success in war which, as Weber emphasized, reduces the legitimacy of political authority and its capacity to concentrate power and to usurp wealth to mobilize coercive power. It is for this reason, Collins (1986) argues, that empires can only get so big—between 4 and 6 million square miles. At this point, logistical loads, diffusion of military technologies, ethnic/national diversity, and potential for showdown war all work to limit further growth of the empire and, in fact, to implode it back upon itself.

We are now in a position to produce a theory that is more robust than those from which it draws its inspiration. This synthesis is certainly not a complete or definitive theory of geopolitics, but its production allows me to illustrate the viability of the M_p strategy that I propose.

METATHEORY AND THEORY PRODUCTION

At some point in metatheorizing, it is useful to develop propositions from models like those presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3. These propositions, if stated at a highly abstract level and if denoting sufficiently generic phenomena, can then become candidates for sociology's "laws" of human organization. In Table 1, I have summarized and synthesized the three theories as a series of abstract

TABLE 1
Some Principles of Geopolitics

I. The amount of potential for territorial expansion by a population through onflict and conquest of neighboring populations is a positive function of its capacity to mobilize and centralize political authority which, in turn, is a positive and additive function of:
  A. The absolute size of a population
  B. The level of production and wealth formation which, in turn, is a positive and additive function of:
    1. the level of technology
    2. the efficiency of entrepreneurial mechanisms
    3. the skill of labor
    4. the availability of resources
  C. the degree of perceived internal threat from subpopulations which, in turn, is a positive and additive function of:
    1. the level of inequality
    2. the level of ethnic diversity in the population
    3. the level of opposition group-formation
    4. the rate of internal conflict among subpopulations as well as between subpopulations and representatives of political authority
  D. the degree of perceived external threat which, in turn, is a positive function of the rate and intensity of past and present conflicts, or potential conflicts, with other populations
  E. the level of legitimacy accorded to political authority which, in turn, is a positive functional of political and economic success political authority in external system relations and an inverse function of the level of internal threat (see C above)
II. The likelihood that efforts at territorial expansion through conflict and conquest will be initiated is a positive and additive function of:
  A. the degree of mobilization of coercive capacities which, in turn, is a positive and additive function of:
    1. the level of perceived internal threat (see IC above)
    2. the level of perceived external threat (see ID above)
    3. the level of dependence of economic units on the activities of political authority in external system relations
    4. the level of pressure for delegitimation of political authority which, in turn, is a function of the level of internal threat (see IC above)
  B. the degree of resource advantage of a population relative to its potential adversaries
  C. the level of production and wealth formation of a population relative to its potential adversaries (see IB above)
  D. the extent of marchland advantage of a population

III. The likelihood of success in territorial expansion through conquest is a positive and additive function of the efficiency of coercive power, the size of the population, the level of productivity, and the extent of resource and marchland advantage relative to adversaries.

IV. The size of the territorial space controlled by a population is a positive and additive function of its ability to:
   A. maintain superiority in the efficiency of coercive power
   B. maintain resource and marchland advantages
   C. maintain standing armies in conquered territories which, in turn, is a function of absolute population size
   D. maintain legitimacy (see IE and IC above)
   E. maintain logistical capacities for efficient and effective communication and transportation which, in turn, is a positive function of the level of technology in these areas and an inverse function of the distance of borders from a home base
   F. maintain the capacity to avoid a showdown war with another expanding empire

V. The likelihood that an empire will collapse and begin to implode back on its home base is a positive and additive function of:
   A. the degree of overextension of borders beyond logistical capacities
   B. the level of pressure for delegitimation of political authority
   C. the initiation of war and/or high levels of military competition between two empires
   D. the loss of coercive, productive, resource, or marchland advandates relative to potential enemies

propositions. I would hesitate to proclaim these to be actual "laws," but they can perhaps help us along the road to creating some laws of human organization.

In translating the processes in Figures 1–3 into propositions, some additional theorizing is involved. The principles in Table 1 represent my sense of the crucial processes involved in geopolitics. These propositions are only loosely derived from the figures in what might be termed "folk deductions" or "folk derivations." I have taken various causal paths from the models in Figures 1–3 and then stated their causal effects as a proposition. For example, Proposition I in Table 1 involves extracting elements from each of the models and then combining them into a parsimonious principle. In the case of Proposition I, the key variable—mobilized and centralized political authority—comes from all the models, although it is most evident in Collins's and Spencer's models (middle center in both); Propositions IA and IB come from Collins's model (the middle portions on the left); Proposition IC comes from Spencer's model (middle portions) and Weber's model (lower left); Proposition ID comes from Spencer's model (middle, toward right side); and Proposition IE comes from Collins's model (upper left) and Weber's (middle, toward the left). I have, in essence, pieced or spliced the theories together in Proposition I to conform to my sense of what accounts for territorial expansion. A similar exercise occurs for the rest of the propositions shown in Table 1.

These exercises are not highly systematic, but neither are they totally random. The propositions all correspond to paths of arrows in the models; and so, the propositions are a tool for reconciling the theories and, at the same time, capturing the strong points (as I interpret them) of each theory. I could just as easily have constructed a composite model, as I often do, and then used this to create propositions. In such cases, the composite model represents a piecing together in an order that I think is most isomorphic with empirical reality of the causal paths of the constituent models from which the composite has been drawn. In the present exercise, I have bypassed this step and gone directly to the propositions.

Constructing propositions is an important part of my M_p strategy. Each of the models is too complex and robust to be tested as a whole. If the models can be translated, in the sense outlined above, into propositions, then the theory is broken down into manageable chunks that can become hypotheses guiding empirical research. One could do this without constructing propositions like those in Table 1; all that is necessary is to follow the causal path(s) that are of interest and use these as a guide to empirical work. In creating Table 1, I also follow certain paths and create hypotheses, but I do so in a way that pulls the three theories together and makes them one theory. And this is the goal of all my efforts at M_p: to synthesize diverse theories in a way that enables us to see how they fit together into a more powerful explanation of empirical events.

The propositions in Table 1 may seem too "simple" or "obvious," but they are nonetheless fundamental. Sociological theorists have often been somewhat snobbish about what constitutes "interesting" theory: if it is simple, some argue that it is not significant or it is naive and unsophisticated. I would argue just the opposite: the goal of theory is to make simple and abstract statements that can be

applied to all contexts; the flow of events in a particular context will provide the values for the variables in the theory, but they will not dictate what the variables are. This basic point is often overlooked by theorists (e.g., Giddens 1979, 1981, 1984), but it is essential to developing adequate theory. If we must construct a new theory for each and every empirical situation, then we are performing historical interpretation rather than scientific theory (the former being, by the way, a perfectly reasonable approach to phenomena, even though it is *not* scientific theory).

With this final caveat, let me now briefly summarize the contours of the propositions. Principle I states that territorial expansion, or geopolitics dominated by conflict, is not possible without the formation of a system of polity authority and control. Propositions IA, IB, IC, ID, and IE state the general conditions under which political authority emerges: large populations require political regulation, control, and coordination (Proposition IA); increased production also requires coordination by political authority, while making wealth available to sustain an independent polity (IB); internal threat increases the concentration of political authority in order to control and manage the threat (IC); external threat does the same as power is mobilized to deal with potential enemies (ID); and legitimacy is the "coinage" or medium by which political authority is sustained (IE).

Principle II specifies the conditions under which such legitimated political authority is used to expand territories through conquest. First, political authority must mobilize coercive force, and such force is mobilized under conditions of external (IIA,1) and internal threat (IIA,2), dependence of economic units on political domination of external clients and markets (IIA,3), and, ironically, (IIA,4), delegitimation of existing political authority (to try and recapture legitimacy through "success" in the external system). Second, political authority must have a resource advantage, or perceive that it does, over potential adversaries (IIB). Third, political authority must be able to rely upon greater resource advantages and higher levels of production as well as wealth formation than those of its potential adversaries (IIC). Finally, it must initially have a marchland advantage over its enemies (IID). The more these conditions are met, the greater is the likelihood that efforts at territorial expansion will ensue.

Principle III states the conditions necessary for success in such efforts at expansion. These are the same as those for initiating territorial expansion, with the addition of a "population size" variable. I have stated these as a separate proposition because war is often initiated even though only some of the conditions in Principle II are met (indeed, when de-legitimation is the principal reason for initiating conflict, none of the other conditions may prevail). Hence, success in conflict will be limited. To offer some examples: if coercive capacity is mobilized because of internal conflicts, then long-term success in conflict is less likely because coercive capacities will be deflected from external relations to quelling internal dissent; if a society does not have a large population relative to its neighbors, or its relative advantage declines with success, then it cannot mobilize a standing army to fight and control territory in the long run; if production

and wealth formation are not superior to enemies, or only roughly equal, then war cannot be successful over the long run; if resource advantages do not exist, or dissipate over time, then success in war is less likely; if a marchland advantage does not initially exist, or if it declines with military success, then further conquest becomes problematic. The point here is that success in territorial expansion depends upon high values for the variables in Principle III, *relative* to the values of these variables for adversaries. If conflict is initiated with low values for some of these variables, success will be limited or short-term. Moreover, once conflict and territorial expansion occur, the values of these variables change, even when a population is successful in conflict.

Principle IV states the conditions under which territory can be controlled over time, a consideration that is very different from those involved in initially conquering a population and its territory. If superiority in coercive capacities can be maintained (IVA), if resource and marchland advantages still exist (IVB), if the population is large enough to maintain, or co-opt, standing armies in territories (IVC), if legitimacy can be sustained even as ethnic diversity and inequality increase (IVD), if communication and transportation technologies are adequate to the logistical loads (IVE), and if a showdown war (or "cold war") with another empire can be avoided (IVF), then territory can be sustained. These conditions have been difficult to maintain historically, although empires have lasted many hundreds of years because most conditions in Proposition IV have prevailed.

But, in the end, empires collapse, and Principle V specifies the key conditions producing collapse and, often, implosion of the empire to the point where its core or center is destroyed and transformed. Overextension beyond the logistical capacities of communication and transportation technologies, delegitimation as a result of rising internal threat (as more diverse peoples are conquered and exploited), rising military competition with other empires or actual war between rival empires, the loss of coercive advantages (through the diffusion of military technologies to enemies), the loss of a marchland advantage (as enemies on several borders mobilize and/or form alliances), the loss of resource advantages, and the loss of productive superiority (almost inevitable when wealth is used to sustain large standing armies to control territory) all operate together or in various combinations to produce collapse—sometimes in a short time frame (e.g., the current Russian empire) or over a much longer period of time (e.g., the Roman Empire).

In sum, then, the principles in Table 1 represent one way to perform M_p. In engaging in such an exercise, I have not discussed all the epistemological and ontological issues that seem to dominate theory, nor have I engaged in other activities of M_u and M_o (hence, the paper is comparatively short and without those "scholarly" footnotes that no one reads anyhow). Rather, I have taken a specific set of social processes—geopolitics and conflict—and tried to use metatheory to produce a better theory without all of the puffery of much M_u and M_o. And, unlike M_u and M_o, M_p is useful in the practical world outside the ivory tower. I close with a few observations on M_p as not only theory production but also as the best approach to sociological practice.

METATHEORY: PRODUCTION AND PRACTICE

The ideas presented in Figures 1–3 and in Table 1 are useful. True, they may not be useful to many academic theorists who continue to talk primarily to each other, but to policymakers, these ideas should be more than mere abstractions. They have contemporary relevance, and that should always be the case with M_p because such metatheorizing tries to explain the fundamental operative dynamics of the social universe. In contrast, M_o and M_u are useful only to academics as a basis for endless "discourse."

The field of sociological practice is one of the least theoretical subfields in sociology (and given the general atheoretical profile of most subfields, this is really saying something); yet, it is the one field that could immediately use M_p efforts in dealing with real-world problems. Sadly, much sociological practice is mired in nontheoretical intellectual traditions, failing to capitalize on existing theories or theories that could become available with more concentrated efforts at M_p.

Why has sociological practice been so atheoretical and often ideological? Part of the problem, to be sure, is that theorists have not generated interesting theories, nor stated them in ways that make them relevant to those in sociological practice. But some of the blame lies with practitioners who prefer to see "practice" as an "art" or who have become comfortable collecting data and making descriptive statements. But, if one wants to recommend policy, then it is necessary to do more than have a "gut feeling" or to extrapolate from past trends: it is necessary to have a *theoretical* explanation of *why* a problem or situation exists. Then, the theory, rather than ideology, empirical history, or personal intuition, can guide efforts to eliminate the problem or change the situation. There is vast potential here for the merger of theory and practice; it is only waiting to be realized.

What about the propositions in Table 1? They are filled with insights and offer numerous avenues of advice to policymakers. For example, the collapse of the Russian empire could have been predicted, as Collins did some fifteen years ago, long before scholars thought in these terms. By the early 1970s, the Soviet Empire had met all of the conditions set forth in Proposition V, and a theory could have told us the likely outcome. The theory also indicates that Germany could never become a long-term empire because it will never have a marchland advantage and will, therefore, eventually have to fight a multifront war (with a limited population and resource base). Or, the theory indicates that Japan's capacity to form an empire beyond its island borders is limited by its lack of a resource advantage, its comparatively small population, and its high logistical loads in holding territories over great distances of water. The theory could also help interpret the Persian Gulf situation, where it would have told us that Iraq could not viably expand its borders as long as the United States and at least one ally in the Gulf (to give the U.S. a proximate home base) wanted to oppose it. For a quick glance at Propositions IVA, IVB, and IVF would indicate that territorial expansion could not succeed.

All of these examples illustrate the potential for using M_p for policy assess-

ment. In the area of geopolitics, sociologists have virtually ceded the territory (bad pun intended) over to political scientists, economists, "professional" diplomats, strategic "planners," and military strategists. Thus, much like many areas of practical activity, sociology has failed to capitalize on its potential for influencing practice and policy. This potential is best realized with metatheory that dares to explain something and with the use of explanatory theory by practitioners.

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