

Whose Classics? Which Readings? Interpretation and Cultural Difference in the Canonization of Sociological Theory

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I

Histories of sociology commonly tell us how the discipline was formed in the nineteenth-century struggle to understand the combined upheavals of the great political revolutions and the industrial revolution. These overturned the established order and posed a variety of questions that remain with us still: questions about class, community, the nature of social integration, and processes of social change. This version of disciplinary history is true enough, but most tellings leave out important causal factors: the impact of voyages of discovery, of long-distance trade and colonization, of nationalism, and of easier travel and communications on the transformation of European consciousness. Sociology, in other words, was born partly as comparative sociology, seeking to understand the ways in which societies (or cultures or peoples) differed from one another. A variety of dimensions were of interest, but perhaps none more so than differences in political system. Partly because Europeans were in the process of challenging absolutist authority and the divine rights of kings, they were particularly interested in contrasts that pointed up the extent to which certain countries enjoyed liberty, rule of law, and government in the interest of the people that were denied to others. The contrasts could be between France and Britain, between the Old World and the New, historically between the *ancien régime* and its successors, and perhaps most tellingly between Western Europe and "the East." Montesquieu and Tocqueville stand as the great "founding fathers" in this tradition. That they are less central than others in canonical disciplinary histories and the

teaching of new sociologists is due, in significant part, to the marginalization of certain important concerns – especially political struggle and cultural difference – within the discipline.

Given the way we represent the history of sociology, it is easy to forget how powerful the East–West contrast was in constituting early modern social thought. Its *locus classicus* lay in accounts of Persia, such as Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*. But the East could also be Ottoman Turkey, India, China and even Russia, and on occasion Eastern or Central Europe. These views were generally "orientalist," as Edward Said has argued (1976), but the most crucial point for present purposes is not the prejudiced view early social thinkers had of the "East," but that they looked at other countries and epochs not only to learn about those places and peoples for their own sakes but to draw lessons for the contemporary West. As so many of us do all the time and at all levels of analysis, the founders of sociology looked at others to learn about themselves. When they looked at the "others," thus, scholars often took as obvious what it meant that some people were cannibals, or ruled by sultans, or married to multiple partners at once. This was as true of early anthropologists like James Frazer and Edward Tylor, with their vast apparatuses of classifications and interpretations of practices and myths divorced from their cultural contexts. It was in its revolt against this sort of thinking that anthropology (led perhaps above all by Bronislaw Malinowski) made itself into the discipline that argued that the meaning of such things was not obvious but had to be explained in the context of an account of a whole "indigenous" society or culture. But sociology (not altogether a separate discipline at the outset) was not entirely ethnocentric, and also developed traditions that problematized the cross-cultural constitution of meaningful interpretations.

If sociologists, and modern social theorists more generally, started with a concern for difference, however, they also projected it outward in "them–us" contrasts. From very early on, European thinkers approached human diversity with a vision of differences among types, not a ubiquity of cross-cutting differentiations.¹ This affected not only their views of others, but their views of themselves. Especially under the influence of nationalist ideas, they developed notions of societies as singular, bounded, and internally integrated, and as realms in which people were more or less the same. On this basis, a great deal of modern social theory came to incorporate prereflectively the notion that human beings naturally inhabit only a single social world or culture at a time.² People on borders, children of mixed marriages, those rising through social mobility and those migrating from one society to another were all constituted for social theory as people with problems by contrast to the presumed ideal of people who inhabited a single social world and could

therefore unambiguously place themselves in their social environments. The implicit phenomenological presumption was that human life would be easier if individuals did not have to manage a heterogeneity of social worlds or modes of cultural understanding. An ideal of clarity and consistency prevailed. This ideal of course reflected broadly rationalist thinking, but it should not be interpreted as limited to rationalistic (or Enlightenment) views. Much of the jargon of authenticity in Romantic and later anti-rationalist thought shares the same idealization of the notion of inhabiting a single self-consistent lifeworld (see Adorno 1973). This notion of the external world mirrored a preFreudian (not to mention preBakhtinian) notion of the potential self-consistent internal life of the individual – one represented in the very term “individual” with its implication that the person cannot be internally divided.

This notion of inhabiting singular social or lifeworlds as integral beings reflected both assumptions about how actual social life was organized and ideals about how social life ought to be organized. It invoked, in other words, an idea of normality. But the early theorists did not for the most part see their contemporary world as unproblematic on this dimension. Rather, they recognized that people around them faced challenges in trying to come to terms with differences, border crossings, and interstitial positions. This led to an understanding of the past as one in which singular social worlds more completely enveloped people; in which society was less differentiated and less complicated. This was for some a golden age, but most social scientists emphasized that for better or worse modernity meant parting with such visions. One powerful version of this argument was Weber's notion of the differentiation of value spheres, itself an elaboration of a Kantian distinction.³ In modern societies, Weber suggested, the realms of truth (theory), morality (practice), and aesthetics (judgment) must be differentiated; dedifferentiation is a pathology. This view carried forward directly into the work of Horkheimer and Adorno and continues to shape that of Habermas (among many others).

Durkheim took a partially similar tack when he contrasted mechanical to organic social solidarity (Durkheim 1893). He stressed that the older, mechanical form of social solidarity was one rooted in sameness and consensus. The modern organic form was rooted in the division of labor and presupposed functional interdependence based on difference. But, actually existing modern societies were pathological on Durkheim's account, for they lacked the necessary means of reconciling individuals to these differentiated societies. Durkheim conceptualized these means, first, in social terms – the need for strong groups of intermediate scale-like occupational associations – and, second, in cultural terms – the need for some overarching ideology or collective representations that would reveal the nature of the singular whole of their social world to individual members.

There are obviously senses in which the view that modern social life is distinctively characterized by differentiation makes sense. Social life is organized on an extremely large scale and subgroups that have a high level of autonomy in some respects are at the same time closely interdependent with each other. Whether because it is necessary or simply because it has been historically produced, the distinction among truth, goodness, and beauty (and/or its analogs) does indeed structure a great deal of contemporary discourse.

Yet there is problematic baggage packed into this way of understanding epochal change. Along with an appreciation of the scale, differentiation, and intensification⁴ of modern social life this account presents us with the presumption that earlier modes of life were basically organized in terms of internal sameness or dedifferentiation. This is what gives Weber's account its special pathos, for example, because Weber sees the differentiation of value spheres as essential to maintaining rationality and as both part of what produces the iron cage and simultaneously a fragile arrangement constantly vulnerable to collapse. His successors who lived through the Nazi era were even more impressed with the threat of dedifferentiation. Durkheim too saw the pathologies of modern people as stemming significantly from the difficulties of coping with this internally differentiated world. And both Durkheim and Weber saw differentiation producing these challenges even without seriously questioning the notion that people would live inside one social world, one society (or subculture) at a time.

Both Durkheim and Weber in this way reflected some emerging features of modern thought that were closely associated with nationalism, though neither produced more than fragmentary analyses of nationalism. They saw human life as “naturally” involving social worlds of internal sameness and only contingently and with difficulty adapting to worlds of high differentiation. Within the worlds of high differentiation they saw people managing by locating themselves firmly within one or another sphere of social relationships and orientations to action. In Weber's most classic contrast, thus, one opted for science or politics as a vocation, not for both.

But of course Weber's own life suggested otherwise.⁵ He wrote purely academic treatises and entered directly into public life and practical action. He revealed that it was indeed possible to inhabit multiple social worlds and to manage their conjunctures and disjunctures (if not always happily). Modernity may present a number of distinctive challenges of this kind, but we should also be careful not to follow the many classical social theorists whose examination of “other cultures” was conducted in a way that hypostatized both the otherness and the integral unity of cultures. People have long inhabited multiple social worlds at the same time. Multilinguality is as “natural” as monolinguality. Trade has established linkages across political

and cultural frontiers. The great religions have spread across divergent local cultures and maintained connections among them. Even in the relatively small scale, low technology societies that most informed Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity, people inhabited multiple horizons of experience, for example as members simultaneously of local lineages and far-flung clans. In great civilizations like India that were not organized as singular political units, this was all the more true.

It is important, thus, both that we recover from the traditional histories of sociology the extent to which the discipline was formed in the challenge of confronting difference and that we recognize the way in which difference was constituted for most sociologists as a problem when it came to be manifest inside putatively singular social worlds. Comparative sociology for the most part reinforced the presumption of internal integrity by taking presumptively "whole" societies as its units. From its beginning, in short, sociology posed basic questions about how to interpret the meaning of different ways of life, but it tended not to grasp how much and how often those different ways of life could be inhabited simultaneously by the same persons.

It is important today to recover the sociological tradition of addressing the challenges of cultural and historical difference, but to do so in ways that do not render observed differences the bases for hypostatizing contrasting "whole" societies or cultures as though they were internally integral. It is in something of this spirit that, generations ago, Sorokin criticized those who studied cultures with the presumption that these were necessarily cognitively or logically integrated units, rather than seeing such integration as an empirical variable (Sorokin 1957). We need to see not only that empirical variable, however, but the practical activity by which ordinary people manage cultural complexity and the interfaces among social worlds.⁶ The issue is not just to avoid "essentialist" invocations of integral identity, but to see that just pointing to "social construction" offers little if any analytic purchase. It is not just that collective identities and ways of life are created, but that they are internally contested, that their boundaries are porous and overlapping, and that people live in more than one at the same time.

II

None of this, of course, makes the more straightforward issues of how to undertake interpretation and comparison across lines of difference any less important. It is a serious deficiency that contemporary sociologists (especially

in the US) recognize the deep relation of their discipline to the historical challenge of interpretation and difference mainly in terms of vague references to Weber's notion of *Verstehen* and his involvement in the *Methodenstreit*, the turn of the century German struggle over the nature of historical knowledge, science, and the claims of social science. Still, even if stopping the story at this point is a problem, this is not a bad place to begin. It was in this context, arguing against Schleiermacher's notions of historical recovery, that Weber claimed "one does not need to be Caesar to understand Caesar."⁷

In the rest of this chapter, I want to discuss something of the ways in which sociologists have struggled with the challenge of understanding Caesar – or others different from themselves. I will first explore further some of the conditions that initially both made this problematic and opened certain particular intellectual approaches to it. I will then turn to some of the different theoretical nexes in which the problem of interpretation has been posed for sociologists, and finally to the ways in which this issue is addressed – or more often avoided – in the contemporary sociology of culture. I will suggest that grappling successfully with the set of issues thus posed is crucial not only for comparative or cross-cultural sociology as a general pursuit of knowledge, but specifically and vitally for the development of a critical sociology able to break with the received categories of social understanding, to engage not simply in an endless production of different interpretations but in dialogue across lines of difference, and thus to inform normative discourse. Taking interpretation seriously, in short, is essential to developing sociology as part of our human capacity for practical reason.

Discourse that takes interpretation seriously is typically called "hermeneutics." The term "hermeneutic," in this discussion, is both a general term for the study of interpretation, and therefore for sociology's struggle with interpretation, and the label for one particular historical tradition of tackling the problems posed by interpretation – that of Biblical scholars, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. At the present time, a variety of different analytic traditions are bringing forward serious accounts of interpretation, and of the effects of different ways of framing and presenting social analysis: Hans-Georg Gadamer is by far the most important figure, but in addition to hermeneutics narrowly conceived there are rhetoric, which is enjoying a resurgent influence (exemplified in the social sciences by D. McCloskey's work in economics and more generally by that of Wayne Booth), new understandings of legal argument and change such as that of Ronald Dworkin, new trends in the philosophy of science from Kuhn through Feyerabend, the post-structuralist movement in cultural theory and the revitalized interest in the American tradition of pragmatism.

Hermeneutic problems are of significance for social theory primarily because of historical distance and cultural difference. We are especially apt to become aware of difficulties and uncertainties in the interpretation of meaning, in other words, when we attempt to understand social actions whose meaning is embedded in contexts very different from our own. The relevant differences of context may stem from either material conditions or differences in the symbolic production of meaning. By material conditions I mean those various concrete pressures and possibilities that shape action and meaning in different settings whether or not they are recognized by actors or exert their influence through discourse. We face a hurdle, thus, in understanding those whose lives and actions never involved printed texts, widespread literacy, or electronic communications technologies, for example, since these are ubiquitous in our own lives and constitutive of our own understanding of social life. Variance in population density also shapes communication and other meaningful aspects of social life, even when it is not made into an object of discourse or cultural meaning. Differences of context may also stem from the internal cultural construction of meaning. Such differences arise in language, in schemes of identification and valuation, and in orientations to social practice. They bear on the fact that understanding human beings is not just a matter of interpreting their action, but also of understanding the ways in which their own interpretations and constructions of meaning shaped their action. This is what Anthony Giddens famously dubbed the "double hermeneutic."⁸

In both these senses, then, we face difficulties in interpreting social life that is differently constituted from our own. In a nutshell, our resources for making sense of it, for giving meaning to what we can observe of it, derive from our own culture (including intellectual traditions) and from previous experience. These are the only resources we have, but in applying them we necessarily run the risk of failing to grasp meanings operative in other contexts while constituting for ourselves meanings that were not at work there.

In a very general sense, the problem of interpretation across lines of difference is at work in any conversation; it is implied by the philosophical problem of how we know other minds. It is, therefore, no accident that many approaches to this problem focus on a model of conversation. Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, presents a hermeneutics built around the notion of dialogue, the reciprocal process of questioning and learning from each other by which two or more parties move toward consensus at least on certain aspects of what they have discussed. This dialogical model is rooted in Gadamer's appreciation of the earlier Socratic dialogues in which all parties participate actively and each learns from the others (by contrast to Socrates' domination of the later dialogues). Jürgen Habermas, by contrast, worries that

Gadamer's conversational model does not distinguish adequately between consensus based on persuasion and that based on truth. In an account of the "ideal speech situation" and similar regulative ideals he attempts to ground an account of discourse on validity claims implicit in all speech. These claims – to truthfulness, sincerity, and rightness – propel discourse forward in a cumulative development toward truth and certainty, even if these are only approached asymptotically.⁹

But there are problems with this whole approach to interpretation and dialogicality through the model of conversation. It grasps a good deal, to be sure, and we can learn from both Gadamer's and Habermas' analyses. But both, and especially Habermas, tend to focus so completely in interpersonal conversation that they do not recognize the full significance of intrapersonal dialogue. One of the key resources we have for communication with others (it is more or less redundant to say "others who are different from ourselves" since this is always a matter of degree, however radical) is that we are not entirely "self-same." Freud and Bakhtin in different ways stressed the internal complexity of the person. Whether in object-relations or ego-analytic terms, thus, psychoanalysis points out the extent to which being a person means coping with a variety of different identities, identifications, and objects; balancing impulses, self-criticism and sense of reality. Much of what Bakhtin saw in the modern novel was a reflection of a human capacity to carry on an interior dialogue, indeed the constitution of the human being through this dialogicality.¹⁰ Because we already engage ourselves through interior dialogue, we are better placed to come to understandings of others and to bridge significant differences than if we were only monological speakers of self-sameness.¹¹

Habermas approaches internal complexity mainly through recognition of the importance of intersubjectivity. That is, he sees that people are not self-identical in any simple sense because each is constituted as a person both through relations to others and through participation in more or less impersonal but social processes such as language. Our very capacity to speak of ourselves thus draws on resources partially outside ourselves. This is a crucial, but significantly different insight from recognition of the centrality of internal dialogue.

Habermas remains within an approach that presumes consensus as its goal. If one takes the notion of interior dialogicality seriously – if one grants that people are constituted by tensions within themselves, as well as by their definitely held views or propensities – then one cannot quite imagine perfect consensus as a desirable social goal. Certainly we do seek consensus about various matters of truth and practical action. We hold more or less rational

and in any case discursively available values and understandings of the world that we wish to be confident that others share. But creatures who had only such discursively available and definite understandings and values, and who were altogether or even basically self-consistent about them, would not be recognizable as humans.

Part of the problem is that Habermas has adopted a strong version of the widespread assumption of social theorists (noted at the beginning of the chapter) that human beings naturally inhabit a single horizon of experience, a single social world, at a time. This informs a view in which establishing consensus is the program both for living within that social world and for building bridges to other social worlds. But if we start from the view that human beings can and indeed very commonly do inhabit multiple social worlds (as well as highly differentiated social worlds) then we are led less to see consensus as the orientation of all communication. For one thing, we are led less to rely on sender-receiver models that presume the issue is one of adequate translation between "thoughts" that start out in one head and are transmitted to another. Beyond this, we can recognize that each of us develops various practical skills for managing our lives in multiple social worlds, and for constituting ourselves against multiple horizons of experience. These practical skills are basic to meeting the challenge of communicating across lines of difference. What we seek – and indeed often achieve – is not consensus as such, but adequate mutual understanding for the pursuit of various practical tasks in which we are jointly engaged. Just as we do not come to complete self-understanding or complete "consensus" among the voices in our interior dialogues, so we do not do so in exterior, interpersonal or societal dialogues. Indeed, we cannot and it does not altogether make sense even to conceptualize this as a goal or regulatory direction for our efforts. This does not mean that consensus is not important, but: (1) that it is an account of the nature of mutual understanding appropriate to certain domains of rational critical discourse and not to all of social life, and (2) even those restricted domains (for example, law courts) in which the rational critical pursuit of consensus is what we would want rest on foundations not just in language but in less discursive and less consensual practical agreements.

The conversation model for interpretation and mutual understanding also has other limits. Notably, accounts like Habermas' and Gadamer's tend to posit participation in conversation as a given and recognize inequalities and power only as distortions and intrusions. It is hard to relate such model discourses to those settings in actual social life where conversation itself is imposed by force and maintained by unequal power. Perhaps the most obvious of these is colonialism. Even more generally, the whole modern problem

of interpretation across lines of differences has been constituted by the processes of state-building and capitalist expansion. Both within Europe and throughout the world, the challenges of cross-cultural relations did not arise and still do not arise either as mere intellectual pursuits or as results of the unconstrained choices of free and equal partners to engage in conversation. They are produced in large part by the exercise of power, whether that power appears in the form of a centralizing state suppressing subordinate ethnicities, of a colonial state backed by an army, of a multinational corporation, or of the dominance of Western communications media. Power is not simply a distortion of the conversation, it is its occasion. Yanomamo in the Amazon basin and Papuans in New Guinea generally have not simply sought out Europeans for dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

Now of course Habermas and Gadamer can both answer to the effect that they were not analyzing actual conversations (and still less cross-cultural relations) but proposing accounts of how we might understand conversation to be able to move toward mutual understanding and truth. Nonetheless, the problem is a serious one. In the first place, it simply poses an unrealistic notion that meaning can be separated from distorting influences rather than appearing always and only in relations constituted in part by power (as well as by other determinations not reducible to meaning, such as social structure). Approaches such as Gadamer's and Habermas' are superior to the idea of a pure semiotics; at least they locate the pursuit of meaning in dialogue rather than in the external point of view of a semiotician. They do not advocate the kind of science of pure meaning suggested by semiotics (and attacked for example by Bourdieu).¹² Their views are plausible accounts of the pursuit of understanding – and thus can represent viable contending positions in the philosophy of science, or inform accounts of legal processes. The catch is that cross-cultural relations are not occasioned primarily by the pursuit of understanding. The efforts of social scientists to interpret other cultures are never free from the larger structures that bring the different cultures into relationship. Much the same could be said of many interpersonal relations – they are crucially constituted by power. This is, for example, the crux of Nancy Fraser's criticism of Habermas' tendency to ground his notion of a lifeworld free from systemic distortions of communication in appeals to idealizations of family life. Families are hardly realms of free and uncoerced mutual pursuit of understanding.¹³ Habermas' appeals to the model of psychoanalysis are similarly problematic.¹⁴ It is not clear how one could establish a collective analog to the roles occupied by analyst and analysand. We can learn from the importance of intersubjectivity to achieving self-understanding, from ideas about systematically motivated blockage

and distortion, and from how a mixture of strategic and pure communicative action is required, but it is hard to figure out what sort of collective project is strictly analogous to psychoanalysis, and especially what sort of project *between different cultures*.

Not least of all, the very notion of difference with which social scientists work is constituted by the way in which the modern world has developed. "Cultures" and "societies" are not simply given as units in the nature of things, nor is this an arbitrary construct of social scientists, a sort of unmotivated mistake. Cultures and societies have been constituted as putatively bounded units in a world-system that is presumed to divide into an exhaustive and more or less mutually exclusive set of such categories. Conditioned by state-building and the global expansion occasioned above all by capitalism, moderns have come to see the world through the lenses of nationalist discourse – that is, in terms of the kinds of collective identities and divisions defined paradigmatically by the notion of nation. "Nation" is a particular construct informed by power relations; it shapes not just the specific interpretations of those who use the concept but the very idea of difference between discrete cultures that is implicit in all our discussions of cross-cultural relations.

Similarly, the social scientist's standpoint of observation is constituted as the synoptic view of a representative of an international culture. Institutionalizing this notion of an international culture was one of the achievements of the Enlightenment; at the same time, the Enlightenment itself depended on an infrastructure of networks across lines of cultural difference to provide the social organizational basis for its discourse. It is only from the vantage point of "international culture" that seemingly disinterested accounts of particular cultures or of the general problem of cultural difference can be posed. International culture constitutes the ground of a specifically social scientific equivalent to the Cartesian "view from nowhere" that informs the modern notion of science and epistemology generally. But of course it is a view from somewhere, even if not precisely spatially located. And it is a view that preforms the supposedly brute facts of social science observation – for example by constituting nations as appropriate units of comparative research.

This construction of "cultures" and "nations" as basic units of modern collective identity and of comparative social science research has significant implications. In the first place, it implies that each one is somehow discrete and subsists as an entity unto itself rather than only as part of a world-system or some other broader social organization or discourse that defines it as a constituent unit or part. This boundedness is suggested, in large part, by the sharp boundedness of modern states; the ideology of nationalism promotes

the notion that each state has or should have its own singular culture (and vice versa). We extrapolate from archetypal examples. French culture is claimed as something clearly distinct from German (never mind the Alsace); Norwegian culture is something clearly distinct from Danish (no matter how much they have been joined historically, how mutually intelligible their languages, or how similar they seem by comparison with Borneo). This way of constructing cultures as objects of our study, however, obscures interconnections. It implies, to expand the last example, that Scandinavian is purely an aggregate term; that it refers to the sum of Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Finnish, and possibly Icelandic cultures, while only these four or five are primary units. Or to take an example of more practical moment, it makes it hard for us to figure out the relationship between the term Europe and the various putative nations that also have claims on the identities of Europeans. This idea of discreteness is also a key factor in constituting the modern problem of ethnicity, minorities, or subcultures. In a nutshell, these are terms we apply when we want to deny that some collection of people constitutes a fully autonomous and/or modern culture because this would imply that they constituted a nation which would imply that they had a legitimate claim on a state. We do not leap to list Sami (Lapps) as one of the constituent cultures of the term Scandinavian, I think, largely because Sami have played little role in the history of contentions over the proper constitution of nation-states in the region.¹⁵

The Sami not only confound our notion of a discrete Norway, secondly, they confound the notion that Norway has a completely unified, integrated culture. Yet referring to "cultures" and "nations" as integral is a second key implication of our typical usage. We refer to each as though it constitutes a single thing to which determinate reference can be made, rather than a cluster of tensions, contradictions, and agonisms. Thus we assume that with an appropriate sample, we can compare Japanese culture to Norwegian culture. We take it as given in such studies that the "culture" can be an object of unitary reference rather than a term needing to be deconstructed. We assume that it is something "out there" to be revealed to us by the responses of a set of individuals, and that the main issue before us is the methodological problem of accurately constituting a "representative" set of individuals. This reflects, in part, our characteristic understanding of the nation as comprising a set of individuals rather than subordinate powers or communities; national identity is understood as inscribed directly into individual identity, the relation between the two terms is unmediated (Calhoun 1993a; 1993b). At the same time, thinking of cultures as integral, we tend both to hypostatize them and to direct attention away from the ways in which they are internally complex and continually reshaped by struggle.

Third, in speaking of "cultures" and "nations" as units, we tend to imply that they are equivalent. This is sometimes a practical, political issue – for example, San Marino with its 24,000 citizens enjoys the same formal status in organizations like the United Nations as do Germany, the United States, and Brazil. It is also a prejudice that shapes our understanding of ways of life different from our own. We attempt to understand their putatively discrete, integral cultures on analogy to our own, assuming that they must be functional equivalents. This sort of assumption – along with those of discreteness and integrity – has been challenged in a good deal of recent anthropology. Famously, for example, Jack Goody challenged attempts to define a set of discrete, equivalent and internally unitary cultures in northern Ghana. He pointed out the ways in which language, religious observance, mythology, and kinship patterns varied along a continuum in certain locales. Previous British observers, thus, had developed a categorization of "Lo" and "Dagaa" as separate and distinct cultures. This was a misunderstanding. Goody argued, for Lo and Dagaa are really more like poles to a continuum. Those in the middle were not marginal to each of two different cultures, or representative of some confusion between them. They were full participants in a way of life defined in varying degree by different forms of practice – not unlike the children of Norwegian immigrant mothers and Irish Catholic fathers who in the US are just as American as anybody else (Goody 1967).

The point here is not that we must abandon the notions of culture or nation, assuming that such a thing would be possible. It is that we need to recognize the ways in which such units: (1) preform our empirical observations of the world, (2) constitute central dimensions of the modern idea of difference that informs our problems of cross-cultural understanding, (3) are deeply embedded in the sociological thinking we inherit from the "classics," and (4) constitute the premise of our own putatively synoptic understanding of the world of such differences on the basis of our position in an international culture. This last, for better or worse, does not remove us from the play of practical concerns and allow us the universal view of free-floating intellectuals. It positions us within a socio-historical process (or set of processes) that by virtue of expanding throughout the globe pose us certain problems and open certain paths for solving them.¹⁶

III

Obviously both differences and interrelationships among people – and peoples – existed long before what we call the modern epoch. Ancient Greeks

commented on the differences among their city-states and between Greeks generally and various other people with whom they came in contact. The great empires of world history all involved long-distance trade, tributary legations, and military recruitment that established contact among diverse people; many created cosmopolitan cities in which cross-cultural relations were a matter of daily contact. What then made the problem of difference and consequent problems of interpretation distinctively modern? The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey gave one important answer when he described the birth of modern hermeneutics as the "liberation of interpretation from dogma" (Warnke 1987: 5). Dilthey referred to the Protestant Reformation with its attack on the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to dictate proper interpretation of the Bible. The Roman Catholic church had attempted to impose theological uniformity; Protestants were inherently schismatic. Martin Luther was not the first heretic, of course; indeed, the Catholic church had only achieved its capacity to enforce a certain orthodoxy in the late patristic era – fighting a host of heretical sects – and it was never complete. But Luther and the Protestant Reformation generally helped to expose orthodoxy as an imposition of force and so – contrary to the intentions of many – to encourage a basic presumption of heterodoxy.

Pierre Bourdieu has usefully discussed the movement of *doxai* – opinions or beliefs – from being simply the taken-for-granted background conditions of life – what he calls *doxa* – through *orthodoxy* with its recognition but implicit condemnation of otherness and *heterodoxy* with its sense of the unavoidability of multiple views. The Protestant Reformation figured prominently in this story. This is not because Protestants were necessarily tolerant; many were as quick to discover heretics or witches as their Catholic brethren. What Protestants did was (1) to create conditions in which Catholic orthodoxy could not appear as taken-for-granted and was likely to be seen as imposed, (2) to offer a series of competing orthodoxies which predisposed their followers to some acceptance of the heterodox nature of the world (even despite their leaders' best intentions), and (3) to make religious faith a matter of active choice, bringing forward disputes over a variety of particulars from the proper mode of communion to the status of the Trinity and the legitimacy of priestly marriage. In this context, the interpretation of Biblical texts took on a new significance – and a new excitement and danger. At the same time, once people began to inquire in this way into the significance of Biblical teachings, they were led to note certain distances between the historical conditions portrayed in the Bible and their own lives. For the first time, Christians faced on a large scale the challenge that had long been posed to Jews, and which had helped to occasion the Talmud – that of adapting

a manifestly historically specific set of sacred texts to serve as guides to lives lived under historically different conditions.

Similar issues have shaped relationships to classical or sacred texts in other traditions – to Vedic lore in India and to Confucian texts in China, for example. Once the distance between the texts and present-day life was established, once they could not be fitted immediately into the same unproblematic background *doxa*, then interpretation became problematic. Attempts could be made to impose orthodoxy, but social change always brought the prospect of heterodox challenges.¹⁷

Protestants, of course, lapsed back into dogma and orthodoxy of their own, but they established the basic principle of hermeneutics – the idea that sacred texts are to be understood on their own terms and for themselves. It was this idea that posed problems of interpretation. It suggested the need for direct access to the sacred texts, of course, thus occasioning a pressure for printing, for widespread literacy, and for refusal of priestly restrictions on reading the Bible. But it also suggested the need for some rules of interpretation to help in the reading. For example, efforts to understand the Bible would need to be guided by the principle of trying to achieve consistency among its many diverse parts and seemingly conflicting statements.¹⁸

The Reformation was but one moment or phase in a long series of transformations that helped to inaugurate the modern era as one crucially constituted by the interplay of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, sameness and difference. As Gadamer has written:

When then remoteness of the lofty and the remoteness of the recondite needed to be overcome not simply in specialized domains such as religious documents, texts of law, or the classics in their foreign languages, but when the historical tradition in its entirety up to the present moment moved into a position of similar remoteness, the problem of hermeneutics entered intrinsically into the philosophic awareness of problems. This took place in virtue of the great breach in tradition brought about by the French Revolution and as a result of which European civilization splintered into national cultures. (1981: 97)

It is perhaps best to think of the French Revolution as a symbol for a cluster of decisive events, including not least of all the Protestant Reformation, rather than the sole and sufficient cause of this momentous transformation. Nonetheless, Gadamer's point is strong. The problem of radical otherness is constituted as a problem of the universality of interpretation across lines of difference because modernity appears: (1) as a break with tradition, turning tradition into history, and (2) as a breaking-up of the broad social and

civilizational commonality within which (at least European) ways of life were loosely differentiated, replacing Western Christendom with bounded nations (and reified cultures). Of course, modernity is not the first occasion of a break in tradition. Once more or less unitary, Islam has been divided into theological and ethnic or nationally distinct variants starting very early on – and leaving the occasion for the project of reunification which helps to inform contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. In another vital sense, the literate, orthodox “big traditions” of religious and cultural transmission already constituted major breaks with the “little traditions” of every passing on of information and reproduction of the social world in all its immediate identities and relationships (Redfield 1957). The unity of Christendom broke with the grip of numerous local cultures and traditions, both religious and secular. Indeed, in the hermeneutic tradition and in modern Western thought more generally, “tradition” is too easily identified with Catholic orthodoxy and other aspects of medieval Europe rather than with the more radically traditional social organization characteristic of many ways of life around the world. Like other literate “big traditions,” Christianity was always subject to hermeneutic problems and self-conscious interventions in reflected understandings not typical of traditions passed on locally, face-to-face, without the mediation of textual experts – such as those of acephalous African societies, village India before Mughal rule, or elsewhere (including alongside or beneath the very gaze of “big traditions”).

In very much the same sense that Dilthey thought the Protestant Reformation liberated Biblical interpretation from dogma, the development of the social sciences – especially sociology and anthropology – might be taken as liberating cross-cultural comparison from established European accounts of the heathen world. This does not mean that sociologists or anthropologists were free from prejudices, any more than Protestants were. Many reproduced the attitudes of colonists toward colonized, for example. More generally, as I have hinted and Gadamer has argued at length, there is no such thing as an understanding free from prejudices: we are always shaped by our origins, our thought is always situated, we are unable to think without taking some things for granted. What we take for granted is determined by our own cultural backgrounds, and more specifically by our academic training. Nonetheless, whether biased or not, sociologists and anthropologists set about attempting to make sense of other ways of life, other forms of social organization or culture, in terms of the way they worked internally. Functionalist analysis obviously reflected this, but so in a different way did Weber's adoption of the notion of *Verstehen*. What this meant was that in a central way, especially insofar as it was essentially comparative, sociology took on the task

of interpreting contrasting ways of life. This was fundamentally different from the practical understanding of other ways of life occasioned, for example, by living in the same imperial city. In such a case, say, in Istanbul, Jews might be in daily contact with Muslims and Christians but have no reason to develop a sociology of the gentile world. Neither, in this example, would it have been necessary to choose between absolutizing the difference between Jews and others as "nations," or reducing their differences to mere ethnic variation among the citizens of a single nation. Among other reasons, though they would have needed to interact, they would not have been called upon to deliberate or to confer legitimacy on a government.¹⁹

Confronted with other cultures, sociologists could find no access to these contrasting ways of life through "brute facts" not needing some manner of interpretation. This was perhaps equally true of sociology's domestic analyses, but more easily ignored.²⁰ At the very least, looking abroad, it was necessary to translate from one language to another in order to make study possible. Generally, translation depended on some level of more general interpretation. Usually, this more general level operated at least partially in its own terms and understandings; it was, in the currently fashionable term, a "metadiscourse." How could one make sense of kin relations, for example, without situating a variety of indigenous terms in relation to one another in order to construct analogies between the set of relationships being studied and those described in the analyst's language? Translation adequate to comparative analysis requires, however, an interpretation of a whole organization of activity, not just the matching of vocabulary. Indeed, the very metaphor of translation may be of limited value in explaining how cross-cultural understanding is achieved. Even within a single cultural setting, interpretation of practical activity faces significant inherent problems, since most practical activity is not directly amenable to discursive rendering. It is difficult, that is, to put into words the embodied understandings and practical skills by which a host of everyday activities are made possible. To think all human action reducible to rules, and therefore to potentially decontextualized explanation, is one of the fallacies Pierre Bourdieu criticizes as characteristic of "objectivism." "The logicism inherent in the objectivist standpoint leads those who adopt it to forget that scientific construction cannot grasp the principles of practical logic without changing the nature of those principles: when made explicit for objective study, a practical succession becomes a represented succession" (1977: 117). A large part of the role of theory in sociology is providing the guidelines for these efforts of interpretation. This is one reason why so much of the most influential "classical" theory is hard to reduce to testable propositions; it is rich with empirical description and offers frameworks for interpretation.

Neither theories nor specific interpretations can be proved or checked for correctness by reference to a set of methodological principles. They must be constructed and evaluated in relation to a range of empirical knowledge through a process of judgment and practical reason. They are judged by whether they are persuasive, whether they seem to make sense, whether they seem adequate to various practical projects. The criteria for this include systematicity, parsimony, scope, intuitive insight, and the like. But these are never conclusive. They do not establish which theory is right when two theories clash, or which of two conflicting interpretations we should believe. The same problems arise in deciding which of the criteria to prefer when they themselves clash. Above all, we evaluate complex empirical interpretations in relationship to the range of other such interpretations we have accepted and in general what we know of the world. One of the best examples of this as an aspect of academic training is the way in which anthropologists master (or at least used to master) a variety of ethnographies from all over the world. These formed the context for their evaluation of new studies.

Despite what I have argued is the centrality of the interpretative task to the history and role of sociology, we do not try to teach it or thematize it very directly as a problem in sociology. The discipline has long been characterized by efforts to repress it or reduce it to a minor and seemingly unproblematic preliminary stage of research. These efforts have been occasioned largely by attempts to make sociology more "scientific." Indeed, a good deal of the relationship of hermeneutics to sociology in recent years has been focused on the philosophy of science question of how similar to the natural sciences sociology is or should be. Unfortunately, regardless of the merits of the arguments, they have often cast hermeneutics (and similar lines of argument) in a negative role. That is, arguments about the centrality of interpretation to sociology have appeared largely as critiques of prevailing scientism and empiricism. The point has been made over and over again that positivist sociology fails to attend to the essentially meaningful, preinterpreted character of human life, and by attempting to reduce human beings to mere objects misses something fundamental to their nature. I will not repeat such arguments now. The problem is not to make this negative point better, or more often, but to focus attention on how better to do the actual interpretative work of sociology.

IV

Rather than simply expostulating on my ideas of what a good sociology would look like, however, let me turn for a moment to the sociology of

culture as it already exists. A great deal of sociology has been conducted as though culture were a separate field of study that could unproblematically be left to anthropologists, literary critics and others. Recently, however, culture has returned to sociology, sometimes with a vengeance. Where sociology has seemed to have little to say about culture, moreover, it has often been excluded from or devalued in exciting and influential interdisciplinary discourses (to the loss of both sociology and those other discourses). To a surprisingly large degree, however, the sociological subfield of cultural analysis is not a particularly good place to look for serious hermeneutical engagement. One could say the glass is half full, that after years of repressing culture sociologists are studying it in increasing numbers. But those who see the glass as half-empty will have to retort that too many sociologists of culture are doing so in ways that avoid serious hermeneutical (and socio-historical or theoretical) questions in order to maximize their newfound legitimacy.

There are several senses in which attention to culture has been urged on sociologists. First, and with fewest transformative implications, it has been argued that as a set of more or less objective social products – books, films, paintings – culture deserves more sociological attention than it has received. Culture, in this sense, is understood as a special domain of objects, social actions and institutions. Studies aim to understand who produces these objects and how, who gets access to them and why, what processes determine the fate of different producers and products, how formal organizations shape, select, or disseminate cultural products, and so forth. Though some of these studies are more creative, it is quite possible to contribute to this literature by applying conventional sociological research techniques, conceptualizations, and theories to this specific domain. Thus one might ask about the socio-economic status of those who go to museums, or the structural position of those who make decisions about arts programming, or the ways in which artistic producers forge a community or subculture. Two common threads unite work in this approach: (1) culture is treated in terms of more or less objectified indicators, and (2) attention to culture is compartmentalized within sociology as the study of a specific domain of social life, analogous to law or medicine. These two characteristics remain distinctive and in force even when this approach is expanded beyond the study of the arts in which it originated and includes studies of popular culture.

A second claim about the importance of culture has more central sociological significance. This turns on the argument that social research in general requires paying attention to culture as a sort of methodological propaedeutic. In constructing surveys, thus, sociologists must be concerned

to avoid or control for cultural bias. In developing categories of analysis, sociologists must be clear that they are often working with culture-specific categories that they have induced as though they were obvious in their meaning and non-problematic. Thus sociologists using the term race need to worry about the “cultural baggage” that comes with the use of this term, the extent to which it represents a historically specific and possibly prejudicial understanding of certain social phenomena, the number of different meanings that it bundles together (though analysis might fruitfully unpack them and make them several separate dimensions or variables) and the extent to which its meaning is inherently contestable. This series of arguments can be presented narrowly as a critique of specific terms and part of a project of finding better, less problematic terms, or more broadly as an argument for the necessarily unstable and multivocal character of sociological concepts and the need for them to be analyzed as parts of broader cultural contexts.²¹

Recognition of this led to a new wave of cross-cultural research, still designed largely as part of an effort to uncover universal processes or laws. Researchers assumed accordingly that cross-cultural variation, while possibly interesting at a surface level, was not deeply problematic; it was in some combination: (1) a matter of residual variance, (2) a matter of extraneous factors to be controlled for, or (3) a “black box” standing in for proper structural or other variables that had not yet been discovered. Culture became the object of somewhat more serious study within this tradition, perhaps ironically, as the result of methodological problems rather than substantive interest. Researchers found that translating survey instruments was more than merely technically difficult, more than simply a matter of finding the right words, since people in different cultures apparently thought differently about various issues, used different schemes of evaluation, and categorized their experiences in different ways.

Attention to this cluster of issues is valuable for all sorts of sociological work, of course, but it has been brought forward because of sociologists' increasing awareness of cultural diversity. This constitutes a third program of increasing sociological attention to culture. One could call it the “culture as a variable” approach. Many sociologists have attempted to expand operationalizations of their conventional sociological problematics by asking whether cultural difference is a significant intervening variable changing the relationship between, say, fathers' class positions and sons' educational attainment, or between environmental complexity and span of control in organizations.²² Many of these new studies involve cross-national comparisons, though they are logically similar to others comparing subcultures or ethnic groups. Such studies generally do not begin with the idea that cultural

differences might prove internally very problematic. Culture is a label for social groups or categories that become units in the analysis; to the extent that culture becomes significant in explanations it is generally as a kind of residual category putatively accounting for variance that cannot be explained by other, more clearly identified and better understood variables.

In trying to deal with these methodological problems, some of these "culture as a variable" researchers have begun to touch on the most basic and potentially transformative of the ways in which culture has demanded the attention of sociologists. This fourth agenda starts with the recognition that social life is inherently cultural, that is, inherently shaped and even constituted in part by differences in the ways in which people generate or recognize meaning in social action and its products. It is fitting that methodological concerns should drive one sociological effort to connect with culture as both basic to sociology and basically a matter of meaning. This is so because positivist methodological concerns to stick to an "objective" way of studying social life have been responsible for much of the repression and/or marginalization of interpretative methods and concerns in post-war sociology. Interpretative, culturally oriented sociology has of course existed since the beginning of the discipline. It appears in every lineage of classical theory from Marx to Durkheim to Weber and Mead. It has maintained a continuous tradition in symbolic interactionism, in the sociology of knowledge and cultural sociology of scholars like Mannheim and Elias, and in variants of Marxist sociology, especially in the Frankfurt tradition and the new Gramscian currents in and after the 1960s. Yet though culture never quite disappeared from sociological attention, it was banished to the margins of the field wherever positivist methodological concerns reigned, especially in America.

Even in the course of reviving the subfield of sociology of culture during the last fifteen years, for example, many researchers have felt constrained to make sure that their work did not focus on the problem of interpreting meaning, lest it appear to be unscientific.²³ The result, of course, was that they were obliged to interpret the social world as one in which meaning was not problematic. It is precisely in taking meaning as problematic, often under the pressure of trying to cope with manifest differences in interpretations of texts or of actions, that some strands of empirical sociology opened the possibility of a more fruitful relationship with hermeneutics.²⁴

In a sense, the split between positivist, empiricist sociology and more interpretative, cultural sociology mirrors the divide between Anglo-American philosophy and its continental counterparts. This offers only cold comfort for positivists, since the last several years have seen even analytic philosophers (like Quine and Popper) demolishing empiricism and related conventional

views of science even for the natural sciences (even if they weren't as radical as Feyerabend and Lakatos); Kuhn's and others' historical studies carried similar import. It is no longer just that there are doubts as to whether the social sciences can be more like the natural sciences, it is widely recognized that the natural sciences as practiced are much more deeply culturally (and theoretically) constructed – more dialogical and multi-perspectival – and therefore much less positive, than textbook accounts of science have suggested. It is not just the alleged relativism of Gadamer or Derrida that positivist sociologists have to fear, in other words, it is Einstein with his idea of relativity.²⁵

Neither Gadamer nor Derrida holds all the answers. On the contrary, each brings the deep problems of difference and interpretation forward in a problematic form. In the first place, both intellectualize, both treat as essentially cognitive a field of knowledge that owes more than they recognize to embodied practice and structures of social relations. Second, while Gadamer is inattentive to power and the difference between the sway of ideology and the more general fact of prejudice or situatedness, Derrida universalizes power and ideology, making it hard to distinguish whether any specific intellectual claims can be said more to warrant acceptance on their intellectual merits than others. Even more for the crasser followers of Derrida and other post-structuralists, because there is no absolute foundation for judging truth, there is no relative basis for judging "epistemic gain" or partial improvement either (as there is in Gadamer and Taylor) (Taylor 1989a). If Gadamer is insufficiently critical, as Habermas suggests, then deconstructionism is critical in so undifferentiated a manner as to lose practical, especially constructive, purchase. Both Gadamer and Derrida leave us with the knowledge that we can never escape from our interpretative traditions or communities. Yet this has less force than at first appears. All knowledge, justifications and interpretations may indeed be internal to traditions or interpretative communities, but there is never a singular and unitary tradition or interpretative community. Membership must always overlap. Such traditions or communities must be internally differentiated and at least at odds on some significant issues, and will be the more so as there is a break between "big" and "little" traditions.

V

As I stressed at the outset, it is important to recognize how much of our approach to problems of difference, and therefore interpretation, is contingent

on the way in which we have tacitly accepted the notions that cultures (and even intellectual traditions and interpretative communities) are discrete, integral, and equivalent. But this is a construct we can re-examine. As we work to develop a more complex cultural sociology, it will be only one of many cases in which the meaning of the basic objects we study is reconstructed by critical, theoretically informed reflection, historical and cultural analysis, and the effort to make better sense of as broad a range of empirical observation as we can.

The role of theoretically informed interpretation is basic to this project. The first of the sociologist's tasks – and perhaps the most important and problematic – is the constitution of the object of study. As Bourdieu and his colleagues have written, social facts do not just appear, they must be won (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1991: ch. 1). When taken seriously, this effort always situates objects within broader contexts, generally theories of social life, interpretations of specific ways of life (including epochs or socio-geographic and cultural settings), and their comparison. This was an important part of the empirically rich work of many "classical" sociologists, but it is largely lost in approaches to canonical theory that work by trying to abstract their concepts and formal propositions from their comparative and historical analyses. There is always room for variation in approaches to constitution of objects of study, for tradeoffs between more local detail and wider comparison, for example, or for emphasizing different aspects of social life – structure, action, culture, power, function, and so on. The point is to see the process as basic and never ending, and to subject it to our continuing critical attention, rather than to imagine that it is somehow settled once and for all, or merely a matter of operational definition.

The objects of sociological study do not present themselves in nature any more than farmland presents itself. Farmers may look at plains that have never been tilled, as some Norwegian immigrants to the American middle west did a century ago, and see rich fields. But this vision is one shaped by their tradition and one rooted in their practical orientation. Just as the farmers must win the fields from nature (or from previous inhabitants who are sometimes dismissed by assimilating them to the category of nature), so too sociologists must win the objects of their research. In this struggle, interpretation is always central. It can be informed by theory, and guided by wise precepts, but it can never be settled by method in such a way as to guarantee the fertility of the fields or to make sure in advance that they grow the scientifically correct crops. Taking interpretation seriously in research, recognizing how deep its problems run, restores the connection of even the most methodologically sophisticated social science to the grounding of judgment and practical reason, and saves it from worshipping the illusions

of scientific self-sufficiency that offer the future to the putative certainty of those experts who would be social engineers.²⁶ Precisely because problems of interpretation cannot be solved in advance but only lived through in history, science does not preclude choice. It is up to us to create a discourse in which choices are made on the basis of knowledge, practical reason, and judgment, challenged by criticism, and open not just to the range of social interests but to the novelty of contending understandings.

Notes

In addition to the ASA session on which this book is based, an earlier version was also presented to the Norwegian Sociological Association summer conference at Lofoten, June 1992. Members of both audiences made helpful comments.

- 1 See Todorov (1993), *On Human Diversity* for an evocation of how exoticism in French portrayals of non-Western peoples dovetailed with racism and nationalism.
- 2 On the idea of "social world" see Strauss (1978), "A social world perspective," and for the phenomenological notion of lifeworld that informs Strauss's account, but also puts the notion of social world on a somewhat different theoretical basis, see Schutz and Luckmann (1976), *The Structures of the Lifeworld*.
- 3 See "Science as a vocation," and "Politics as a vocation," among a number of Weber's works; Kant's three critiques are distinguished on just these lines.
- 4 By "intensification" I mean something like Durkheim's notion of "dynamic density," the capacity for human beings not just to live near each other but to carry on manifold significant relations with each other.
- 5 This is evident immediately from recognition of the substantial public and political work he did – for example, helping to draft the Weimar constitution – alongside his scientific or scholarly production. For a deeper sense of the extent to which Weber did not in fact choose sharply between these vocations see Marianne Weber's (1975) excellent (and very sociological) biography, *Max Weber*.
- 6 See Hannerz (1992), *Cultural Complexity* for a nice contemporary suggestion of this issue. Also, Hannerz (1958), "The world in Creolisation."
- 7 Compare Arendt's ([1954] 1977: 182) contemptuous formulation of a central theme in pragmatism (which she understands more broadly than just the American philosophical school, and which she charges with deeply pernicious effects on modern education): "that you can know and understand only what you have done yourself."
- 8 See Giddens (1977), *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, following Charles Taylor ([1971] 1985), "Interpretation and the sciences of man" and Gadamer (1975), *Truth and Method*.
- 9 Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1975), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976), *Reason in the Age of Science* (1981); Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1988), *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984).

- 10 I will not attempt to lay out the range of appropriate references to Freud and psychoanalysis. The most accessible of Bakhtin's texts is probably (1981) *The Dialogical Imagination*. The work of Vygotsky (also published under the pseudonym Voloshinov) helps to open up related themes. See Holquist and Clark (1986) on Bakhtin; Wertsch (1990) on Vygotsky.
- 11 This insight is partially suggested in George Herbert Mead's (1934) notion of taking the role of the other (*Mind, Self, and Society*), but not really developed in the same way.
- 12 Bourdieu (1990), "Lecture on the lecture," in *In Other Words*.
- 13 Fraser ([1986] 1989), "What's critical about critical theory." Part of the problem is that Habermas does not see the need for a specifically gendered analysis but tries to achieve universality by transcending gender (which keeps it from being thematized but not from being relevant).
- 14 Habermas is certainly aware that there are problems with applying the model of doctor and patient to large-scale subjects such as classes; he indicates in *Theory and Practice*, p. 30, that the key is to distinguish strategic confrontations (to which the psychoanalytic model does not apply from normative reflection and communication to which it does, though this still seems both to strip psychoanalytic therapy of its strategic dimension and to imagine an improbable sort of social encounter).
- 15 Though the formation of a Sami Parliament appropriates nationalist rhetoric and (like other mobilizations of subordinate nationalities and regional identities) poses a question about distributions of power among the constituent identities of a potentially unified Europe.
- 16 The international intellectual discourse thus does not attain objectivity, though it attains salutary diversity, from the inclusion of the voices of post-colonial intellectuals. It is important also to remember that, for example, South Asian participants in this international discourse are not simply representatives of the anthropological other but elites empowered by education and/or class to enter into this realm.
- 17 Such attempts are often understandable from the point of view of priestly power as well as theology; see Bourdieu (1991), "Genesis and structure of the religious field."
- 18 Earlier Biblical redactors and copyists seem sometimes to have responded to internal inconsistencies by assuming them to be the result of previous transcription errors – and often trying to resolve them by altering texts to achieve consistency and to accord with prevailing doctrine. See Ehrman (1993), *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*.
- 19 See discussion in Weintraub (1994), "Introduction"; Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires* (1962), *The Decline of Empires* (1964).
- 20 Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1991), *The Craft of Sociology*, offer a strong, though not explicitly cross-cultural, analysis of this in their discussion of "winning the social fact."
- 21 It also reveals the limits of the idea of a "pure structuralism" in sociology, such

- as that advocated by Peter Blau. Blau's sociological structuralism involves studying interaction rates between various categories of persons – for example, rich and poor, black and white. Inescapably, though, Blau must begin with inductions of such categories from some cultural framework. If they are objectified in data sources (such as census items) it is easy to treat them as though they were objective and forget that they were not only chosen by individuals but constituted by culture. Whether or not this is the case, Blau's reliance on these categories implicitly calls not just for tests of their salience (that is, their ability to predict interaction rates), which is his own main concern, but for an account of how they are derived and why they are the most appropriate representations of the cultural factors that make the variance in interaction rates meaningful (which Blau does not offer). Blau (1977), *Inequality and Heterogeneity*; see also discussion in Calhoun and Scott (1990), "Introduction."
- 22 A somewhat similar style of research introduces gender as a variable into analytic models that had previously ignored it – but without undertaking a more general rethinking of the importance of gender as a category constitutive of both the social world and sociological problems.
 - 23 See, for example, Robert Wuthnow's (1987) attempts to move "beyond the problem of meaning;" *Meaning and Moral Order* and (1989) *Communities of Discourse*, and my (1992a) response in "Beyond the problem of meaning."
 - 24 It is also, by the way, in taking meaning as infinite and lacking any intrinsic relation to "truth" or application that "post-structuralist" and "post-modernist" lines of thought have differed most decisively from hermeneutics.
 - 25 Or even more, with his understanding of the transformative implications of Planck's work. Or consider Heisenberg (quoted from Arendt's 1954/1977), *Between Past and Future*, p. 47): "The most important new result of nuclear physics was the recognition of the possibility of applying quite different types of natural laws, without contradiction, to one and the same physical event. This is due to the fact that within a system of laws which are based on certain fundamental ideas only certain quite definite ways of asking questions make sense, and thus, such a system is separated from others which allow different questions to be put." But the implications of this should not be overstated. In particular, social scientists should not collapse the issue of interpretation completely into the contrast between quantitative and qualitative methods – equating quantitative techniques with analysis and viewing interpretation as either an imprecise version of analysis or somehow its opposite. First, quantitative sociology also depends on interpretation and this is sometimes done with great sensitivity. Second, much quantitative sociology is essentially descriptive; the use of numbers does not guarantee causal or other forms of analysis, let alone relation to theory. Third, while some qualitative sociology is overwhelmingly descriptive in aim, much focuses on analyses aimed at clarifying the conceptual constitution of phenomena under study. Finally, a good deal of qualitative sociology is in fact model-building and shares both the use of abstraction and the goal of precision with quantitative analysis – or even more, with mathematical model-building. If there is a real

issue in this sociological debate, it is the question of whether meaning is constituted by a rich relation of the specific objects of study to a broad socio-cultural context, or narrowed and even violated by wrenching variables from their contexts.

26 In Kantian language, the social sciences depend largely on judgment, for the social world is not accessible to pure reason. But since social scientists are not passive, external observers but engaged social actors, their work is necessarily guided by the ethical imperatives of practical reason as well.