

The Rise and Domestication of Historical Sociology

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Historical sociology is not really new, though it has enjoyed a certain vogue in the last twenty years. In fact, historical research and scholarship (including comparative history) was central to the work of many of the founders and forerunners of sociology—most notably Max Weber but also in varying degrees Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Alexis de Tocqueville among others. It was practiced with distinction more recently by sociologists as disparate as George Homans, Robert Merton, Robert Bellah, Seymour Martin Lipset, Charles Tilly, J. A. Banks, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Reinhard Bendix, Barrington Moore, and Neil Smelser. Why then, should historical sociology have seemed both new and controversial in the 1970s and early 1980s?

The answer lies less in the work of historical sociologists themselves than in the orthodoxies of mainstream, especially American, sociology of the time. Historical sociologists picked one battle for themselves: they mounted an attack on modernization theory, challenging its unilinear developmental tendencies, its problematic historical generalizations and the dominance (at least in much of sociology) of culture and psychology over political economy. In this attack, the new generation of historical sociologists challenged the most influential of their immediate forebears (and sometimes helped to create the illusion that historical sociology was the novel invention of the younger generation). The other major battle was thrust upon historical sociologists when many leaders of the dominant quantitative, scientific branch of the discipline dismissed their work as dangerously “idiographic,” excessively political, and in any case somehow not quite ‘real’ sociology.

Historical sociology has borne the marks of both battles, and in some sense, like an army always getting ready to fight the last war, it remains unnecessarily preoccupied with them. Paying too much attention to culture or to historically specific action thus seemed to invite being labeled unscientific. Focusing on

culture also raised the specter of association with Parsonsian functionalism and modernization theory. Historical sociologists remain disproportionately tied to political economy, even though most have abandoned the Marxism that gave that a political point. At the same time that old defense mechanisms remain in place, many of the old aspirations to transform sociology have dimmed. Above all, historical sociology has not succeeded enough in historicizing social theory and is itself becoming too often atheoretical.

In this essay, I will first examine the process by which historical sociology achieved a certain legitimation within sociology but in doing so became domesticated as a subfield, losing much of its critical edge and challenge to mainstream sociology. I will argue that the genuine importance of historical sociology is obscured by attempts to grasp it as a form of research method rather than as part of a substantive reorientation of inquiry. Second, I will say a little about the current importance for historical sociology of confronting problems of culture and action if it is to live up to more of its promise within sociology and also participate more effectively in interdisciplinary historical discourse. Finally, I shall point to the importance of developing approaches to historical sociology that do not just address past times but clarify the nature and theoretical significance of basic, categorical transformations in social life.

The Rise and Domestication of Historical Sociology

The 1960s upset the confident development of mainstream sociology, which was based on the balanced split between grand theory and abstracted empiricism of which C. Wright Mills (1958) wrote so critically. A variety of mostly antifunctionalist schools of theory contended with each other, in some ways undermining the very centrality of theory. Despite antiempiricist diatribes, however, the hegemony of largely quantitative, predominately scientific empirical sociology only grew more complete. Its dominance failed to impart a sense of security to its adherents, however, as critiques from many quarters—phenomenology and ethnomethodology, Marxism and Weberian hermeneutics—challenged sociologists' very idea of what made their discipline a science. This disciplinary unease gained added force from the broader political turmoil of the 1960s and early 1970s.

In this context, historical sociology grew not just as scholarly innovation or renewal but as a sort of social movement. Recruitment to historical sociology drew on several important sources beyond simply the intrinsic merits of the perspective: for example, political dissatisfaction with current American and more broadly Western power regimes encouraged research into their origins

and trajectories, and both the success and the collapse of the civil rights, student protest, and antiwar movements prompted inquiry into their antecedents and attempts to develop stronger theoretical foundations and longer historical perspectives for the future development of such movements. In more specifically disciplinary terms, many young sociologists reacted against the narrowness and abstractness of much existing sociology. And finally, the excitement generated by several interdisciplinary discourses with substantial historical and political components drew the involvement of many sociologists despite mainstream claims to disciplinary autonomy. Marxism was probably the most important, but the “new social history,” labor studies, and (a bit later for the most part) feminism were also prominent.

Against this backdrop, an increasing turn to historical sociology provoked controversy where none had existed before (and, overdetermined by political ideologies and a tight job market, sometimes led to negative or difficult tenure and promotion decisions). The work of Bellah (1957), Smelser (1958), Eisenstadt (1963), and Tilly (1964) never provoked a similar controversy. Certainly, earlier historical sociologists had sometimes felt some isolation within the profession, and a few once tried to create a subsidiary association, but this never involved the conflicts of the later resurgence of historical sociology. This was partly because such earlier works were generally not tied to new and/or politically loaded theoretical perspectives. It was also because in the earlier period historical sociologists did not offer so substantial a claim to reorienting sociology in general and because the hegemony of ahistorical quantitative studies was much less complete.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, sociologists oriented to increasingly sophisticated quantitative methods, and largely disconnected from theoretical discourse, enjoyed hegemony in most of sociology’s research centers. Many nonetheless manifested a certain siege mentality. Internal challenges were coupled with a sense that sociology lacked prestige in a broader scientific field. Elite or would-be elite sociologists turned away from the long tradition of work oriented to “social problems” and increasingly borrowed approaches from economics while treating economists as a crucial reference group.¹ In this context, hegemonic sociologists were apt to see historical research as dangerously unscientific because apparently idiographic, as not only unacceptably interdisciplinary but as linking sociology to the wrong other disciplines, and as attempting to reshape sociology in accord with left political concerns.

The period of this early fighting, though full of painful moments, was also the “golden age” of historical sociology—or comparative historical sociology—as a movement. Historical sociologists enjoyed glory days waging

war on an old sort of functionalism, especially modernization theory, and its counterpart, a spuriously universalistic but in fact ethnocentric positivism. Classical modernization theory had given widespread credence to a universalistic, unilinear account of social and cultural change, one that led harmoniously to modern Western liberalism. Researchers who looked less at such global narratives were still likely to lose touch with historical specificity by seeking to discover universal features of those processes of social change itself. Even many of the most distinguished historical sociologists of the preceding period could be faulted on this issue.

The new historical sociologists spoke out for greater variability in processes of social change, for the impact of earlier developmental patterns on later development efforts, and for basic tensions and contradictions in the processes of historical change that made it a matter of active struggle rather than automatic unfolding. They also placed a needed emphasis on political economy, trying especially to show the centrality of power regimes, exploitation, and class division. Where many modernization theorists emphasized transformations of cultural values and "becoming individually modern," the new historical sociologists often bent over backward to avoid cultural interpretation and sociopsychological accounts. With the bathwater of untenable assumptions, however, historical sociologists were too often ready to throw out the babies of meaningful human action and concern for only what amounts to a basic historical change, especially an epochal transformation of cultural categories and forms of social relationship.²

Part of the reorientation was a shift in substantive concerns. Historical sociologists worked first to establish the importance of political economy and then in some cases the importance and relative autonomy of state processes against narrowly economic or cultural explanation (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1986; Poulantzas's [1974] more theoretical effort within the Marxist tradition was also extremely influential). Ironically, this focus on the state, initially inspired in part by the concerns of politically committed sociologists, often deflected attention away from the study of popular political action and toward the study of formal structures, state elites, and state-centered policy formation. Politics became more a matter of structure and function than action.³

The reorientation was also linked to the way historical sociologists sought to win respect for their work in a discipline dominated by quantitative research and scientific self-understanding. In Britain, calls for historical sociology were often linked to criticism of precisely these dominant orientations (often under the rubric of "positivism"). But the most rapid growth of historical

sociology came not in response to these arguments but out of the empirical debates over social change that galvanized much of American sociology in the 1960s and 1970s. The leading American historical sociologists—for example, Charles Tilly and Theda Skocpol—elected to play on the turf of their mainstream colleagues, not just in placing an emphasis on empirical research ahead of theory and epistemological critique but in putting forward a methodological argument for the nature and conduct of historical sociology. This was a crucial step in domesticating the once radical and challenging movement for historical sociology and rendering it merely a disciplinary subfield distinguished by methodology.

Claiming Legitimacy from Methods

Rather than emphasizing sociology's substantive need for history—the need for social theory to be intrinsically historical—Skocpol, Tilly, and others argued that historical sociology should be accepted because it was or could be comparably rigorous to other forms of sociology.⁴ Where Tilly emphasized the operationalization of quantitative sociological research and analytic methods for historical use, Skocpol placed a distinctive stress on comparison.⁵ This was all the more influential because it provided an account of the analytic rigor that qualitative researchers might use. Together with Margaret Somers, Skocpol (1980; see also Skocpol 1984) mobilized John Stuart Mill to distinguish between parallel demonstration of theory, contrast of contexts, and their favored combination of the two: macrocausal analysis. There is much good sense in Skocpol and Somers' analysis, and reflection on our methods is important. But in this and other similar arguments there is also a curious tendency to try to describe historical sociology in terms of method or approach rather than substance.⁶ Skocpol and Somers, for example, ask at the outset of their article "What purposes are pursued—and how—through the specific modalities of *comparative* history?" Though they use a variety of substantive studies as examples, however, by "purposes pursued" they mean generic categories of methodological purposes. Does one pursue parallel demonstration of a theory, for example, or does one seek to contrast contexts? They do not mean "What substantive theoretical or empirical problems does one aim to solve?"

For Skocpol and Somers, this methodological emphasis is part of a strategy of disciplinary legitimation.⁷ They are the best representatives of an effort, implicit or explicit, to convince mainstream sociologists of the utility of historical research by playing into the penchant of mainstream sociologists for formal analytic techniques. They seek, in other words, to give largely

qualitative historical sociology a status analogous to statistical research methods. There is some ambiguity as to whether this portrayal of historical analysis as a method is meant to call attention to the data gathering process—that is, historical sociology is like survey methods—or to the data analysis process—that is, historical sociology is like *Lisrel*. Either way, the substantive importance of historical work is underemphasized. Too often, this version of historical sociology can also be surprisingly ahistorical. It problematizes neither temporal processes nor the specificities of time and place but rather amounts to doing conventional sociology with data drawn from the past.⁸ Finally, this account of historical work as a method obscures its true methodological diversity. Historians and historical sociologists may use an enormously wide variety of techniques to gather and analyze data.

Goldthorpe's (1991) critique of historical sociology is instructive and may serve as a focus for discussion, as he is a more than usually sophisticated exponent of a widespread view rooted in a conventional understanding of science. Goldthorpe seeks to dissuade sociologists from doing historical research except when absolutely necessary. The purposes of sociology are to be nomothetic, to seek the most generalizable explanations of social processes and structures, while those of history are correspondingly specific to time and place. "History may serve as, so to speak, a 'residual category' for sociology, marking the point at which sociologists, in invoking 'history,' thereby curb their impulse to generalize or, in other words, to explain sociologically, and accept the role of the specific and of the contingent as framing—that is, as providing both the setting and the limits—of their own analyses" (1991, 14). While history's positive role for sociologists is thus reduced, Goldthorpe emphasizes the negative: the price sociologists will have to pay in quality and comprehensiveness of data when they turn from contemporary to historical research.

Though he focuses his critical attention partly on Skocpol, Goldthorpe's real target is those who would deny a basic difference between history and sociology. This is a substantial and diverse crew—more so than Goldthorpe seems to realize. Not just Giddens and Abrams, but Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989), Gareth Stedman Jones (1976), Fernand Braudel (1980) and Eric Hobsbawm (1971) have all argued that history and sociology are, as Braudel puts it, "one single intellectual adventure" (1980, 69; see review of this discussion in Calhoun [1987] and [1992a]). As should be evident, this is not just a list of armchair sociologists anxious to have historians serve as their "under-laborers," digging up facts for them to theorize. Their claims are simply that a strong understanding of social life must be both historical and sociologi-

cal at the same time. Goldthorpe grants in passing that sociologists ought to know about the historical contexts and limits of their findings, but his main argument is that sociology and history need to be kept distinct on methodological grounds. Historians can only interpret the "relics" of the past, while sociologists can create new and better data through contemporary research. Sociologists who turn to history take on (often poorly recognized) challenges posed by the paucity of available data. This much is undoubtedly true. What is more in doubt is whether this proposition offers any principle for distinguishing history from sociology. Goldthorpe inadvertently reveals how confusing the definition of boundaries can be when he takes the work of a prominent historian, Michael Anderson, as an example of the limits of historical sociology and categorizes Charles Tilly as a historian. Beyond such gaffes—and Goldthorpe's attempt to demonstrate his case by critique of Barrington Moore and Kai Erickson rather than any of the major newer works—there are more fundamental problems with his argument.

The distinction between historical facts as inferences from relics and the facts of social science as the results of new, more perspicuous, and more complete and repeatable observations has more limited purchase than Goldthorpe imagines. It reflects both the ideology of many historians, which overstates the extent to which they rely solely on the relics they have inspected in archives (the dustier the better), and the ideology of sociologists, that it is possible rigorously to study such objects as class, industrial organization, or social integration entirely from controlled, contemporary observations without massive (and usually unexamined) historical inductions. No doubt it is correct that contemporary data gathered specifically to address an analytical problem are better suited for many sociological purposes. Specifically, to the extent that we seek generalizable, lawlike statements about specific aspects of social life, contemporary data will usually be better (though just as we would want this data to reflect a wide range of contemporary settings and subjects in order to avoid spurious claims to generality, so we would presumably want to test its historical scope as well). This tells us nothing, however, about how adequate a knowledge of social life we can in fact construct from such more or less generalizable statements about various of its specific aspects. It tells us nothing about where the categories of our sociological inquiries come from and how they remain shaped by their empirical and practical origins.

All this also tells us too little about how to differentiate sociological from historical data. How old, we might ask, does demographic data have to be before it counts as a historical relic rather than purpose-built sociological information? The data a field worker can generate from observation and interview

are indeed enormously richer than those normally available to historians on some aspects of social life but not on all. If the field worker is studying a protest movement, will she refrain from consulting such "relics" as handbills passed out by the protesters, television footage, or police records (if they are promptly rather than only "historically" available)? More basically, we need to grasp how extraordinarily limited the practice of historians would be if they could rely only on first-order inferences from relics. History would be reduced to the narrowest of primary-source investigations with no broader attempts at understanding historical phenomena based on the intersection of many projects. And, perhaps more surprisingly, sociology would also be radically narrowed. Sociologists would no longer seek to answer such time-and-place-specific questions as: Is racial violence increasing in France? How have fertility patterns changed in postwar America? Have recent British educational reforms increased social mobility? They would seek, on Goldthorpe's account, only to understand racial violence, fertility, and social mobility as more or less generalizable phenomena.

Goldthorpe's methodological arguments against historical sociology could largely be rephrased as useful advice: pay attention to the availability, biases, and limits of primary sources, for example, or be careful to consider how historical facts are not "modular" and easily lifted from a book but often deeply implicated in complex interpretations. This amounts to saying that historical sociologists ought to take the same sort of care over evidence that historians do, which is quite right but hardly a convincing basis for declaring the two disciplines to be necessarily separate. Indeed, on this dimension of his argument, Goldthorpe seems mainly to be saying either that history is too hard for sociologists or that one who pays careful attention to historical evidence cannot reasonably address questions of any breadth beyond the immediate case (not even, for example, asking rigorously what it is a case of).

Goldthorpe's more basic argument for a separation of disciplines lies in his call for nomothetically generalizable observations.⁹ Interestingly, he is in agreement with Theda Skocpol here (though unaware of it). She has never argued that sociology and history are indistinguishable and indeed has suggested that the disciplinary turf of historical sociology needs to be kept distinct from that of history. Her call for macroanalytic comparative strategies is, in fact, designed precisely to encourage the very pursuit of generalizable explanations (rather than accounts of specific cases) that Goldthorpe also advocates. Thus, Skocpol (1979) tries to use her case studies not to advance analysis of the French, Russian, or Chinese revolutions as such but to develop a better sociological account of states and social revolutions in general. This is why

comparison is methodologically so important to her.¹⁰ Along with Somers, she also perceives a need to answer—with something more than just substantive argument—arguments such as Goldthorpe's about either (a) what aspects of social life sociologists would be forced to ignore if they did not rely on historical research or (b) the ways in which sociological theory depends intrinsically on historical understanding (and therefore had best develop it seriously rather than relying on happenstance, casual reading, and secondary school education.¹¹

At a minimum, the first of these two sorts of arguments involves recognizing four sorts of social phenomena that cannot be dealt with adequately through purely contemporaneous data sources:

1. Some important sociological phenomena, like revolutions (Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991) or settler societies (McMichael 1984) occur only in a small number of cases. This makes it impossible to study them by most statistical techniques and often difficult or impossible to use interviews, experiments, or other contemporary research methods to good effect because the rarity of the events means that a researcher might have to wait decades for the chance and/or it might be difficult to be on the scene at the right time.
2. Some particular events or cases of a broader phenomenon are theoretically important or have an intrinsic interest. For example, the case of Japan is crucial to all arguments about whether the origins of capitalist economic development depended on some specific cultural features of Western civilization (i.e., Europe and societies settled by Europeans). Could capitalism have developed elsewhere had Europeans not gotten to it first (Anderson 1975)?¹²
3. Some phenomena simply happen over an extended period of time. Many sociological research topics focus on fairly brief events, like marriages and divorces, adolescence, or the creation of new businesses. Other phenomena of great importance, however, happen on longer time scales. For example, industrialization, state formation, the creation of the modern form of family, and the spread of popular democracy all took centuries. Simply to look at present-day cases would be to examine only specific points in a long trajectory or course of development. This could lead not only to faulty generalizations but to a failure to grasp the essential historical pattern of the phenomenon in question.
4. For some phenomena, changing historical context is a major set of explanatory variables. For example, changes in the structure of interna-

tional trade opportunities, political pressures, technologies, and the like all shape the conditions for economic development. The world context is an important determinant of what strategies work, which ones fail, and how far development will get (Wallerstein 1974–88). When Britain became the world's first industrial capitalist country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it did not have to compete with any other such powerful economic producer. When Japan became an industrial capitalist power, there were already many such, and there are even more to compete with new capitalist producers today.

Even an emphasis on the empirical holes that must be left in a sociology that neglects history does not, however, fully bring out the importance of historical sociology. The rest of that importance lies in the challenge that historical sociology poses, ideally, to (a) the canonical histories (and anthropologies) that have been incorporated into classical social theory and its successors, (b) the attempt to apply concepts and develop generalizations without attention to their cultural and historical specificity, and (c) the neglect of the historicity of all of social life. It is for these reasons that *all* sociologists need to be historical, at least in some part. A strategy of disciplinary legitimation that results in a historical sociology compartmentalized as a subfield, especially one defined vaguely by methodological approach, greatly impoverishes its potential contributions.¹³

A Lost Theoretical Agenda

In the 1960s and 1970s, when modernization research was still a formidable antagonist, historical sociologists often took up a Marxist standard in their theoretical polemics.¹⁴ Sociologists as different as Wallerstein, Tilly, and Skocpol all paid obeisances of various sorts to Marxist theory, though this seems to have mattered deeply only in Wallerstein's case. Perhaps more basically, Marxist and Marxist-influenced historiography exerted a wide influence through the work of Thompson, Hobsbawm, Braudel, and many others. Even for non-Marxist scholars, Marxism framed many of the key research questions. As time went on, however, the specific influence of Marxism waned in most versions of historical sociology. Weber's influence grew somewhat, but more basically historical sociology ceased to be characterized by any particular theoretical or political agenda (though historical sociologists made use of various theories and continued vaguely to think of themselves as Young Turks).

Most historical sociology remained within the classical sociological traditions insofar as it took its basic topics and questions from the attempt to understand the change processes, major events, and international impacts of Western modernity. Relatively few historical sociologists studied earlier epochs or parts of the histories of non-Western societies that had little to do with the impact of the West or the modern world system (Mann 1986 and Abu-Lughod 1989 are exceptions). Though the new wave of historical sociologists emphasized variation and comparison more, they actually did less work in Third World settings than did their predecessors among modernization researchers. Historical sociology of the last twenty years has spared itself important challenges by focusing overwhelmingly on the modern West, especially on the more industrial countries (and for that matter especially on the larger Western European countries and North America). Like its predominantly empiricist character, this helped to keep it in or near the sociological mainstream.

Much the same story of domestication could be told of social history, of course, despite Hobsbawm's anticipation twenty years ago that "social history can never be another specialization like economic or other hyphenated histories because its subject matter cannot be isolated" (1971, 5). Social history has indeed been compartmentalized. It too has lost its insurgent, cutting-edge character. To many historians, cultural history appears to have taken that place (Hunt 1989). Feminist scholarship is another, overlapping, candidate, and recently feminist historians have in fact debated whether or not they ought to throw in their lot with social history or maintain a broader engagement with the discipline as a whole (Scott 1988; Tilly 1989; Bennett 1989). Both social history and historical sociology have ceased to be intellectual movements and have instead become mere subfields. They have senior gatekeepers and junior aspirants, contending schools of thought, and prominent professors promoting the careers of their students. Their protagonists fight not for their academic lives or for radical social or political movements but for the next departmental appointment. In both cases, this is unfortunate in several ways, although good for graduate students seeking jobs.

None of this is to say that the old enemies should become heroes. Modernization theory deserved the attack it received. And in this age of collapsing communism, it is still important to challenge theories of unilinear progress. Nor have the old virtues lost all their luster. Finding a middle path between overly abstract grand theory and the overly grand pretensions of abstracted empiricism is still one of the important accomplishments of historical sociology. But the old fights between Marxists and functionalists, *dependistas* and modernization theorists, have gone the way of decks of punched computer

cards and the double-knit leisure suits once all too common at ASA meetings. Key debates are now more apt to concern modernity and postmodernity, cultural interpretation and rational action models. Historical sociology (whether practiced by sociologists or historians or others) has important, indeed crucial, contributions to make to these discourses. The methodological focus of much reflection on the project of historical sociology, however, tends (a) to neglect the way in which it can shape such basic discourses and help to make them more than idle academic competitions and (b) to emphasize rather a view of the field that reflects its struggle for acceptance fifteen years ago.

Culture, Action, and Historical Sociology

The battle against modernization theory in the 1970s was not the first time sociologists found themselves constructing an exaggerated dichotomy between culture and society. This time, as before, many complemented it with a further split between action and structure. Previous historical writing, especially “old-fashioned” narrative, was accused of suggesting that individuals and groups were able somehow to translate their ideologies directly into historical outcomes, that we could understand what happened in the Russian Revolution, for example, by understanding what was in Lenin’s head. It was not that analysts saw no role for action. The social structures that made action possible and the strategies that made it rational were both accepted as important concerns. It was attempts to interpret what made action *meaningful* that were portrayed as lapses into naive voluntarism or impressionistic fuzziness. And, of course, there was enough naive voluntarism about to make this plausible, just as there were enough culturalists who were prepared to present culture as an autonomous and free-floating system, independent of any social organization or creative action. It was this, for example, that diminished the effectiveness of calls like Geertz’s (1958) to take culture more seriously and avoid the pitfalls of sociologism and psychologism.¹⁵ In sociology, professional biases and powers were stacked against any interpretative account of culture or action. Phenomenology was as much the victim of this as cultural studies.

The anti-interpretative biases have remained as the sociology of culture has grown. It is an odd mix, born, like the methodological account of historical sociology, of a need for disciplinary legitimation. Indeed, the methodological arguments about comparative historical sociology seem to have influenced at least some of the recent efforts to take culture more seriously. Robert Wuthnow, one of America’s foremost sociologists of culture, has recently branched into historical work with a monumental study of the Protestant Refor-

mation, the Enlightenment, and European socialism (Wuthnow 1989). A guiding principle of Wuthnow's work is that it is important for sociologists to approach culture as object and correspondingly to avoid the interpretation of meaning. His historical study attempts to examine its three sociocultural movements solely through attention to the social factors affecting the production, selection, and institutionalization of dominant or enduring ideologies. Wuthnow offers some useful arguments, largely centered on the importance of the state as distinct from the economy. But note what factors Wuthnow feels constrained *not* to consider by virtue of his calling as sociologist: the intentions of individual actors, the force of ideas themselves, the fit between innovative ideas and existing cultural traditions, and the practical problems that made people open to shifting from one way of thinking to another. Wuthnow's approach to culture without action or meaning keeps it well within the sociological mainstream. The fact that the study is of historical movements (or that they form a chronological series) becomes coincidental. These are just cases for exploring the more general phenomenon of how movements of ideas reach critical takeoff points (reason no. 1 above for historical sociology). It is not even clear, pace Goldthorpe, that there are compelling reasons for turning to historical cases to explore this phenomenon, unless one can say something about what makes these specific cases distinctive.¹⁶ In fact, of course, the three cases are all fascinating and much of the interest of the book inheres in the historical importance of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and socialism. But Wuthnow cannot admit this for to do so would be to place the stress on the interpretation of the substance of the cases rather than on his methodological principles for systematic analysis.

In the last twenty years, a good deal has been done to join action and structure in a less dualistic account of structuration.¹⁷ Culture and society are still widely opposed, however, and for every sociologist stressing the primacy of social relations, there is a historian, literary critic, or symbolic anthropologist prepared to grant culture an utter autonomy. Yet this failure to join cultural and social analysis together makes it much harder to grapple with "structuration" and throws enormous impediments in the way of grasping basic qualitative transformations in human life. Think, for example, of how social as well as cultural factors are needed to understand and substantiate George Steiner's comment on qualitative change in 1789: "In ways which no preceding historical phenomenon had accomplished, the French Revolution mobilized historicity itself, seeing itself as historical, as transformative of the basic conditions of human possibility, as invasive of the individual person." (1988, 150) The French Revolution both reflected and furthered a fundamental categorical

transformation in human self-understanding, a remaking of the person, and an expansion of the capacities of social action. Yet this was not an event in culture alone or a cultural outcome imaginable separately from the social struggles and material conditions that made it possible. To begin to speak not just of “cultural systems” but of communications media, literary markets and patronage, and shifting relations between public and private spaces and identities is to enter a discourse where the cultural cannot be separated from the social. It is within this discourse that we can see the constitution and transformation of basic categories of human life.

The search for a sociology that can take human action seriously without lapsing into a naive voluntarism or a naturalistic rationalism depends upon a complex, historical understanding of culture. It requires, for example, an understanding of how what it means to be a human actor can vary, an understanding that can only be gained as part of a culturally and historically specific inquiry into the constitution of the person.¹⁸ At the same time, an actorless account of culture, such as that characteristic of most anthropology and more recently of poststructuralism, cannot provide the necessary dynamism or normative purchase for either good history or critical theory. Finally, an account of the most basic transformations in history must appeal to action of some sort if it is to offer an endogenous account of crucial changes and one that avoids either mechanistic determinism or the imputation that change is just an unfolding of potentials structurally inherent in a cultural or social-relational starting point. And it must work in terms of the transformation of cultural categories, not only to avoid a simple voluntarism but to be able to identify what should count as qualitatively new rather than merely quantitatively different. Thus, capitalism is not merely different from feudalism on a range of variables, such as tendency to expand productivity or reliance on money-mediated markets, it is incommensurable with feudalism because basic categories and practices—like labor, as it is transformed by abstraction and sale into a commodity—either exist only in one or have sharply distinct meanings in each and cannot be carried on in both senses at once.

Getting some purchase on culture—as meaningful activity, not mere objective products—must be among the next tasks of a historical sociology that has avoided this dimension of human life as part of its reaction against modernization theory and its strategy for disciplinary legitimation. Unfortunately, three “professional deformations” distort historical sociologists’ efforts in this arena. The first is the idea that one can or should avoid culture. The second is the notion that culture is simply a topical area referring to certain objective products of human activity.¹⁹ The third is the idea that culture should be addressed

only in subjectless, actorless, "structuralist" guise.²⁰ Each of these last two falls afoul of Leroi Jones's admonition that "hunting is not those heads on the wall" by failing to address the ubiquitous role of meaningful action in the creation of all social arrangements.

The Historical Constitution of Sociological Categories

Poststructuralism (which is really a more direct outgrowth of structuralism than the name implies) has enormously revitalized contemporary cultural discourse. Poststructuralist ideas are at the heart of the explanation for why the emphases of historians have shifted from the once "new" social history in which sociology was influential to a currently fashionable "new cultural history" (Hunt 1989). Nonetheless, we need to see three closely linked weaknesses that keep poststructuralism from meeting all the needs of historical sociology. The first is that it works within and perpetuates the separation of culture and society. The second is that it grants little if any role to action. These both stem from an internal approach to culture, one that stresses its unity and closure as a system, even if that is only for the purpose of deconstructing it. As Weber (1987) has argued, the very claim to deconstruct a text is a move that holds that text within an interpretive framework or community, which fixes it within a context. Poststructuralism, in its reliance on texts and textual metaphors and in its general antisubjectivist analytic strategies, constructs culture as a system of objects. It is in this sense sharply opposed to a view of both culture and society as matters of practice. Bourdieu's work (especially 1976, 1990), for example (though arguably in many ways an instance of "poststructuralism," insofar as that creation of English language analysts has any purchase on actual French currents of thought), shows not only how actors participate in the reproduction as well as creation or change of structure but also how the categories of social and cultural analysis merge in an account of the forms of practice. The forms are that part—usually the vast majority—of action that can be theorized and properly analyzed. Beyond them lies the particularity or singularity of action that can only be described.

Even Bourdieu, however, does not offer all the strength we need to counter the third weakness of poststructuralism. This is its universalizing of difference. When difference is universalized it is, ironically, trivialized. When any grouping of commonalities is simply the normalizing discourse of power, we lose our capacity to distinguish greater or lesser differences. This is linked to the notorious incapacity of poststructuralist work to ground its own (or any other) normative orientations. Shifting to a theory of practice helps. It reveals, first of

all, that as activity culture has a temporal direction, a history. Shifts from one position to another are not made from among the choices in an abstract field of possibilities (as both logical positivists and poststructuralists often imply). Rather, they are practical moves from weaker to stronger positions; they are made to solve practical problems. In the realm of knowledge, Charles Taylor (1989) has called this "epistemic gain." But outside epistemology a similar process is also at work, obligating us to understand the meaning of ideas, political actions, or institutions at least partly in terms of their creation. We need to grasp them not just as they are, in a static sense, but as they could have been arrived at in a historical process. "It is essential to an adequate understanding of certain problems, questions, issues, that one understand them genetically" (Taylor 1984, 17). In other words, we understand a position by knowing why and from where or what one might have moved to it.²¹

In addition, working in a theory of practice points up that not all differences necessitate clashes or resolutions. We can and do allow many to coexist happily. But for at least a few this is impossible. These differences involve incommensurable practices, courses of action that cannot be pursued simultaneously any more than one can play rugby and basketball by making the same moves (see Bernstein 1983; Calhoun 1991a; Taylor 1985). An analysis of practices, and more particularly of the various habituses and implicit strategies that they reveal, is basic to establishing where the truly important lines of social conflict lie. But such an analysis of practices and strategies is not enough. It is still internal to a sociocultural formation. It does not give us purchase, any more than typical poststructuralist approaches do, on the source and nature of categorical transformations in history. Bourdieu's account of the various forms of capital, for example, generalizes the idea of capital for the analysis of any and all strategizing in any historical or cultural setting (see Calhoun 1993b). In this way, it undercuts even Bourdieu's own earlier analyses of the tensions between Kabyle society and the incursions of French society and economic practices in Algeria (Bourdieu 1962, 1976). Bourdieu's scheme does not elucidate what, if anything, might be distinctive to modern capitalism, for example, or how the various individual and collective strategic pursuits that are the source of constant quantitative changes in social arrangements ever are reorganized by more basic qualitative changes (though aspects of this are part of his current work on the development of the modern French state). Bourdieu's work is similar, in this connection, to Foucault's. Both begin with analyses that make a good deal of contrasts between modernity and pre- or nonmodern social forms. Yet each is led to universalize his critical analytic tools, the bodily inscription and discourse of power, and the convertible forms of capital.

This is not just a question of where particular concepts or generalizations apply, a matter of scope statements (Walker and Cohen 1985). The notion of historical constitution of categories is more basic. Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1968), took on the challenge of giving a sociological account of the origins of the basic categories of thought. This sociologization of the Kantian categories is fascinating and a neglected feature of Durkheim's thought. But it is crucial to note that Durkheim operates primarily in static terms. His idea of "elementary forms" is not simply an idea of origins but rather of universals that are more visible in their earlier and simpler appearances. His account of the categories—time and space, for example—makes the experience of living in society their basis. It does not focus on how variations in social organization or processes of historical transformation might reconstitute such basic categories. If this is an issue (within the neo-Kantian framework) for categories like space and time, it is at least as much so for "rationality," "individual," "nation," or "society." These and a host of other basic terms of analysis derive their specific meanings from processes of historical change (within specific cultural traditions and often refracted through highly developed intellectual frameworks), not from abstract definition.

Social theory has been heavily shaped by the construction of its "canon" of classical works. Parsons played the most substantial role (though the real canonizers were those who taught theory and wrote texts). The major innovation since Parsons's death has been the addition of Marx to the ranks of founders. Simmel continues to appear only on the fringes, and other than Marx, the history of social theory before the late nineteenth century remains widely ignored. This not only reduces the range of theoretical ideas most sociologists use, it inhibits interdisciplinary discourse (e.g., with political theory that remains in active dialogue with earlier theories). Perhaps even more basically, the construction of the canon shaped the standard historical views of most sociologists—these have come not so much from the study of history as from the study of what Weber, Durkheim, and other classical theorists have had to say about history. Such study has tended, moreover, to discount the study of historical change as such in favor of typologies: traditional/modern, mechanical/organic, and so on. Though Durkheim's account of the division of labor does offer some causal arguments (e.g., about the role of "dynamic density"), it is not mainly a historical account of change so much as an elaboration of the functioning of two different forms of social solidarity. Weber, far more a historian than Durkheim, is nonetheless taught to sociologists largely through his abstract definitions and typologies in the opening pages of *Economy and Society*, together with *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of*

Capitalism. His writings about the complexity of historical variation and change are generally ignored or relegated to secondary status.

From the works of classical theorists, sociologists were apt to draw schematic accounts of how modern societies came into being, which they would then treat as both settled and sufficient. Sociologists—like most political scientists and economists—were primarily concerned with the operation of the existing institutions of modern societies. They did not focus on the historical transformations that brought those societies into being or on the idea that they might be fundamentally transformed.²² One of the most important impacts of Marxism, when it was revitalized in the 1960s, was that it introduced such a notion of basic transformations into social science discourse. The important role of Marxism in the resurgence of historical sociology did not put culture or the interpretation of meaningful human action in the foreground, but it did help to maintain a central place for the problematic of basic historical change. Marxism is one of the theories most attuned to the need to specify clear breaks between epochs and to develop historically specific conceptual tools for understanding each.²³ A category like labor, for instance, gains its full theoretical meaning only in terms of the whole categorical structure of capitalism. Its meaning is fundamentally altered if it is reduced to “work,” in the sense in which productive activity is characteristic of all historical periods. See Postone (1993) for a sophisticated reading of Marx’s mature theory as being historically specific to capitalism.

This is part, for example, of what Hobsbawm (1971) meant by distinguishing the history of society from social history in general. Social historians may study innumerable ways in which people are social; they may identify a host of commonalties or divergences in the routines of daily life. Simply looking at these specifics, however, does not give us a grip on basic transformations in fundamental forms of social arrangements. Consider, for example, the notion of “everyday forms of resistance,” made popular recently by the subaltern studies group. There are indeed innumerable ways in which subalterns may resist the will of those who dominate them or at least may resist submerging their identities in the hegemonic culture imposed on them. By means of dialect and the outright refusal of discourse, they insulate their worlds from the scrutiny of those from dominant groups. They move slowly, instill distrust in their children, and develop a range of other “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1984). This is an important fact of social life. But noting it, or distinguishing tactics of maneuver from position, does not take away from the observation that organized, sustained, and cumulative political action by such subalterns has been historically exceptional, restricted primarily to the modern era, and effective in

securing changes in ways that everyday resistance could never rival. Hobsbawm overstates this, particularly by implying that formalization and conscious control are essential to influence and subjectivity, but he is not altogether off the mark:

“The poor,” or indeed any subaltern group, become a subject rather than an object of history only through formalized collectivities, however structured. Everybody always has families, social relations, attitudes toward sexuality, childhood and death, and all other things that keep social historians usefully employed. But, until the past two centuries, as traditional historiography shows, “the poor” could be neglected most of the time by their “betters,” and therefore remained largely invisible to them, precisely because of their active impact on events was occasional, scattered and impermanent. (1978, 48)

This capacity to organize, to create institutionalized forces for change, of course depended on other social changes, including the growth of the state and capitalist industry. Changes like these help to define categorical breaks in history, as distinct from mere differences and fluctuations.

Marxism is not unique in stressing such breaks. Foucault (1966, 1969), unquestionably influenced by Marx (and Hegel) though equally without question no Marxist in his mature work, laid great stress on the discovery of historical “ruptures.” Modernization theory itself proposed at least one set of changes so basic as to amount to a fundamental transformation, the defining “before” and “after” of tradition and modernity (though after this one historical break all further change was seen in terms of an evolutionary continuum). For the most part, however, historians and sociologists have rejected, or at least abandoned, consideration of such breaks. Even the fate of Foucault’s emphasis on ruptures is instructive. Foucault has become enormously influential, in part precisely because historians are prepared to take a search of the power/knowledge link and other fundamental categories of Foucauldian analysis into virtually any and every conceivable historical context. Indeed, Foucault himself did this in the later volumes of his *History of Sexuality* (1978–88), abandoning the argument about the distinctiveness of modernity that was so central to his earlier work. So used, Foucault’s categories become, ironically, as universalist as rational choice theory or any other product of the Enlightenment discourses he began by criticizing.

This use of Foucault is particularly American and fits with a more general tendency to turn French structuralist discourse into a normalized academic

doctrine. Where the French structuralists and poststructuralists argued in a strong polemical relationship to Marxism, phenomenology, and other analytic strategies, their American disciples have tended, ironically, to reproduce deconstructionism and postmodernism as monological discourses of truth, losing sight of the agonistic dimension of their origins (see Weber [1987], for a perceptive discussion focused on literary criticism). Of course, the poststructuralists (to take a single name for this tendency) argue about the importance of difference and conflict; they do not ignore them. But too often they universalize these features of discourse and culture, making it impossible to grasp differences in the production and character of difference, for example, and obscuring attention to other dimensions of culture and social life.

At its best, one of the points that Foucault's work (especially 1965, 1966, 1969, 1977) makes is that we need an understanding of the historical constitution of basic categories of understanding, and we need to see the costs entailed in their construction. Foucault's work is not very widely read by historical sociologists, though, and at least partly for an instructive reason. Foucault appears in the guise of a student of culture, and historical sociology is still locked in a reaction formation against cultural analysis that dates from its battles with modernization theory. Yet, this failure to take culture seriously not only impedes addressing basic categorical breaks in history, it hinders historical sociology's shift of attention to the emerging central issue of the constitution of actors. Even though many historical sociologists study collective action, they commonly adopt a kind of objectivism and fail to give adequate attention to culture (i.e., to actors' constructions of their own identities, to the categories through which they understand the world, etc.). This objectivism is equally manifest in rational choice theory and structuralism, which are two sides of the same coin in mainstream sociology. In the work of Tilly, for example, collective action is the product of interests (in an analysis not far from rational choice theory) and structure but seldom of culture. More precisely, Tilly does not pursue a cultural analysis of the constitution of interests or structures.

One of the key differences of critical theory from traditional social theory is that the former demands a reflexive and historical grounding of its own categories, while the latter typically adopts transhistorical, putatively neutral, and universally available categories. In other words, the critical theorist takes on the obligation to ask in strong senses "why do I use these categories, and what are their implications?" while the traditional theorist asks simply "have I defined my categories clearly?" The division is evident even within the Marxist tradition. Many Marxists thus treat labor as a transhistorical, universal category rather than one specific to capitalism. Reducing labor to work, however.

deculturalizes and dehistoricizes Marx's analysis of capitalism. It negates the effort of *Capital* to show how a categorical break distinguishes earlier accumulation of wealth from capitalism and demands the new analytic categories and changed relationships among terms established in the opening chapter.²⁴ Similarly, other theorists, recognizing cultural and historical diversity, have attempted to overcome its more serious implications by subsuming it into a common, often teleological, evolutionary framework. Unlike biological evolutionary theories, which stress the enormous qualitative diversity within the common processes of speciation, inheritance, mutation, selection, and so forth, sociological theories have generally relied on claimed universal features of all societies—like technology, held by Lenski, Lenski, and Nolan (1990) to be the prime mover of evolutionary change—to act as basic, transhistorical variables. Such theories do indeed pay attention to the problem of establishing qualitative changes in patterns of social organization, but rather than showing the historical constitution and particularity of their own categories and analytical approach, they position themselves outside of history as neutral observers of the whole.

As the foremost contemporary critical theorist, Habermas has been ambivalent on the issue of historical grounding of categories. His early work, especially *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, works in exemplary historical fashion. It develops its concept as specific to a stage of capitalist development and state formation, as varying among national histories, and as transformed by transitions within capitalism and state organization. In Habermas's later work, however, especially in his magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, he sheds this historical constitution of categories for an evolutionary construct. Although he wants to stress the special importance of the opposition between instrumental and communicative reason in the contemporary era, for example, he locates the distinction in a primordial split, a sort of communicative expulsion from the Garden of Eden. His theory becomes more Rousseauian (and Kantian) and less Marxian. It also becomes much less historically specific, with the result that he is no longer able within its terms to locate basic qualitative transformations within history (such as the rise of capitalism). This has the effect of laying his theory open to the common poststructuralist (or postmodernist) charge of unjust universalization—more so indeed than even his widely criticized normative claims.

Poststructuralist and postmodern thought has emphasized difference in a radical but generally salutary way and with the idea of postmodernity itself such thought has suggested a historical shift that required a commensurate shift in categories and modes of analysis. Unfortunately, this shift has been asserted

rather more than demonstrated—particularly where social rather than cultural factors are at issue (Calhoun 1993a). It is also difficult—and often rejected as a goal—to ground the poststructuralist account of difference in an analysis of its own historical and theoretical conditions. It is impossible within its strong claims as to the incommensurability of language games to construct a conclusive argument as to why we should in fact be tolerant or encouraging of other language games, or why other than by chance we should participate in any one. This then has the ironic result of granting “the other” legitimacy comparable to ourselves but of denying the possibility of meaningful discourse across the cultural gulf that separates us. What is needed to resolve this dilemma is the recognition that processes of communication and cross-cultural relations are themselves historical and part of materially consequential social practices. Translation is an inapt metaphor for what most important cross-cultural communication must mean. Any account of the confrontation of, say, aboriginal Australians with Europeans must go beyond an attempt to translate cultural contents to a recognition that all communication was a part of relations that transformed each party, though asymmetrically; that were conducted by means of material power as well as cultural signification; and that focused on social practices not abstract discourse. To say such communication—or less extreme and less violent communication across basic cultural divides—is historical is to say that arriving at mutual understanding is not primarily a process of translation but rather of transformation. Both parties must change into the sort of people who can understand each other (and a good deal else is likely to change in the same process).²⁵

If it is to be able to deal effectively with either basic cross-cultural comparisons or fundamental historical transformations, social theory needs the capacity to ground its categories historically. This is something that historical sociology (and history) should provide. The category of the person is a good example. Inquiries of the kind begun by Marcel Mauss (cf. n. 18) need to be continued. Perhaps the most important contemporary exemplar of such work is Charles Taylor’s recent *The Sources of the Self*. We could read this work as, among other things, an almost diametric opposition to Foucault on a crucial point. Foucault used historical studies to uncover the construction of selves (and “the self”) and then took this as the basis for an account of the unreality of such constructed selves. He remained, ironically, caught within a “jargon of authenticity” (Adorno 1973). Historicity was taken as a rebuttal of claimed authenticity that would have had to be “original” to be accepted (see discussion in Berman 1989). Taylor, by contrast, shows a whole series of subtle stations through which the modern notion of the self passes as it is constituted and

reconstituted. Each of these, he suggests, must be treated as authentic (see Calhoun 1991b).

Taylor's inquiry, however, remains within the realm of (a rather philosophical) intellectual history. Taylor focuses conceptual attention on practices, but does not try to concretize and substantiate his account of the transformations of the self through a broader sociocultural history. This is a problem with intellectual history more generally, though current trends are in a positive direction. Recent intellectual history has branched out beyond semibiographical attention to "great thinkers," placing their work not just in the context of "their times" or their intellectual influences and adversaries but in that of a more theoretically serious analysis of systems of signification and discourse (see, e.g., White 1978, 1987; LaCapra 1983). But signification and discourse are still typically treated as though they existed independently of broader social and material processes.²⁶

Conclusion

Historical scholarship and research rose to the forefront of sociology as an alternative to modernization research and related approaches to social change. It rose also in response to an unfortunate narrowing of much mainstream sociological research and inattention to major questions, including some posed by classical social theorists. The political orientations of early practitioners and their challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of mainstream sociology aroused controversy and hostility. When it was not simply *ad hominem* attack, this often focused on the closely related claims that historical research was "idiographic" and/or always a matter of interpretation and therefore unable to make contributions to the project of a cumulative social science. Some of the historical sociologists most influential in winning disciplinary legitimacy for the field did so partly by claiming for historical sociology a distinctive (usually comparative) methodology. Framing the project of historical sociology in methodological rather than substantive terms, however, has had the unfortunate effects of weakening ties to social theory and reducing much historical sociology to conventional mainstream sociological research using data from the past. The thematic importance of historicity as such is too often lost.

The legitimation of historical sociology first and foremost as rigorous method rather than substantive challenge, the predominance of political-economic foci, and the continued emphasis on rejecting the culturally oriented modernization approach combine to inhibit development of work oriented more to matters of culture and meaningful social action. Even where culture is

addressed, there is a strong tendency to try to do so in objectivistic terms rather than through interpretation of meaning.

In order to realize its potential both within sociology and in relation to an interdisciplinary historical and theoretical discourse, however, historical sociology needs to address problems of the changing constitution of social actors, the shifting meanings of cultural categories, and the struggle over identities and ideologies. These need to be conceived as part and parcel of social relations, not separate topics of inquiry, and still less as the turf of other disciplines. It is important thus to regain for historical sociology the agenda of changing social theory rather than accepting domestication as a "safe" subdiscipline. It is also important to resist arguments for the sharp separation of sociology from interdisciplinary discourse in history and social theory.

In its early years, historical sociology played a major role in reopening serious theoretical discourse about large-scale social transformations. This remains a vital agenda. This is not to say that studies with other foci are illegitimate or unimportant. But to reduce historical sociology to conventional sociology applied to past times is both to deprive it of its main significance and to open the door to challenges of methodologically minded conventional sociologists. Historical sociologists thus should continue to push forward with theoretical discourse on basic social transformations rather than being altogether domesticated within the positivity of contemporary sociological research. In order to do so, however, it is crucial to focus much more centrally and richly on problems of culture and meaningful action. Blind spots or weaknesses in these areas are problematic legacies of historical sociology's initial conflict with modernization theory and its struggle for legitimation. Social theory, however, needs not just a historical approach to culture and action as objects of analysis but an approach that opens up inquiry into the historical constitution of basic theoretical categories. This is especially important for any theorist who aspires to be reflexively aware of the conditions of her or his own thought. A reflexivity limited to the here and now or to a positive recognition of one's own interpretative tradition cannot suffice as the grounding for a truly critical theory.

NOTES

1. I have shown elsewhere a striking increase in the rate of citations to economics journals by articles in the leading American sociology journals during this period (Calhoun 1992a).

2. This was certainly not true for all, though few approaches combined both attention to epochal transformation and to culture. An account of what makes the modern world categorically distinctive is central to Wallerstein's world-systems theory (though culture as a substantive domain is less so). In this sense, his work is among the most historical of historical sociologies (even though Wallerstein sharply distinguishes his focus on social change from an interest in the idiosyncratic past for its own sake). That is, he works by studying a process of change in all its phases rather than by abstracting several events—for example, revolutions—from their historical contexts in order to look for general features of revolutions. Similarly, historical transformations in cultural and sociopsychological processes have been addressed importantly by Sennett (1976) and others. More typical, however, are accounts that reduce culture to ideology and social psychology to rational interests. Various other babies have also been thrown out with the bathwater of modernization theory—for example, attention to the effect of built environment or physical infrastructure (e.g., transportation and communications facilities) on social life has been abandoned (Calhoun 1992b).

3. In this the new political sociologists moved close to much American political science, itself often distanced from politics by the objectification of its objects of study.

4. They certainly agreed that sociology needed historical work but less on theoretical grounds than in order to fill in neglected empirical territory. In this sense, it is wrong to lump, as Goldthorpe (1991) does, Skocpol's position together with the theoretical argument for a unity of sociology and history advanced by Giddens (1985), Abrams (1982), and others. Of course, these two sorts of claims were not contradictory, though the difference in rationales is significant. Skocpol's methodological emphasis was distinctively important in the context of American sociology. It was linked to a much more rapid growth of empirical historical research by sociologists than that developed in Britain (see Calhoun 1987), but much of this research lost touch with the agenda of making social theory itself more historical.

5. Tilly was and is also an advocate of comparison, and some of his earlier collaborative work was very influential in promoting specifically comparative historical sociology (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975; Tilly 1975). The difference from Skocpol in this regard is one of emphasis and formalization.

6. Charles Tilly (1988), for example, has proposed a hierarchy moving from the epochal "world-historical" level down through world-system analysis and macrohistory to microhistory, with his own preferences lying in the latter two categories. This is perfectly plausible, but it reveals the same tendency to categorize mainly on nonsubstantive features of analytic strategy. Charles Ragin and David Zaret (1983) have offered a different methodological program, drawing on Weber and developed by Ragin (1988) through Boolean algebra and other techniques.

7. Concern for legitimation was not unreasonable, whatever the merits of the specific strategy. Mainstream sociology was for a time strongly biased against historical work and influenced heavily by its scientism and the categories of the *methodenstreit*, the contrast of putatively nomothetic and idiographic disciplines. Too much of this

nonsense lives on. At the same time, enough historians are hostile to theory and to systematic reflection on the production of their knowledge to give credence to the disciplinary split from their side of the fence. But the emotions of the dispute are now fairly remote, and it is a little strange to read through the numerous debates over whether and how history and sociology should link up (see reviews in Abrams 1982 and Calhoun 1987). For all their frequent good sense, these told us little about what was to happen when the disciplines did join forces, and they underestimated the needs that would remain unmet even when historians and sociologists spoke freely. Gareth Stedman Jones was (along with Hobsbawm) one of the few clearly to articulate the central issue: "there is no distinction in principle between history and any of the other 'social sciences.' The distinction is that between theory brought to bear" (1976, 305). Similarly, we might add, it was naive for optimists to assume that there would be no serious or enduring clash of analytic perspectives and that the differences between sociologists and historians were purely complementary—different sorts of data, say, or mere data versus analytic techniques.

8. Similarly, sociologists doing longitudinal analyses with data plucked out of historical context now often jump on the bandwagon of historical sociology—at least when there appear to be benefits.

9. In drawing on this terminological heritage of the *methodenstreit*, sociologists in recent decades have implied that theory must be exclusively a matter of the so-called nomothetic. This reflects a very distinct and problematic view of theory, however, and accordingly neglects both the extent of genuine theory developed in historically and culturally specific—putatively idiographic—analyses and conversely the extent to which even apparently very general theory is intrinsically specific itself, its conceptualizations rooted in their empirical referents (Calhoun 1991a).

10. Goldthorpe really has a further claim about the level of analysis in works like Skocpol's and Moore's. He leaves this rather undeveloped, however, because he confounds it with the easier task of showing that Moore's (1966) use of historical sources is sloppy (something that has been argued at length before). He doesn't really develop the underlying argument, which, I think, would need to go something like this: Moore and Skocpol work by putting together accounts of individual cases at the national level from published historical works. Such cases are apt to reflect both inadequate grasp of the historical specifics of the individual cases and a poor ability to discriminate among the conflicting arguments of historians. Even where this were not true, such works would still be too "grand" in their aims. By attempting to explain very big questions directly with variables that they can only measure based on extremely complex inferences from inferences from inferences (and which in any case are composites of other more specific variables), they render their analyses dubious at best. Crucially, they are not able (because of the limits of historical data) to get at the really basic variables that constitute the more complex phenomena and that would need to be examined to produce a really satisfying explanation. They are like biologists reasoning from phenotypes in the absence of genetic information (or even a good classification based on reproductive

organization and descent rather than appearance). This improved form of Goldthorpe's argument has some merit but (a) has little purchase on the distinguishing of history from sociology except insofar as sociologists imagine that historical relics are adequate sources of data for developing knowledge of such quasiuniversal building blocks of social life and (b) implies an assumption on Goldthorpe's part that microsociology is intrinsically simpler than macro (because it is about building blocks rather than complex structures built of them) and (c) implies the further assumption that it is potentially possible to aggregate an adequate understanding of the whole social world (including its largest scale structures and dynamics) from such building blocks.

11. I refer to Somers only as coauthor of the influential 1980 article with Skocpol. As her paper in the present volume reveals, she has since changed her position (if it was ever fully represented by that article).

12. In general, case studies are important supplements to statistical research because they allow detailed knowledge of specific instances of a more general phenomenon, as well as statements about the average or the overall pattern. Case studies are often misunderstood by those who ask whether cases are "typical" or "representative." Case studies are often especially illuminating when focused on nontypical examples where they point up the limits to theoretical generalizations.

13. It would be hard in any case to find the methodological principle that unifies the major "classics" of the resurgence of historical sociology in the 1970s. Is it a method (or set of methods) that joins *The Modern World-System* (Wallerstein 1974–88), *The Rebellious Century* (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975), *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (Anderson 1974), and *States and Social Revolutions* (Skocpol 1979) in a common discourse or makes them exemplars to generations of graduate students? One might at least as well point to their common bias in favor of broadly "structural" accounts and against either voluntaristic approaches to action or cultural interpretation. Surely, however, the importance of the works just mentioned derives primarily from their contributions to addressing important substantive theoretical or empirical problems or questions.

14. The "new social history" was also often Marxist or political-economic, but not so biased toward the "macro." Indeed, family history was important to social history in a way it never was to historical sociology (despite several good historical works by sociologists). Much family history, too, it should be noted, was carried out within the broad framework of political economy, concerns for class and attentions to the struggles people faced both within and about families during the course of industrialization. But links to cultural analysis were more readily made in history, partly because the Young Turks challenged an older generation of "conventional" macropolitical historians rather than culturally oriented modernization theorists. Feminist scholarship (e.g., Rose 1992) has recently helped to link family history, cultural analysis, and historical sociology.

15. In "Ideology as a Cultural System" (1958), Geertz was writing with the basic Parsonsian conception of three subsystems of action—social, personality, and cultural—and calling for a renewed appreciation of the relative autonomy of the last.

16. This analysis of Wuthnow is developed further in Calhoun (1992c).

17. This term arises earlier in Pierre Bourdieu's work (e.g., 1971) but has become more widely associated in English with Anthony Giddens.

18. This is a problem charted early on for sociology in Marcel Mauss's classic—and all but forgotten—essay on the category of the person (reprinted with commentary in Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985). The major contemporary exploration of this problem is Charles Taylor's *The Sources of the Self* (1989); see also Calhoun (1991b).

19. "Hunting is not those heads on the wall" is the title of a brilliant essay on writing by Leroi Jones (Amiru Baraka) *City Lights Review*, 1968, 56–71.

20. This is raised in an interesting exchange between Theda Skocpol and William Sewell Jr. Sewell opened the exchange with a critique of Skocpol's (1979) argument against ideological explanation of revolution. He advocated a more sophisticated and complex analytic approach that would allow for a better grasp of culturally and historically concrete phenomena. Recognizing that culture has been dismissed by historical sociologists (and most other sociologists) as too closely linked to a voluntarist account of agency, he argued that attention to culture need not involve theories that take the conscious intentions of agents to be historically or sociologically decisive. This was how Skocpol ruled out the autonomous power of ideology: she showed that "any line of reasoning that treats revolutionary ideologies as blueprints for revolutionary outcomes cannot sustain scrutiny" (1979, 170). Sewell claims authority from Althusser, Foucault, Geertz, and Williams for an alternative view of ideology as the anonymous and impersonal operation of ideological state apparatuses, epistemes, cultural systems, or structures of feeling. This view of ideology is structural, he suggests, just as are the forces of class, state, and international relations that form the basis of Skocpol's analysis. Skocpol, therefore, dealt with only a "naive voluntarist conception of ideology" (Sewell 1985, 61). In reply, Skocpol accepts Sewell's criticism of her earlier treatment of ideology but challenges his argument that the concept of ideology should be used in an entirely impersonal, anonymous, and structuralist sense. Ironically, given her reputation as an extreme proponent of structural analysis and the frequent criticism of her neglect of both culture and intentional action, Skocpol argues for these notions against Sewell's ideological structuralism. The central difficulty with Sewell's argument, Skocpol contends, is his failure to distinguish between a notion of culture which is "transpersonal" and anonymous, and ideology and cultural idioms as these are brought into use by specific actors in revolutionary transformation.

21. This emphasis on a fundamentally historical form of understanding is shared in varying degrees by a variety of intellectual traditions, from postfundamentalist and post-Kuhnian philosophy of science through parts of poststructuralism and above all Gadamer's hermeneutics, in which practice and historicity is basic to the critique of earlier hermeneutic claims to find truth by radically overcoming historical distance (Gadamer 1975; Bernstein 1983 argues the case for a convergence among different scholarly traditions). The Gadamer-Taylor argument shows the insufficiency of the familiar division posed by speech act theory (and appropriated by Habermas) between constative and performative utterances. Poststructuralists are often keen to show how

putative constatives (e.g., neutral truth claims) are really performatives (grabs for power). On Taylor's account we see that demonstrating performativity need not be the end of analysis, and that performativity is not antithetical to a discourse of at least proximate truth or rightness.

22. Modernization theorists looked outside the modern West but for the most part dropped the idea of basic historical transformations for a notion of evolutionary continuum. They did not study the transformations of modernity but rather the "becoming modern" of those who missed the first opportunity.

23. It should not be thought that all Marxists are equally attentive to this need. It has been common for many to turn Marxism into a more or less evolutionary theory, and/or to treat the basic concepts of Marx's account of capitalism as transhistorical.

24. See Postone (1993) for a discussion of this.

25. I have discussed this at much greater length in Calhoun (1991a).

26. Intellectual history, in fact, has been a particularly active and productive field of late, fruitfully transcending its boundaries as part of the new cultural history (see discussion in Kramer 1989). Poststructuralist thought has played an important role in this.

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