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Editorial

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Tradition and innovation in classical sociology: Tenth Anniversary Report of *JCS*

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Perhaps the very idea of 'classical sociology' is a contradiction in terms; sociology was originally that social science peculiarly concerned with the study of the processes of modernization and the condition of modernity, that is, with the critical examination of 'post-traditional' developments and hence 'post-classical' forms of social organization. Its concerns have broadened subsequently, but the focus of sociology remains on the exploration of the nature and development of social structure and social action in the post-traditional world. In the nineteenth century, sociologists invented new concepts and experimented with new methods to study the emergence of unprecedented social phenomena and the rise of a type of society that was variously called 'modern society', 'industrial society', and 'capitalist society'. In the twentieth century, there was a further elaboration of key sociological concepts, and it became increasingly popular to proclaim the rise of yet another form of society, described as 'post-industrial society', 'late modern society', 'post-modern society', or 'network society'. In the current century, the idea of globalization has swept everything before it, leading to the notion that 'society' has now been replaced by flows and networks of people, objects, and ideas. With the transition from traditional to modern societies, the integrative power of *Gemeinschaft* began to compete with the systemic power of *Gesellschaft*; with the transition from modern to late modern societies, the local horizons of our *Lebenswelt* appear to be increasingly shaped by the deterritorialized networks of the *Weltgesellschaft*. If we are 'post-traditional', surely we are also 'post-classical'. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many contemporary sociologists have some difficulty accepting the very idea of classical sociology.

What is the point of the investigation of the classical tradition? We believe that there are several reasons why classical sociology in general and the study of classical sociological texts in particular remain of central importance in the foreseeable future.

First, as present-day social scientists, we have inherited a *vocabulary* from classical thinkers which forms the basis of contemporary social and political analysis. Key concepts of classical sociological thought are still with us: society, community, social reproduction, social transformation, social action, social system, social structure, social order, social development, social differentiation, social rationalization, social class, social crisis, social conflict, social struggle, social identity, social role, social group, social understanding, social critique – to mention only a few of the classical sociological concepts which continue to play a pivotal role in contemporary social and political thought. Of course, these concepts need constant refinement and addition, but they are unlikely to be replaced or disappear.

Second, most of the *social issues and processes* that confronted the early classics are also still with us – in particular, social issues such as structural inequality, anomie, alienation, and exploitation, as well as social processes such as commodification, urbanization, differentiation, and bureaucratization. Although it would be hard to deny that in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries we have experienced a number of social and political changes that were *not* characteristic of the late nineteenth century, most of these changes are inextricably linked to, and to some extent still contingent upon, the structural transformations of the early modern period. Even those who claim that capitalism is more global than ever cannot ignore the fact that the transnational dimensions of the capitalist market have been studied for a long time (not least by Karl Marx, 1967 [1848]). Even those who insist that advanced societies are characterized by an unprecedented degree of structural differentiation are obliged to accept that the causes, symptoms, and consequences of large-scale fragmentation processes have been on the sociological agenda since the late nineteenth century (as illustrated in the writings of Émile Durkheim, 1984 [1893]). Even those who grapple with the continuing presence and social power of religion cannot deny that a sustained concern with the political economy of symbolic forces has been with us for more than one hundred years (as demonstrated in the works of Max Weber, 1978 [1922] and 2001 [1930/1905]). And even those who, in the context of the rise of the global network society, reflect upon the social implications of so-called deterritorialization processes have to acknowledge that the systematic attempt to make sense of the abstraction of time and space, triggered by the rise of modern society, is an essential ingredient of classical sociological thought (as shown in some of the contributions by Georg Simmel, 1997 [1903]).

Third, we believe that, following the methodological framework of modern social science, sociology can benefit from a commitment to *combining empirical research and theoretical analysis*. Such a commitment was not only central to the works of the classics, but it continues to be of pivotal importance to a discipline that is concerned with both the material and the symbolic developments of the social world. Sociology is often regarded as a relatively young discipline that competes with the age-old authority of philosophy, in particular with political philosophy. This is mainly due to the fact that, to a large extent, sociology has always been committed to studying the specific *sociohistorical conditions* underlying different forms of knowledge acquisition and knowledge production. Indeed, from a sociological perspective, all major areas of philosophical inquiry have a profoundly social dimension: the nature of knowledge (epistemology), the nature of being (ontology),

the nature of argument (logic), the nature of morality (ethics), and the nature of cultural production (aesthetics) – all of these 'existential' dimensions of philosophical inquiry can be, and in fact should be, conceived of as 'coexistential' conditions of sociohistorically specific life forms. The methodological commitment to combining theoretical analysis with empirical research – that is, the normative commitment to locating the theoretical foundations of philosophical speculation in the empirical foundations of sociological exploration – lies at the heart of modern social science. The central importance of this commitment manifests itself in the normative underpinnings of the works of the 'founding fathers' of sociology: for instance, in Marx's view that human life is to be conceived of as an ensemble of social practices; in Weber's insight that we need to explore the multifaceted ways in which people mobilize the value-laden resource of *Verstehen* if we want to make sense of the fact that the social universe is a world of interpretive beings who, by definition, have a deep-seated need to attach meaning to their actions; and in Durkheim's ambition to uncover the existential significance of social facts, which permeate, however subtly, all individual and collective forms of consciousness.

The journal will continue to be innovative in terms of both content and style. Future issues will be concerned to celebrate the work of past sociologists – such as the writings of the late Shmuel Eisenstadt – and the research of contemporary sociologists working in the field of classical sociology. We should also spell out that we publish detailed review articles, rather than short book reviews, as we believe that they give the reviewer an opportunity to provide the reader with a thorough overview of important debates in, and original contributions to, the field of contemporary sociology.

While we are committed to recognizing the continuing relevance of the conceptual and methodological tools of classical social thought, we want to stress that the *Journal of Classical Sociology* was never intended to be simply a celebration of classical sociology if narrowly defined as the foundational work undertaken by Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. In other words, classical sociology, as we see it, is not limited to the study of European social thought produced between 1844 (the year in which Marx wrote the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*; Marx, 2000/1977 [1844]) or 1893 (the year in which Durkheim published *The Division of Labor in Society*; Durkheim, 1984 [1893]) and 1922 (the year of the posthumous publication of Weber's *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*; Weber, 1978 [1922]). We have nevertheless carried a wealth of material on this particular period, such as a Special Issue on the anniversary of the publication of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, edited by Peter Baehr (2005), and a Special Issue on the legacy of Émile Durkheim, edited by William Ramp (2008). In 2012, we will publish a Special Issue on John Holloway's most recent book, entitled *Crack Capitalism* (2010), illustrating the continuing relevance of Marxist thought to contemporary critiques of capitalism. In addition to our thorough engagement with the various legacies of Marxist, Durkheimian, and Weberian thought, we have published articles on the writings of Vilfredo Pareto (Albert, 2004), Ludwig Wittgenstein (Greiffenhagen and Sharrock, 2009; King, 2009; Ogien, 2009), Antonio Gramsci (Fontana, 2002), Werner Sombart (Grundmann and Stehr, 2001), Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead (Schubert, 2006), Franklin Giddings (Chriss, 2006c), and Lester Ward (Chriss, 2006b).

We have made every effort to emphasize that, from our perspective, it is crucial to break out of the straitjacket of the 'Holy Trinity' of sociological thought. This is not to suggest, however, that one should not attach paradigmatic importance to the writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. In fact, there are a number of good reasons to regard these thinkers as the 'founding fathers' of sociology (see especially Giddens, 1996 [1971]). Yet, with the aim of stressing the importance of other prominent 'classical' scholars, we have published various articles concerned with the works of influential figures such as Alexis de Tocqueville (Chen, 2009; de Tocqueville, 2009 [1836]; Faught, 2007; Hochberg, 2007; Meyer, 2003; Smith, 2010; Swedberg, 2009; Torpey, 2009b), Georg Simmel (Cooper, 2010; Deflem, 2003; Dodd, 2008; Gross, 2001; Kemple, 2009; Vandenberghe, 2010; Witz, 2001), and Karl Mannheim (Green, 2009; Mullins and Jacobs, 2006; Zafirovski and Rodeheaver, 2009).

The journal has always been conscious of the controversial nature of canon formation in sociology (Outhwaite, 2009). We have consequently sought not only to explore that legacy critically but also to deepen and extend it. We can identify several good examples, such as the Special Issue on American Exceptionalism, edited by John Torpey (2009a), and – perhaps more whimsically – an original study entitled 'Goethe in Palermo' (Dodd, 2008). The journal has also made a systematic attempt to extend awareness of the existence of separate national traditions and thereby to avoid falling into the trap of 'methodological nationalism' (Chernilo, 2008). This effort is reflected, for instance, in the publication of Chris Rojek's interview with Eric Dunning, which provides useful insights into the legacy of the Leicester School in Great Britain (Rojek, 2004), or the Special Issue on recent developments in Polish sociology, edited by Janusz Mucha and Steven Vaitkus (2006). Furthermore, we have aimed to explore and consolidate the legacies of key sociologists such as George Herbert Mead (Athens, 2002; Schubert, 2006), Norbert Elias (Dunning et al., 2001; Elias, 2001), Peter Laslett (2005), and William E.B. Du Bois (Kemple, 2009; Stanfield, 2010).

We are aware of the problematic division between Western European and North American sociology. It is all too easy to think of 'classical sociology' – from Karl Marx to Karl Mannheim – as simply 'European sociology' or, in an even more restricted sense, as a 'continental European project'. The journal has sought to represent equally important features of American sociology, for instance, in the Special Issue on Robert Merton, edited by Ragnvald Kalleberg (2007), and in the Special Issue on American sociology, edited by James J. Chriss (2006a). The cultural and intellectual separation between these two dominant traditions is probably unhelpful to the long-term institutional development of sociology, and periodically we have run issues and published articles that explore the bridges and the linkages between them. It is for this reason that we have published several articles on the work and influence of Talcott Parsons – a perfect example of a sociologist who worked in both the North American and the Western European traditions. Moreover, we have published a Special Issue, edited by Uta Gerhardt (2005), on Parsons's legacy in contemporary social and political thought.

As we announced in the first issue of the journal, our intention has always been to defend and promote the idea of 'classicality' (Webster, 2005), that is, a legacy of research and analysis that endorses the critical study of the social by drawing upon the works of

classical sociological thinkers and those who were influenced by them. As such, 'sociological classicality' is not confined to any particular place or time. In search of this eclectic genre of social thought, we have explored the works of Michel Foucault (Datta, 2008; Joas, 2008; Lemke, 2010), Pierre Bourdieu (Fowler, 2007; Robbins, 2002, 2007, 2010), Erving Goffman and Emmanuel Levinas (Raffel, 2002), John Rawls (Special Issue: Rawls, 2009), John Galbraith (Smart, 2003), Philip Rieff (Special Issue: Fine and Manning, 2003), Hans-Georg Gadamer (How, 2007), Theodor W. Adorno (Hagens, 2006), Alfred N. Whitehead and Herbert Marcuse (Moore, 2007), Niklas Luhmann (Paul, 2001; Thornhill, 2010; Vanderstraeten, 2002), and Gunnar Myrdal (Eliaeson, 2008). It is also important to point out, however, that we have examined themes and issues that are central to contemporary sociology, notably debates on globalization (Inglis and Robertson, 2008), economics (Graça, 2008; Smart, 2003; Zafirovski, 2005), methodological nationalism (Chernilo, 2008), relativism (Boudon, 2005), the politics of difference (Susen, 2010), critical theory (Rodríguez Martínez, 2004), and citizenship (Special Issue: Turner and Susen, 2010).

Although we seek to defend an inclusive notion of classicality and, at the same time, avoid a ritualistic adherence to a canon, we believe that it is important to be aware of the fact that sociology is currently exposed to an exceptional degree of fragmentation. Such a fragmentation process threatens to undermine sociology as a coherent discipline. Indeed, it was no accident that our introduction to the first issue carried the title 'The Fragmentation of Sociology'; in the subsequent decade there is no sign that this process has abated. Sociology appears to be more exposed or prone to intellectual fashion than any other discipline in the social sciences. One example of this tendency towards intra-disciplinary fragmentation is that in the recent decades of neo-liberalism, inaugurated by the Presidency of Ronald Reagan and the election of Margaret Thatcher, mainstream sociology came to downplay – or, in some cases, even to abandon – its connections with Marx, Marxism, and political economy. The study of consumerism, leisure, culture, identity, post-modernism, and the body came to occupy the centre stage through much of the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting a paradigmatic shift associated with 'the cultural turn' and epitomized in the rise of 'decorative sociology' (Rojek and Turner, 2000). And yet, with the financial and economic crisis that began in 2007, Marxism, political economy, and macro-sociology are being slowly reinstated.

There is now much debate about the 'financialization of capitalism' (Foster, 2007), but the recent credit crunch is a good illustration of the importance of an intellectual tradition and the dangers of fashion-driven social theory. We can define this transformation of capitalism as including a drift from production to finance, a slowdown in the rate of economic growth, the proliferation of oligopolistic multinational corporations, and the financialization of the accumulation process. One of the results is a transformation of the structure of the elite (Epstein, 2005). Yet, the idea of a deeply rooted financial instability in capitalism can be traced back to Joseph Schumpeter's 'The Crisis of the Tax State' (1991 [1918]), a work which was influential in the development of the political economy of Paul M. Sweezy and Harry Magdoff (1972) and which largely inspired Daniel Bell's account of 'fiscal sociology' in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976). One problem with fashion-driven sociology is that there is no systematic accumulation of

work, let alone a consolidation of a coherent theory and research programme; if anything, there is an obsession with whatever is marketable (see Rojek and Turner, 2000). The current crisis should be an opportunity to build on the framework of fiscal sociology, rather than a reason for assembling *ad hoc* notions and catchy aphorisms proclaiming 'the end of the social' in advanced societies.

We have concluded this Anniversary Report with a brief observation on the economic crisis of the decade in order to emphasize that, even if we are prepared to recognize that all intellectual schools and scientific paradigms are invented, we need to acknowledge that sociological research traditions and intellectual paradigms are not only influential but also useful. The recent economic crisis shows, among other things, the enduring significance of Marx's sociology of capitalism – as our journal will illustrate in a forthcoming Special Issue on the relevance of Marxist and neo-Marxist forms of analysis to understanding the nature of capitalism in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, this discussion is indicative of the depth and breadth of the sociological tradition as encompassing an intellectual kinship not only with politics but also with economics. In the future, we shall continue to explore the parameters of classicality with the aim of demonstrating its relevance to contemporary sociology and to the critical analysis of the social complexities and political challenges encountered in the contemporary world. In short, our programme is one of equal emphasis on tradition and innovation.

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