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THE PARSONS REVIVAL IN GERMAN SOCIOLOGY

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The following observation appeared in a recently published work of German social theory:

> Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, and Emile Durkheim are indisputably accepted as classical figures in the history of sociological theory—thanks, not least of all, to the work of Talcott Parsons. That one still occupies oneself with these authors today as if they were one's contemporaries needs no explicit justification. Yet however highly one may rate the work of Talcott Parsons, his status as a classical thinker is not so uncontroversial that one may choose his work

I would like to thank Richard Münch for his generous contributions of information and insight about this topic of mutual interest. He cannot be held accountable, however, for the opinions I have expressed.

> as the starting point of systematic sociological explanation without justifying this choice.
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> To begin with the obvious: there is no one among his contemporaries who developed a social theory of comparable complexity. The autobiographical intellectual history that Parsons published in 1974 gives an initial insight into the consistency and the cumulative success of the effort which this scholar of more than fifty years has put into the construction of a single theory. As it stands today, the work is unparalleled in regard to its level of abstraction, internal differentiation, theoretical breadth and systematicity —all of which is, simultaneously, connected to the literature of each particular empirical field. Although the interest in this theory has slackened since the mid 1960s, and though Parsons's later work has at times been pushed into the background by hermeneutically and critically oriented investigations, no social theory can be taken seriously today which does not—at the very least—clarify its relationship to Parsons's. Whoever deludes himself about this fact allows himself to be captured by contemporary issues rather than rationally confronting them. That goes also for a neo-Marxism which wishes simply to bypass Parsons—in the history of social science, errors of this type are normally quickly corrected.

This spirited justification of Parsons's continuing importance—indeed, his classical stature—may seem too wearily familiar. Slightly defensive and a little too strident, it is written, one might suppose, by one of the aggrieved orthodoxy, another former student of Parsons flaying hopelessly against the tide of intellectual history.

But such a supposition would be wrong. This passage was written by Jürgen Habermas, Germany's leading social theorist and, many would argue, the leading critical social theorist in the world today. With this ringing justification Habermas introduced his analysis of Parsons in the second volume of his *Theories des Kommunicativen Handelns* (1981b:297), a discussion of some 200 pages that holds center stage in the work. When this work—*Theories of Communicative Action*—appeared in December 1981, it

sold out its first edition of 10,000 copies within the month. Has Parsons become bedtime reading for German social theorists?

When Talcott Parsons traveled to Heidelberg in 1926, he was making a pilgrimage to the home of sociological theory, for Germany had the greatest theoretical tradition in sociology by far. This tradition had effectively ended by the time of Parsons's arrival: The social and cultural basis for significant theory was destroyed by the deluge of 1915-1945. After the Second World War, sociology was reintroduced to Germany by scholars like König and Schelsky who had substantive rather than theoretical interests. Some older critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer returned, but the only distinctively sociological theorist of this early period whose work became influential was Ralf Dahrendorf, who had received his training outside Germany, at the London School of Economics. Dahrendorf, of course, helped create conflict theory, and his presence, added to the influence of the older critical theorists, gave to what there was of German sociological theory a distinctly antifunctionalist bent. Yet perhaps the most distinctive quality of this theory was the very fact of its paucity—this in the land that had given sociological theory its birth. Dahrendorf did not found a school or train significant theorists, and the politics of the early postwar period was not fruitful for the growth of critical sociological theory.

With the rebirth of political activity in the 1960s, and the growing distance that separated German intellectual life from the ravages of the inter-war period, German sociological theory revived. At first this revival was almost entirely within the framework of critical theory. The best-known German theoretical discussions undoubtedly were the celebrated arguments over positivism, in which critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer debated critical rationalists like Popper and Albert. The student movement of the late 1960s gave added force to this theoretical-cum-political revival, pushing it, in the process, toward a more orthodox and deterministic brand of Marxism, a framework within which the bulk of substantive German sociology remains.

Yet German theoretical development continued to grow and change. The most distinguished younger member of the Frankfurt school, Habermas also took part in the early positivism dispute, which helped revitalize the younger generation of German theorists.

Habermas, however, was a sharp critic of the student movement and was opposed to Marxist orthodoxy. For reasons I will elaborate below, during the late 1960s and the 1970s his theory became more expansive and complex. Habermas was quickly drawn into a dialogue with leading nonMarxist theories, particularly those of Weber and Parsons. This initial dialogue was decisive; not only did it give vital impetus to the further growth of German sociological theory, but it significantly affected its form.

In 1980 the University of Heidelberg gave Parsons an honorary doctorate of philosophy. The speeches honoring him, serious and appreciative in tone, were delivered by some of the leading lights in German sociological theory—by Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, and Wolfgang Schluchter, among others. (They are collected in Schluchter, 1980.) Once a pilgrim to the theoretical mecca, Parsons was now the object of a theoretical homage himself. In some manner he had managed to give back to German theory as much as he had earlier received. Although sociological theory in Germany is unlikely ever to regain its earlier domination over the field, it certainly is now a major force to be reckoned with in sociology. As it is increasingly translated and read, theorists in the English-speaking world are learning that critical theory is far from its only achievement. In fact, with the exception of the continuing strand of Marxist orthodoxy, German sociological theory has become dramatically "Parsonized." Every major branch —critical theory, systems theory, action theory, phenomenology, Weberian theory—has absorbed some of Parsons's most important lessons; each has, indeed, often assumed a distinctively Parsonian form. How has this come about, and what does it mean?

As compared with the situation in the United States—Mertonian injunctions notwithstanding—the cultural studies tradition in Europe has been much more sharply differentiated into separate theoretical and practical strands. Sociological theory in Europe has tended toward the philosophical and speculative rather than the explanatory. This has been nowhere more true than in Germany, the country Marx scorned as a nation of philosophers. Marx's criticism, of course, was motivated not only by his country's philosophical penchant, for the German inclination for social philosophy is usually combined with an inclination toward idealism. German theorists want their philosophy to be explicitly normative; it should

make the world more meaningful, providing answers to the basic problems of existence. Traditionally, German theory has accomplished this task in one of two ways: (1) it has argued that the world is not a fragmented and individualized world of material constraints but a unified, organic community of spiritual ties; (2) it has argued that although the world is in fact materialistic and fragmented, it need not be, and that a more spiritualized existence is possible.

This penchant for philosophy and ambivalent idealism is German theory's strength and its weakness. It provides the German tradition with a richness and depth that often make the Anglo-American tradition seem shallow by comparison. At the same time, it makes German theory often frustratingly far removed from mundane explanatory concerns, and it also leads, in many cases, to an either/or approach to epistemological and ideological dilemmas. Theory should focus *either* on norms *or* on interest; modern societies should be *either* utilitarian and modern *or* romantic, in either the conservative or the radical sense. Rather than an agnostic position that, rather sloppily, says "a little of each," German social theory often insists that a choice be made.

Although German social theory today continues to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of this double heritage, it has moved closer to sociological theory in the American and English sense. Marxism, of course, has been one important bridging mechanism, for it can encourage explanatory empirical efforts while providing both metaphysical anchoring and the indictment of a normless and despiritualized world. A second, and recently a more important, bridge has been provided by Parsonianism. American and English readers may find this ironic, for Parsons is often viewed in the Anglo-American world as espousing mere speculative philosophy and idealistic ideology. This very philosophical and normative bent makes him attractive to German theory. Yet for all his similarities, Parsons remains part of a very different intellectual tradition. His is an explanatory theory, albeit at a high level of generality, and although he emphasized the normative aspects of society, he often demonstrated their interpenetration with the material world. What Parsons sought, in fact, was to overcome the either/or choices posed by the German tradition: He tried to transform the polar choices of modernism and romanticism, norms and interests, into interpenetrating positions on a single continuum.

This is where Habermas's interest in Parsons began. Habermas was always uncomfortable with the dichotomizing aspects of the Marxist tradition, and long before he had overtly taken his "Parsonian turn" he sought to incorporate aspects of Parsons's conceptual synthesis. In his famous essay "Science and Technology as Ideology" (1970), for example, he brought the pattern variables into the center of "critical theory." The pattern variables had been developed by Parsons to break down the dichotomy that Tönnies had established between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft.* Against Tönnies, Parsons argued that modern society included both community and society—indeed, that different combinations of rationality and affectivity existed in different institutional spheres. Yet, although Habermas was attracted to the pattern-variable schema, he revised it in a revealing way. On the one hand, he used the schema to complicate and differentiate the conceptual apparatus he had inherited from critical theory; on the other, he used the pattern variables to reinstate the very dichotomy that Parsons had sought to avoid. Habermas claimed that affective neutrality, universalism, and specificity were the principal norms of instrumental capitalist society; only in some postinstrumental society would the alternative pattern-variable choices come into being.

This double-sided attitude toward Parsons's theory set the framework for much of the rest of Habermas's development. Absorbing more and more of Parsons's vocabulary, he steadily gains more insight into the complex structuring of the modern world; at the same time, his insistence on the merely instrumental character of this world leads him to turn Parsons's synthetic theory inside out. In his masterly *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), for example, Habermas implicitly appropriates Parsons's AGIL model, which views society as composed of the interacting subsystems of polity/law/economy/values, and he relates this differentiation, as Parsons did, to the three-system model of personality, culture, and society. Because of the complexity with which Habermas traces the interworking of the subsystems of capitalism, this work is a landmark of neoMarxist theory. Yet Habermas maintains, all the same, that capitalism cannot really establish reciprocal interactions between cultural patterns, social system demands, and psychological needs, and the familiar polarity of instrumental rationality versus human value is reestablished. In his latest work, *Theories of Communica-*

tive Action, Habermas examines Parsons in systematic detail for the first time, for only in this most recent phase has he consciously set out to develop a new, post-Marxist theory. Yet his conclusions here are much the same. Parsons, he acknowledges, poses the crucial question of the relation between lifeworlds—worlds of experience and symbolic discourse—and system or structure. But he insists that Parsons, particularly in his later work, reduces symbolic experience to an instrumental reflection of impersonal "systems" life (for at least a partial summary of his views in English, see Habermas, 1981a). Habermas once again revises Parsons so the theory reflects the problems he himself sees in "modernity."

Habermas's "critical Parsonianism" seems to me one-sided and wrong. He has drastically depersonalized the social system and overly moralized the lifeworlds of culture and experience. His theory finds answers to the problems of existence, and it does so in a philosophically brilliant and satisfying way. Yet in doing so, Habermas has reintroduced the epistemological and ideological dichotomies of idealism. But it is really not enough to locate Habermas by placing him within this broad tradition. To understand the evolution of his relation to Parsons, we must appreciate the specific dialogue through which his later attitude toward Parsonian theory developed. We must turn, for this, to Niklas Luhmann.

In the early 1970s, Habermas and Luhmann engaged in a major debate over the relative advantages of "critical" versus "systems" theory. Is the essence of modernity the freedom and order allowed by the differentiation of systems or the gap between a universalized culture and a rationalized society? Whereas Habermas argued that systems theory technologized society and actually eliminated choice, Luhmann argued that all societies are in fact subject to certain "technical" constraints and that by conceptualizing these demands, systems theory can transcend ideology and provide an objective framework for social analysis. (For a collection of his essays spanning the period 1964-1976, see Luhmann, 1982. For two longer analyses, see Luhmann, 1979. Columbia University Press is publishing a translation of the Habermas-Luhmann debate.) Many observers agreed that Luhmann had the better of this debate and that Habermas's historicism seemed to place him on weaker ground. It is certainly true that after this exchange Habermas took up the systemic aspects of Parsonian theory in a

much more assiduous and explicit way. In some sense this was an enormous victory for Parsonianism, for this debate paved the way for the tremendously expanded interest in Parsons's work among younger German theorists. At the same time, however, Habermas's "conversion" may actually have been a defeat. The problem lay with Luhmann's presentation of the essence of Parsons's work.

Luhmann is an enormously accomplished social theorist whose work ranges as easily across disciplines as it does across historical time. Trained in jurisprudence and administration, he came only later in life to academia, and a crucial element in this transition was a year spent in the early 1960s with Parsons at Harvard.

Where Parsons starts with the voluntary character of choice and derives norms from the necessity for such choice to be carried out according to general standards of evaluation, Luhmann starts from the phenomenological insistence on the lack of real choice in human affairs, on the "natural familiarity" that brackets the range of any individual's experience. By adding Heidegger to Husserl, however, Luhmann begins to establish the necessity for artificial, more social mechanisms of control, because the temporal contingency of experience creates anxieties about encounters with new individuals, new experiences, and future events. The growing complexity of modern society adds further to this necessity for the control or systematization of experience, for increasing complexity threatens to eliminate the interpersonal basis of trust that phenomenology assumes. For all these reasons, modern society places a new premium on abstract and general mechanisms of control. The most general such mechanism is the existence of a "system" as such. The depersonalized world of modernity demands system organization, and actors must trust in the system itself. Systems reduce the untenable complexity of the modern world. They simplify reality, first, by becoming internally differentiated; increasing the range of institutions and processes opens up options for society while reducing options and anxieties for particular actors. Systems also create trust by establishing "media of communication." Money, power, love, and truth are mechanisms that concentrate and simplify information about society and social interaction; by providing standards that are accepted on faith, they allow interaction to proceed in what would otherwise be a chaotic and fundamentally incomprehensible world.

Some of the recent introductions to Luhmann's work suggest that he has "radicalized" Parsons, and Luhmann himself stresses the distance from Parsons and the advances he has made. Certainly Luhmann has "advanced" in certain significant ways. His writing is pithy, and he moves from common experience to esoteric argument with astonishing ease. For these reasons he is able to demonstrate some of the essential structures of Parsonian thinking with a clarity and richness Parsons never approached. The phenomenological and Heideggerian dimensions of Luhmann's work expand Parsons in important ways—they converge here with the early Garfinkel—and his close attention to empirical and historical literature is salutary. Yet to speak of "advance" as such, let alone of "radicalization," seems wholly premature.

Luhmann has changed Parsons, but not always for the better. His phenomenological focus has costs as well as benefits, and his explicit and omnipresent focus on "systems" can be dangerous as well. These analytical difficulties are exacerbated by distinctive ideological differences, for Luhmann, unlike Parsons, has definite conservative leanings. Where Parsons supported the New Deal, Luhmann works for the Christian Democrats.

Systems in Luhmann's work have a mechanistic and naturalistic cast. Parsons avoided this danger because he insisted that social systems were always interpenetrated by meaning and culture. Luhmann does not; he rarely talks about meaning as such, preferring to discuss culture as an epiphenomenon of the need to reduce system complexity through trust. Luhmann poses the dichotomy of theories of meaningful action *versus* systems analysis; Parsons's theory starts with meaningful action and derives the concepts of culture and social system from the need to coordinate it. For Luhmann, systems are reified, they have purposes. When Parsons's systems are reified, he misspeaks himself; he is usually conscious that "system" is an intellectual abstraction. In Luhmann's work there can be no question of ethics or morality being opposed to system demands, since there is no internalized source of moral conflict outside of system demands. For Parsons, by contrast, culture is always a system analytically separated from society, and as differentiation and complexity increase, this distinction is accentuated. For Luhmann, *dis*trust is a residual category; for Parsons, it is not only an ever-present possibility but something that modern society

systematically encourages even while it seeks its control. For Luhmann, people are primordially experiential; Parsons's people certainly are affectual as well, but they are also thinking, moral beings who have the potential for rationality and complex judgments. Here is the difference, perhaps, between Husserlian psychology and neo-Kantian liberalism.

Luhmann too, therefore, has used Parsonianism to reintroduce the dichotomies that Parsons sought to avoid. His dichotomies seem at first to be directly opposite from those Habermas posits, yet in actuality they complement them. Luhmann tells us that truth, love, and trust are part of everyday bourgeois life, and in this he could not be more different from Habermas's critical Parsonianism. Still, he locates the "base" of this society in intrinsically nonmeaningful system demands. The structures of society and the processes that change them exist "behind the backs" of actors, independent of their will. And society can become only more differentiated and atomized, so despite the presence of media, meaningful integration and community are increasingly difficult. There is in Luhmann's theory a strain of *Realpolitik,* a strain reinforced by his relative conservatism about activism and change. He has escaped from idealism, but *Realpolitik,* with its weary and often cynical acceptance of workaday demands, has always been the other side of idealism in the German tradition.

We have now found one of the hidden reasons for Habermas's idiosyncratic use and misuse of Parsons's work. If Luhmann is, after all, "the German Parsons," then systems theory may indeed be viewed as embodying a form of instrumental rationality, and the lifeworld and symbolic discourse may appear as legitimate counterweights. True, such a reading would not be entirely fair to Luhmann, but his work certainly can more easily be misread this way than Parsons's own. Both Habermas and Luhmann, then, redichotomize Parsons's thought, creating forms of Parsonianism that represent different strands of their national traditions. Each version, it is now clear, is symbiotically related to the other. Each needs the other, moreover, for its own justification.

Luhmann's and Habermas's creative misreadings of Parsons, and of each other's work, form the background for the variations on Parsonianism created by the two other major participants in the new German revival, Richard Münch and Wolfgang Schluchter.

Both theorists are aware of the dichotomizing results of this Habermas–Luhmann debate, yet in remedying them each moves in significantly different ways.

Although Münch himself once theorized from within Luhmann's systems framework, he is now very critical of Luhmann's work. Against Luhmann he stresses the Kantian elements in Parsons's theory (see Münch, 1981b, 1982), its openness to human intervention, and its commitment to universalism and rationality. For him, Parsons's theory has a "Kantian core," not the kind of systems infrastructure that Luhmann implies. And, in truth, Münch gets much closer to "the real Parsons" than Luhmann or Habermas. His essays are enormously rich and limpid expositions of Parsons's thought, and he has a feel for its empirical relevance that allows him to embrace Parsons's formalism without in any way being formalistic. For the most part, Münch follows up on the theoretical directions Parsons laid out. He amplifies Parsons's continuous but still creative relationship to different strands of the classical tradition (see, for example, Münch, 1980, 1981a). He writes powerfully and persuasively, and his ongoing research program into the comparative structures of modern society is promising indeed.

Yet Münch, too, has revised Parsons while purportedly only explicating and following him, and despite his truer reading, he has followed Luhmann and Habermas in producing a Parsonianism more in line with the traditions of German thought than Parsons's own. In his reaction against the atomizing and mechanistic aspects of Luhmann's theory, Münch suggests an explicit normative emphasis in Parsons's vision of society that was not really there. Münch presents Parsons as overwhelmingly concerned with maintaining the "whole" through the interpenetration of society's parts. This is undoubtedly a theme, and an important one, in Parsons's writing. Yet it does not represent his only normative commitment, nor does it do justice to what at least was Parsons's overweening conscious concern: the mundane ambition to explain historical and empirical variation as such.

For Parsons, subsystem differentiation is the most outstanding historical fact. It is an empirical separation that corresponds to generalized analytical divisions, and the interchange relations that connect different subsystems have the same "everyday" character.

If exchange is not broadly reciprocal, equilibrium cannot be maintained; if disequilibrium occurs, conflict ensues, and change processes develop; eventually more differentiation occurs, and exchange reciprocity is temporarily restored. Münch's emphasis is quite different. Rather than the fact of differentiation, it is the subsystem interrelationships that focus his attention, and he calls these relationships of "interpenetration" rather than exchange. Although he recognizes the explanatory possibility of Parsons's AGIL model for illuminating empirical equilibrium and change, it is the moral implications of the model that he finds powerfully attractive. He moralizes Parsons's analytical scheme, discussing system exchanges as positive, "dynamizing" processes; the boundary relation of economic and cultural life, for example, allows, in Münch's view, for the energizing expansion of both moral and economic possibilities. Reciprocal exchange is not simply equilibrating, it is also healthy, representing the balance and interpenetration of a good society. Unequal exchange is not, for it represents the possibilities for hyperspecialization, domination, or isolation that eventually undermine social well-being.

We hear in the back of Münch's Parsonianism the echoes of recent German experience. If the subsystems of "latency" (L) and "integration" (I) are functionally interpenetrated, Münch writes, then the intellectual culture of the latency dimensions will provide rationality and direction to social integration and group life, while the integrative pressures of group life will, in turn, ensure that social responsibility controls the intellect. If, however, the "L" subsystem dominates this exchange with "I," then intellectuals have become isolated from society and form a self-interested elite. If, by contrast, "I" dominates the exchange with "L," then powerful social groups are given free rein to manipulate ideas for their own purposes. Münch cites China and other historical cases by way of illustration, but Germany's Mandarin intellectuals and its dominating Prussian aristocracy seem not far behind. Yet although such examples of the consequences of uneven interchange are opportune, they do not in themselves provide the basis for conflating moral judgments with Parsons's analytical schema. Parsons was well aware that differentiation would lead to tension, uneven development, and an endemic lack of equal return. This unevenness, however, could itself be viewed as a sign of dynamism and health;

it could lead to social reform, not reaction, and to self-respect rather than deference. Reciprocity is a norm for explaining variance, not necessarily a norm for characterizing and evaluating it. Thus, although this kind of direct moral relevance is what makes Münch's work so appealing—in contrast to the dreary scientism of so many orthodox followers—it also compresses dimensions that Parsons would have left intact.

But there is also a problem in Münch's characterization of Parsons's morality as such. More than Münch seems to allow, individuation and differentiation were for Parsons very positive goods. If he had written a philosophy of history, and at times it lies barely concealed in his evolutionary work, he would have insisted at least as much on separation and autonomy as on wholeness and interpenetration. Münch has overemphasized the organicist metaphysics in Parsons's work. By underplaying the critical importance of utilitarianism and liberalism, he has developed what is still a distinctively German Parsons, although it is a far more accurate and more richly illuminating Parsons than his colleagues have yet to find.

It would not be fair if I failed to indicate that behind this German revival of Parsons there stands an earlier figure who also sought to undermine the traditional dichotomies of German thought: Max Weber. In their movement beyond purely critical theory and orthodox Marxism, German theorists have become increasingly interested in Weber's work, even as they have been increasingly attracted to Parsons's. Wolfgang Schluchter has been central to the Weber revival and has emerged as one of the premier Weberian scholars and theorists on the contemporary scene.

In the spring of 1981, Schluchter gave a talk at UCLA entitled "Current Trends in German Sociological Theory." These trends, he suggested, were the critical communications theory of Habermas, the systems theory of Luhmann, the action theory of Münch, and the Weberian theory of developmental history. This last theoretical strand is his own, and Schluchter has skillfully dedicated himself to demonstrating its superiority over the other three. Schluchter argues that these three movements are independent and antagonistic to one another; I have argued here to the contrary, that they can also be seen as three variations on Parsonian thought. So, I would also argue, can a major thrust of Schluch-

ter's own work. Just as neoMarxism is becoming Parsonized in contemporary German theory, so is its Weberianism. If Habermas can be seen as fighting against Luhmann from a Parsonized systems theory of his own, so Schluchter must be seen as battling his three opponents at least in part on the Parsonized ground they all share.

Münch has opposed Habermas's instrumentalist, "decisionist" theory of capitalism by criticizing the way in which his view of Parsons and modern systems theory has been overly affected by Luhmann. Habermas is much more Schluchter's target than he is the target of Münch, and Schluchter adopts a somewhat similar strategy of critique, though from an explicitly "Weberian" point of view (see, Roth and Schluchter, particularly Schluchter's "Value-Neutrality and the Ethic of Responsibility," 1979). His criticism is two-fold: he argues first against Habermas's insistence that modern society is merely instrumentally rational and "decisionist," and second, against Habermas's suggestion that Max Weber's historical sociology explains and legitimates this. While Münch finds the symbolic and normative resources to oppose Habermas in Parsons's work, Schluchter ostensibly finds them in Weber's. He insists that Weber is neither instrumental nor decisionist, and he elaborates a "Weberian" historical theory that demonstrates that modernity is neither as well.

The problem with Schluchter's argument is that Weber's theory, taken by itself, cannot carry this heavy burden; without Parsons, Schluchter would not find the symbolic and normative resources he needs. He realizes that the hinge of his argument against Habermas is Weber's rationalization thesis, the key to a normative and multidimensional understanding of which rests, in turn, on Weber's sociology of religion (see especially Schluchter's "The Paradox of Rationalization" in his 1979 volume with Roth). The interpretation of Weber's sociology of religion, therefore, becomes crucial to Schluchter's argument. He suggests that Weber's religious sociology traces cultural differentiation rather than rationalization as such, the growing independence of meaning, cognition, and affect rather than the elimination of meaning and affect by cognition. Weber writes of the systematization and abstraction of religious symbolism, Schluchter argues, not its reduction and instrumentalization. Finally, Weber's practical and postreligious understanding of modernity must be seen as an "anthropocentric

dualism" that maintains the tension between the "is" and the "ought," not a theory of *Realpolitik* that eliminates it.

Every point in this crucial interpretation of Weber's religious sociology, it is clear, has been filtered through the evolutionary cultural theories of Parsons and Bellah. Yet, while Schluchter amply footnotes the Parsonian corpus, he presents his multidimensional version of the rationalization thesis as if it were Weber's own. Much the same can be said for his brilliant later analysis of legal and political rationalization (see Schluchter, 1981, especially chaps. 3-4). Here Schluchter "elaborates" Weber's theory of rational-legal society by connecting Weber's concept of "the ethic of responsibility"—the political embodiment of anthropocentric dualism—to his notion of rational, enacted law. Schluchter makes this connection by describing political ethics and law as complementary dimensions whose relationship was established through the functional differentiation of a broader political morality.

Schluchter has made good use of Parsons's synthetic achievement to overcome the dichotomies of Habermas's (and Weber's!) thought. The politics of the German theoretical debate, however, have caused him partly to conceal this good use. Similar "political" considerations lead him to speak very openly about Parsons when criticisms are due. For Schluchter is not simply Habermas's antagonist; he aligns himself with Habermas against the "wholism" of Parsonians like Luhmann and Münch. Indeed, one of the most telling polemics of his rationalization discussion is Schluchter's argument against the Parsonian idea that differentiation leads to complementary political and cultural strands. He suggests that Parsons underemphasizes the "paradoxes of rationalization," the real tensions generated by the conflicts between science and morality, between the politics of responsibility and the politics of conviction. This underemphasis, Schluchter believes, is linked in turn to Parsons's idealism, to his neglect of the pressure from "real interests."

In this open criticism, however, Schluchter is both right and wrong. In terms of epistemology, there certainly are strands in Parsonianism that are antirealistic, strands that mar large parts of the corpus of work. Yet to lump Parsons together with Friedrich Tenbruk—the German Weberian who produced an elegant but overtly emanationist reading of Weber's religious sociology—goes

much too far. Tenbruk, for example, while drawing on Bellah's evolutionary theory, completely neglected its very real emphasis on politics and class. And Parsons's brilliant introductory essay to Weber's *Sociology of Religion* (1964)—on which Schluchter himself relies—systematically incorporates Weber's discussion of the impact of material experience on religious orientation.

In terms of his more empirical point, Schluchter's criticism is also valid in significant ways. Weber had a much surer sense of the tragic difficulties of modern life. Parsons—and, as we have seen, certain strands of German Parsonianism as well—was much too inclined to equate the fact that values are differentiated from a common value system with their complementarity in either a cultural or a social sense (on this point, see my own critique of Parsons's theory earlier in this volume). Yet Schluchter oversteps himself here as well. The very notion that modernity is characterized by substantive moral and political paradoxes is available to Schluchter only because he used Parsons's differentiation theory to enrich Weber's own approach to modern life. Parsons's more integrated theory allows Schluchter to overcome Weber's dichotomies. Only once these analytical dichotomies are overcome can Schluchter successfully speak of modernity's ideological and empirical "paradoxes"! If I have suggested that Schluchter, more than any of the other theorists, steps outside the German tradition, it is because he has one foot on Weber's shoulders but one on Parsons's as well.

If German sociological theory is blossoming today, it is at least in part because of its vivid encounter with Talcott Parsons. Parsons is read and studied in Germany today not because of his "Germanness"—the abstraction and generality that so bothers Americans—but because he has succeeded in bringing to German theory synthetic and explanatory perspectives that its native traditions often lack. It is this specifically theoretical dimension of Parsons that the Germans seek out. They regard Americans' political readings and denunciations of Parsons as naive and intellectually immature. They are right. The younger German scholars interested in Parsons today are leftists and liberals.

In America, of course, the relationship of sociological theory to Parsons has been burdened with much more historical and psychological freight. It was here that Parsons once exercised his

much-disputed domination. If sociology were to be free to develop, this domination had to be overthrown. The attacks on Parsons, which spanned the three postwar decades of his life, were often significant. Anti-Parsonian attacks spawned every major movement of theoretical reform, each of which initially presented itself vis-à-vis some particular dimension of Parsons's work.

Now that Parsons is gone, however, and the status of his corpus in American theory severely diminished, these new theories stand as radically incomplete. Each concentrates on one strand of Parsons's original work, and when considered together they revive all the significant dichotomies that Parsons's framework was designed to resolve. If these theoretical pieces are ever going to be put back together again, it will take more than the king's men. Only another equally synthetic theory could do the job. This theory, I believe, would have to be a neofunctionalism modeled generally after Parsons's own: It would have to refer to system while recognizing will; it would have to maintain components of norms and of interests; it would have to explain conflict and cooperation. To simply bypass Parsons, as Habermas has reminded us in the passage that begins this essay, would be a serious intellectual mistake. Trying to discuss the relation between action and structure or between micro- and macrosociology without reference to Parsons is like trying to reinvent the wheel. If Parsons is to be transcended, it can be only by a true *Aufheben,* through what Hegel called a concrete rather than abstract negation.

It is tempting to say that the current American "stupidity" about Parsons's work will be overcome by the continuing translation of these new German texts and that this will be one result of the new Europeanization of American social theory, along with the ideologicalization of our debates and our introduction to *tout Paris.* Certainly this is partly true. Durkheim came back to France via American sociology and English anthropology. Weber was brought back to Germany through Parsons and Bendix. Yet it is also clear, I think, that the renewal of serious interest in Parsons has already begun here at home. There is some talk and some handwringing about an incipient "Parsons revival." One reason is the growing interest in theory itself. The bloom is off the rose of quantitative sociology, and more historical and comparative work is back in fashion. Another reason is decreasing excitement over

Marxist and critical work, for even while the competent practice of Marxist sociology has spread enormously, the social and cultural reasons for its ideological renewal have begun—in every western nation—to wither on the vine. And finally, if there is the beginning of a Parsons revival here at home, it is due in no small part to the intrinsic quality of Parsons's intellectual work, a quality that German sociological theory has recently come to appreciate.

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