Comparative-Historical Sociology as Professional Practice

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**Abstract:** The once dominant comparative and historical approach in sociology has been replaced by methods which extract, collate and re-label data from the immediate present. What explains contemporary dustbowl of historical sociology? This paper suggests: the gradual disinvestment in professional utility and professional practice. History of the interrelationship between jurisprudence and social science in both Germany and the United States shows social scientists more dominant profession of jurists who used comparative history to harmonise laws. American scholars drew on their training in German faculties of Law to establish academic science faculties. Subsequent academic effort to professionalise these disciplines as pure ‘science’ withdrawal from the original practical concerns.

**Keywords:** Professions; Universities; Law; Comparative-Historical Sociology; Max Weber

**Introduction**

The once dominant comparative and historical approach in sociology has been replaced by methods which extract, collate and re-label data from the immediate present (Inglis 2014). This applies equal quantitative methods and to increasingly popular qualitative ethnographic approaches. With these data with other civilisational patterns, other regions or other periods, sociology increases contemporary values and concerns without sufficient reflection. As Calhoun (1996) argues, the recent flourishing of historical sociology in American sociology was ‘domesticated’ into a method of difference and agreement. In Britain, the promise Abrams (1982) identified during structuration turn evaporated in the stream of planes headed towards California. What explains contemporary dustbowl of historical sociology? This paper suggests: the gradual disinvestment in professional utility and professional practice since the 1970s at least, with the trend originating in the interwar period.

The history of the interrelationship between legal science, that is, jurisprudence, and social science in Germany and the United States during the nineteenth century suggests that academic social science...
emerged as adjunct researchers working for a more dominant profession of jurists. Comparative-Historical Sociology as Professional Practice

Emerging as adjunct researchers working for a more dominant profession of jurists. The method jurists employed to harmonise conflicts of laws, especially during national unification recently colonised or annexed territories, such as Alsace-Lorraine after 1871. The first generation of jurists in America drew on their training in German faculties of Law, establishing faculties of science, economics, and sociology across the Atlantic. Subsequent academic efforts to professionalise disciplines as pure ‘science’ meant withdrawal from their original practical concerns. This historic decline of comparative-historical sociology suggests that social scientists would have greater input in policy and public affairs if we demonstrated our professional capacity to explain a wide range of phenomena inaccessible to more ‘involved’ participants mired in the rip current of the content. Norbert Elias’s terminology of ‘involvement and detachment’ (Elias 1987). In fact, historical comparison of the ideal method through which sociologists can justifiably claim expertise not already covered by disciplines.

To justify this claim – that comparative-historical research is necessary for professional sociologists, I will briefly articulate three sub-theses here:

- First, that comparative-historical research was central to the disciplinary emergence of sociology in Germany and America, but resulted in an unusual disciplinary configuration in the New World of the twentieth century. Sociology was effectively a ‘remainder discipline’ for everything: economics or political science.

- Second, American social scientists continued to employ comparative-historical methods alongside forms of data analysis until the 1970s and consequently remained effective in promoting sociological until comparative-historical sociology declined thereafter.

- Third, this decline must be contextualised in relation to the following trends: first, and most significantly, the rise of ‘comparative-historical sociology’ as a sub-disciplinary specialism; second, the rise of New Left academics into higher education employment; and finally, the rise of neoliberalism.

The anti-authoritarianism of bearded academics combined with the anti-monopolism of neoliberal management to hollow out professional authority in general. The institutional legacies of early-twentieth-century disciplinary configurations led to academic sociology bearing the brunt of universities’ accommodation to one side of this anti-professional pincer movement: the critical, New Left academics into higher education employment; and finally, the rise of neoliberalism. The idea of neoliberalism: by holding conferences, writing books and telling students about neoliberalism. Meanwhile, as teachers, few of these critical sociologists inculcated the deep historical and comparative knowledge through which students could either truly understand the present or relate to actual working beyond their corner of the ivory tower. The result has been a retreat into the present, at large and within the discipline ostensibly charged with understanding society.

German Jurisprudence: An Alternate Origin for Academia

Social Science
To understand how far removed contemporary presentism is from social science as originally should go back to the beginning – nay, before the beginning. Too often sociology’s origin myt organised scholarship into society began when natural scientists – French engineers at polyte particular – began experimenting with a form of ‘social physics’ to explain the statics and dyn organisation. The problem with this story is that it gives primacy to ‘science’, particularly nat assumes social science is thus a ‘softer’ copycat or afterthought.

In reality, academic social science was present at the foundation of the modern university in I when natural science was still in its budding stages in German universities. The reason this is recognised today is that early social science did not take place within the philosophical faculti from which we sociologists obtain our status as ‘doctor’ after conferral of a PhD. Rather, withi professional faculty of law, the historical school of jurisprudence, led by Savigny, Eichhorn, N Grimm and others, consolidated a discourse and method to understand the ‘system’ of laws ir ‘spirit’ or Geist of the people (Lybeck 2015; Reimann 1989). The ultimate philosophical roots Herder’s writings on the Volksgeist (Iggers 1983; Köpke 1996). Romantic conservatism à la É provided the political and cultural impulse; as Mannheim (1986 [1925]) suggested: through h jurisprudence, conservatism was methodologised. And, the method was comparative-historic especially on comparisons between Germanic and Roman civilisations.

In the early nineteenth century, the successful institutionalisation of historical jurisprudence recently established University of Berlin meant that research into history, philology, economanthropology, and so on, were tied to a much larger project of nation building (Ziolkowski 20 nationalist ends of this work were kept secret to avoid censorship. However, these scholars’ ai discussions – comparing the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, or the Hanseatic Gemein Prussian civil service – were virtual comparisons between contemporary Austria, Prussia and Germany’ consisting of over thirty other German-speaking states (Crosby 2008). The compar historical method was anything but detached from the political concerns of the time, and was of making political arguments without exposing oneself to the authorities.

Throughout the nineteenth century, academic law retained its gate-keeping function insofar a jurisprudence was necessary for entering the civil service. The law student learned Greek, Ro1 English law, etc., both historically and comparatively. Following the considerable reforms of § historical school, the basic training in law remained more or less similar across the entire cen 1893). It consisted of the following: the student would read Roman law for two full years, initi how to approach primary archival sources, and later shifting into exegetical studies of the Cor and the Pandects. Beginning in the second semester, the student began parallel study of Gern with constitutional and administrative law, followed often by criminal law and procedure; the to learn legal methodology – first, the comparative method, followed by the ‘systematic’ meth Then, limited specialisation meant lectures from professors of, for example, canon law, intern civil process. Or, in other cases, a student would specialise within a territorial sphere – for exi mastering Prussian civil law, or Rhenish tort law. By the third or fourth year of studies, incre specialization often meant travel to other university towns. Since, not every university had a c specialised subject – indeed, the fields were widely dispersed across all the German speaking student had to move locations to complete his studies.
This transnationalism, especially as students became civil servants, jurists or professors, them positioned academics well during the period of political unification. Many took up roles in public office, particularly in the more liberalised southwest German states including Baden. According to historian,

> The leadership of professors and students in the drive for closer national unification, in securing political and civic rights, and other public issues helped bring the German universities closer to the realities of German society than they had been [...] The walls of corporate immunities between the academic and political spheres were weakened and lowered by reforms and political intervention of the states (McClelland 1980: 230).

Professors increasingly embodied the Fichtean ethic as an intellectual and political elite, but the universities were wholly subsumed within the state. Professors were salaried civil servants: ministry controlled examinations, and specialised seminars and laboratories were funded from princely budgets. Still, especially in the period after 1849, during which a consultation with pupils resulted in constitutional by-laws protecting Ordinarien (though not Extraordinarien and Dozenten); academics were guaranteed the right to nominate new faculty appointments and autonomous respect to staffing and academic justice. But, the very fact of consultation reflected the drama before and after 1848 in German-speaking Europe.

When, in 1848, the Frankfurt Assembly met to establish a new legal and political framework in Europe, it was jurists who led the so-called ‘Parliament of Professors’ (Hamerow 1958). Many since have, suggested the failure of the Frankfurt Assembly to make its liberal revolution permanent, historical ‘turning point at which Germany failed to turn’ (Taylor 1961; cf. Blackbourn and Elgie 1995). However, that was an unavoidable result of border issues; the parliament of jurists, in fact, made legislation at speed due to their earlier academic conferences including the Germanistentag in 1846–47 (Crosby 2008: 132). More importantly, when the Frankfurt Assembly most of the legislation proposed was slowly and almost silently enacted by the jurists returning to their respective states. By the time Bismarck united the German Empire under Prussia’s banner in 1871, Europe was already well on its way to legal harmonisation.

**Comparative-Historical Research as Professional Practice**

The Case of Friedrich Althoff

How did comparative and historical research factor during national unification? The case of Friedrich Althoff’s training and employment at the University of Strassburg and, more recently annexed, will provide a useful practical example. A great deal is known about Friedrich Althoff’s subsequent career as a university administrator – the so-called ‘Bismarck of the University’ (Backhaus 1993; Brocke 1991; Bielke 1991; Bruch and Kaderas 2002; Geuna 1995; Sachse 1928; Vereeck 1993), and a few historians, especially John Craig, have studied the University of Strassburg in detail and depth.
comparative-historical sociology as professional practice (grimmer-solem 2003; schlüter 2004). but, with only one short exception, on that of althoff: school policies (nebelin 1991), no historian or sociologist has fully connected the late century of university administration, as weber called it, to althoff’s earlier dual appointment as memni faculty and secretary at the university of strasbourg, founded in 1872 as a means of cultural in particular, little attention has been paid to althoff’s work as a jurist during this period, which historical legal scientific training characteristic of his day. further, the task with which he was codification of alsatian law – was of clear importance to imperial authorities in the reichsland. his successful management of the codification project, which gave germany access to the leg: the recently annexed territory, led to his appointment in the cultural ministry in berlin. he was to put into immediate use in the newly annexed region of alsace-lorraine.

much has been made of althoff’s supposed lack of doctoral qualifications, for he was awarded without having completed a doctorate, habilitation or advanced certificate. this circumstance unique in all of german university history (brocke 1991: 277), contributed to a misperception critics that he was unqualified or somehow honorifically appointed. it is therefore worth addr education in detail: following a typical gymnasium education, during which he mastered greek handwriting, the seventeen-year-old althoff enrolled at bonn to study law. in his first semester attended professor sell’s lectures on the institutions and archival sources of roman law, alo in logic and policy science. in the following year, he studied german legal history, roman law including the corpus juris civilis and the pandects. as his studies progressed, he began specfavoured lecturer, georg fredrich dahlmann, a hero of the 1848 revolutions, who taught fina science, in addition to courses in russian and english history, until his death in 1860. in 1856, the student fraternity, the corps saxonia, where he spent much of his time. legally, he began private law, exchange law (wechselrecht), volksrecht and, in particular, civil law. by the end of studies at bonn in 1860, he had become an expert in rhenish civil process.

as an able, if not necessarily gifted scholar, the son of a domänenrat (provincial governor), al secured low-level employment in a local civil service ministry. he married marie ingenohl in he had passed his assessors exam with excellent marks. in 1870, he had nearly completed his dissertation, approved by rudolph gneist as early as 1863, when, on 17 july, napoleon iii de prussia drawing the nations into the franco-prussian war. by 16 august, he was called into n where he served as medical orderly until may 1872, when he was rushed from the front to serv special capacity at the imperial office in strasbourg. for in the interim, it had been discovered very special legal expertise was desperately needed: his doctoral dissertation on the history of was to be put into immediate use in the newly annexed region of alsace-lorraine.

initially working within the reichsland (imperial ministry, althoff was soon dually-appointe baron franz von roggenbach, who was charged with organising a model german university a part of a cultural imperial mission. althoff would also be promoted to the position of e: professor in the refounded university. thus, having submitted neither dissertation nor habilit
became professor of French civil law at the Imperial University of Strassburg. His dual appointment advantage of his practical experience as a civil servant, with which he assisted Roggenbach in remaining administrative developments and organisational issues surrounding the university professor, he began his first course of lectures in the winter of 1872, teaching 17 students. In general, Althoff was the expert on French was in this capacity that, in 1879, Reichsland Premier (Oberpräsident), Eduard von Möller as prepare a full and complete codification of Alsatian law. The contract stated that Althoff and his researchers, five in all, were tasked to gather a complete collection of the laws of Alsace-Lorr then be translated into German. All of the researchers would receive a full pension to work on

The team was expressly instructed to engage in jurisprudential comparison to the highest possible standards, and as far as possible to submit data to 'objective testing', but not at the expense of comprehensiveness, until the entire map of the laws of the territory was apprehended, collected and codified. The table of contents were projected as follows:

**Volume I – Constitution and legal texts**
A. [Holy Roman] Imperial constitution
B. Constitution of Court
C. Civil Code
D. Code of Civil Procedure
E. Commercial code
F. Bankruptcy Law
G. Code of Criminal Instruction
H. Penal Code
I. Forestry Code

**Volume II – Law from the French period**
A. Until 4 August (excl.) 1870
B. From 4 August (incl.) 1870 to 24 March 1871

**Volume III – German law.**
A. From the period of the Provisional Government
B. Since the Unification of Alsace-Lorraine with the German Empire

Althoff and his researchers set to work immediately. With a massive budget, they ordered every possible source they could get their hands on, adding to Althoff’s already burgeoning library. For, even as early as : Möller had discussed the possibility of the codification project, and his ministry regularly sought counsel when confronted with complicated legal situations involving ‘conflict of laws’ between German and customary Alsatian law.

Once all of the material was gathered, the comparative-historical legal methodology proved ir effective. Across long-ruled ledgers, the jurists would list three columns along a vertical timeline: Imperial, one French, one German – they would then list each legal act, case or precedent the slotting these along the timeline. The manuscripts have the appearance of double-entry accou
gaps and spaces are left between Imperial and French law indicating when certain laws were alternative sovereignties were in force. Through this painstaking documentation, the research clear sense of not only the substantive differences between French, German and Holy Roman but also a sense of the overall historical development, or evolution, of the law as it specifically Alsace-Lorraine. The interlocking and shifting sovereignties produced a particular amalgam of jurisdictions that was unique to the Rhenish province. Not only did Althoff and his researchers method was designed precisely to determine those specificities.

Here, the power and utility of the historical legal scientific method as a form of professional apparent. As part of an imperial mission, the jurists did not sit in their armchairs and develop best to rule a colonised territory. They went out into society, and gathered all the legal preceed-textbooks that had ever been produced on the region. The results provided a heuristic window as it actually existed in all its complexity. Once differentiated, the imperial ministry could isol French laws, which were customary laws, and which were German Imperial laws alien to the t laws could then be redressed and repackaged as legacies of prior, historical traditions. Progres were justified through historical reference. Through Althoff’s research, the German Empire g; control over the legal order of Alsace-Lorraine without the locals ever knowing it.

By 1881, the handbooks of Alsatian law were printed and bound. 1,600 copies were sent aroun With his work considered among the great achievements of legal science, Althoff was promot professor, again unprecedented insofar as he still never formally acquired a doctorate. Legal s civil servants sent letters of congratulation. In the following year, Althoff was commissioned t Alsatian exam board, which provided qualifications for the civil service and legal profession. I opportunity to modernise and update expectations for jurists studying at Strassburg. The cor began, but was not completed, under Althoff’s direct supervision. In September 1882, Berlin s took charge of university and educational policy, library policy, monument building and a ran cultural services.

By the time Althoff assumed the post of undersecretary for university affairs, the German uni had transformed considerably. As rapid industrialisation was connected to the ‘fourth factor’. technological growth, universities received more and more state investment. Althoff’s respon reflected the new challenges and conflicting priorities bubbling over as state, university and s before the eyes of the world. Administering these changes to maximise the goals of several int Althoff transformed the university system into an efficient bureaucratic machine. He lobbied increases in university funding as the Prussian budget for education expanded from 9.6 millio to 26 million in 1907.

Among Althoff’s first responsibilities was redress of Bismarck’s concerns over the rapidly exp: ‘academic proletariat’ (gelehrtes Proletariat) – the result of an ‘overproduction’ of university o [notes] The Chancellor wrote: today ‘the production of teaching forces for the school has already The public interest demanded that Althoff’s ministry should take immediate measures to coun overproduction:
I have repeatedly expressed my opinion that the opposition of the Social Democrats an Communists against the everyday modern man clearly relates to these educated circles result of their upbringing which results in dissatisfaction, leading them to sympathise elements fighting the legal and social order, hoping for a change in their own situation’

The means through which Althoff and the ministry addressed Bismarck’s concerns are reveal recognisably the same practices employed during the codification of Alsatian Law. First, Althoff undersecretary, Gustav von Goßler, agreed with Bismarck’s observations, but suggested the p expansion of university enrolment was that too many students were involved in fraternities, obtaining passing marks on exams. Not enough priority was given to the gifted scholars dedicating itself for its own sake. The solution would have to involve the proper compensation of these excellents providing them, not with charity, but a living wage.

The Cultural Ministry then requested consultation with equivalent ministries in the other Ger Even within the German Empire, Althoff’s jurisdiction applied only to Prussia, not Baden, Ba Mecklenburg and so forth. The only means through which Prussian policy became German pc through the consultation and harmonisation of comparable standards and best practices, a fo centre–periphery dynamic (cf. Ben-David 1977). Insofar as higher education policy required movement of students, such inter-territorial standards of excellence were essential to maintai

These brief examples of how Althoff’s training as a jurist – in particular his application of co method – played itself out are similar to administrative practices today: consider, for example Process begun in 1999. Signatory universities and nations have committed themselves to the ‘excellence’ across a range of different national university systems. Through ‘harmonisation’ credentials, ministers and university administrators ensure the transfer of academic credentials across borders. The result is transnational mobility and degree equivalence for the professional class European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – a region that well exceeds the borders of even the sense, university policy functions as a form of state-making, ensuring the advance guard of civil lawyers, academics and bureaucrats can work with one another across borders, just as histori jurists established the preconditions of German unification between 1848 and 1871.

The Transfer of German Legal Science to America as Science

The significance of the University of Strassburg was not limited to the early career of Althoff. university was founded as an ideal ‘German’ university, in order to turn Alsatians ‘back’ into (1984). As the first university founded in Germany in 54 years, the imperial mission encourage officials, and the public to announce their idea of the ‘true’ German university. Among the incrived philosophical faculty of arts and sciences and the formal establishment of social scien Schmoller’s seminar (Grimmer-Solem 2003). In fact, the Strassburg Seminairesystem was the recognisable departmental structure in the world. As a new model, the university proved extr
By the end of the century, every university in Germany save Munich and Tübingen, had adopt Seminaresystem.

It was precisely in this period that foreign visitors, especially American university presidents: including Daniel Coit Gilman, Andrew White, G. Stanley Hall and John W. Burgess, visited Germany. The secret to their success in higher education. The timing of this is central to the further development of the entire global higher education system. Gilman visited the University of Strassburg during the autumn of 1875; he had been convinced that the university he and the American public desired was a French elitist institution similar to the grandes écoles. Upon seeing the university now constructed on the former French abutments in Strassburg, Gilman could not help but be impressed. He remarked on the impressive library and the well-equipped laboratory facilities ‘which abound in the conveniences of good scientific work’ (Franklin 1910: 240). Upon his return to America, Gilman would create a university – a graduate school – in the United States, using an endowment provided by a receptive philanthropist, Johns Hopkins.

Thus, the idealised model of the University of Strassburg was transferred across the ocean. No institution in the United States, using an endowment provided by a receptive philanthropist, Johns Hopkins.

Around the same time, in 1876, political scientist, John W. Burgess was recruited by the trustees of Columbia College to establish a German-style department of political science. While tradition and inertia were overcome, by 1880, trustee Samuel Ruggles asked Burgess to travel to Europe to gather the up-to-date for such an institution. In a letter to W. F. Wilcox, Burgess described his earlier scheme at Amherst:

> [T]he institutions, which, as models, influenced me were the Imperial University at Strassburg which had a separate Faculty for the Political Sciences, and the École libre des Sciences politiques at Paris. No American institution had any influence whatever in the matter, was then no School or Faculty of Political Science in our country'.

Burgess and the trustees at Columbia envisioned a new professional elite, comparable to the German model. In keeping with their Northern elitist vision of reform, professionalism and nationalism, a school of political science would train the coming leaders of the American nation. To achieve this, Burgess and colleagues transformed the College into a University.

Now, with the founding of this faculty of Political Science in Columbia College, a new type of professional practice emerged. Comparative-Historical Sociology as Professional Practice
Burgess’s political science was drawn directly from the decades of scholarship contributed by historical legal scientists, emphasising the role of institutions, geography and law. Adding a H
dimension drawn from Johann Bluntschli, Burgess identified the leaders of civilisation as the the Gothic tribes organised within their natural geographic home surrounding the Alps in cen
following ‘the disruption of the Roman Empire’: Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Franks and Burgundia Visigoths, Goths and Vandals, Scandinavians, Varangians and Germans.

I designated the Teutonic nations formed by the amalgamation of these races, in the di
gographical unities, with each other and with the races on which they imposed their r
therein as the bearers of modern political civilization, and endeavoured to explain the 
purpose of the colonial systems which had been established by some of them in conti
inhabited by savages or semisavages or races politically incompetent (Burgess 1934: 2

According to Burgess (1934: 248), it was the Teutonic race’s destiny to establish the modern c
Europe:

[the] final purpose of all such combinations was the development and perfection of the State, and of all such colonial arrangements the bringing of the subject peoples into rel with the civilized world and preparing them for self-government.

Justifying colonialism, spearheaded by Germanic nations, Burgess’s vision inspired some Col
who recruited him to convert Columbia College into a German-style university.

The transfer of the Strassburg model to American graduate schools contributed to the transla
historical economics across the Atlantic at the same time (Rodgers 2009). As Herbst (1972: 1;

By and large, the American representatives of the new economics accepted the opinion
and Schmoller that to seek causal relations in history that were based on numerical av
and generalizations meant to assume that men were but so many atoms, each replacea
another’.

Even decades later, a German professor, Otto Hoetzsch, visiting America noted the range of d
between German universities and American colleges. [nl][n] But, one exceptional similarity o
Hoetzsch: the Faculty of Political Sciences, which taught history, political science, sociology a
He wrote: ‘here the German model was recognizable everywhere. Seminars, reference librarie
and exactly the same procedure as with us!’ These scholars spoke fluent German and many, e
researchers, had attended seminars in Germany, including Schmoller’s seminar and lectures l
He also stated

What has pleased me most on this trip is that everywhere confirmed the strong impres
through the stream of these men and as the methods of German sciences penetrates in American life, respect and interest in the German language and culture is ascending. That bring the two peoples closer and closer.

The full political science curriculum Burgess instituted at Columbia was, in fact, nearly identical to traditional ‘classic’ education in law Althoff received at Bonn:

I. History and Political Philosophy
   a. Political and Constitutional History
   b. Legal History
   c. Political Philosophy

II. Public Law and Comparative Jurisprudence
   a. Constitutional and International Law
   b. Administrative Law
   c. Roman Law and Comparative Jurisprudence

III. Political Economy and Social Science
   a. Political Economy
   b. Science of Finance
   c. Statistics and Social Science (Small 1916: 739–46)

Students would progress through each year, beginning their training with historical research including Roman Law, as well as comparative jurisprudence methodologies. Sociology, however, was institutionalised on the periphery of central institutional focus.

The traditional history of the social sciences, in contrast, neglects this central institutional focus in its distance from later narratives of progressive social reform and academic autonomisation. Rather, emphasise the role of positivistic methods in social science, in particular quantitative research (Platt 1999; Porter 2011). Camic and Xie (1994) describe a shift in the interwar period at Columbia towards quantitative methods. The ‘new sociologists of ideas’ (Camic and Gross 2004) note the interdependency: this transition evident in anthropological, political scientific, economic and sociological research. They interpret this as a move away from traditional comparative-historical methods retained in Ch this shift in sociology to Giddings, Camic and Xie suggest Burgess himself directed this interdependence. Having reviewed Burgess’s papers in full, I have uncovered no evidence of this sort.

Rather Burgess continued to employ comparison and history in his own work (which is not to allow others to pursue the latest techniques in statistics emanating from the German historicist economics), indicating the movement toward numbers was not spearheaded by Burgess. Rather, positivist shift was indicative of the gradual diminishment of Germanism amongst the second historians and economists at Columbia in the decades surrounding the First World War.

Still, the comparative-historical method continued to be employed within institutional economic science and related fields. Sociology, however, was institutionalised on the periphery of centr...
professionalisation in government and business during the New Deal and after (Camic 2007). Social research was employed for practical and professional purposes, comparative and historical remained a central technique until at least the 1970s. This will be briefly demonstrated using the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) led by industrial economist, Clark Ke

Clark Kerr and the Carnegie Commission for Higher Education

Kerr was an industrial economist working in the post-war period, but came to prominence with his functionalist principles of labour relations and industrialisation to the University of California (Schrum 2011). The result was the ‘California Master Plan’ in which the state’s tiered higher education became a kind of ‘social mobility machine’ – a student could enter anywhere within the system and sorted them out in relation to their capacity and function. By the mid-1960s, however, Kerr was being too conservative by rebellious student radicals and too lenient by the conservative government. Reagan. He was fired by the Board of Regents in 1967, which was impeccable timing for the conservative Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT). The foundation had recently become able to write the tax code for philanthropic corporations. The CFAT was founded in 1905 to provide pension teachers, but now had increasing surpluses of capital reserves due to positive actuarial circumstances. Pensions and widows were dying off. The changed tax code, however, meant this money to be spent as soon as possible; this led to the hiring of Kerr as chairman of the newly established

Between 1969 and 1974, the CCHE produced over 160 volumes and reports, including formal statistical measures of academic research still applied today in university rankings. The commission recommended a ‘Second G. I. Bill’ to incorporate excluded populations into tertiary education and subsidised student loans, and proposed the establishment of a National Department of Higher Education. Kerr drew upon the leading experts in the field of higher education policy, including Joseph B. Reisman, Lipset and Ladd, and Talcott Parsons. In this period, social scientists were firmly at federal higher education policy, due in no small part to their participation in the ‘cultural Cold War’ and against Western ‘science’ (Saunders 2001). However, performance of this function – higher education policy – is often misrecognised by scholars due to the differential governmental philanthropy from bureaucratic state civil-service.

And yet, the CCHE responded to comparable internal and external pressures faced by Althoff in the nineteenth, including cultural imperialism, the overproduction of graduates, and the need to include excluded groups. Furthermore, both Althoff and Kerr managed university policy through a set of practices, including the production of reference books that served as black-letter law, the push for grant funding, and the harmonisation of credentials through comparative and statistical measures of excellence. Kerr expressed a vision of limitless work for social scientists:

Higher education with over 9 million students and an annual expenditure of £30 billion is an enormous enterprise it warrants continuous study. What is needed now is not the
intermittent work of commissions and study groups but the establishment of permanent groups to cooperate with government and other private organizations in helping the nation devise policies it will require in this critical area of national endeavour. [12][#N12]

But, in the early 1970s, the ideal of a National Department of Higher Education died with the resignation of its greatest advocate, Richard Nixon.

While it lasted, the CCHE effectively made national university policy through the production of books, many of which were comparative in nature. Among the best-selling texts were institutional comparisons and case studies – of community colleges in different states, for example (Clark texts included international comparisons, both contemporary (Burn 1971) and historical (Ben Kerr also enlisted ‘outside’ perspectives on American universities, including those of Alain To and Eric Ashby (1971). Indeed, Ashby’s historical interpretation provided a prediction of what would consist of in the year 2000. He projected a huge increase in student and faculty numbers accurately, in fact – sustained by funding of around 3 per cent of GNP (also accurate, though largely through individualised student loans). While noting the positive outcome of universal education, Ashby also warned this would result in ‘a brontosaurusian cumbrousness and a surfe unless the university resisted further expansion.

Indeed, because the CCHE had a professional purpose – making university policy – one can see a range of comparative and historical practices and methodologies throughout the commission’s work that became increasingly rare elsewhere in the academic social sciences. Formal comparison was applied in program evaluation of CCHE work itself, as in a document comparing CCHE recommendations with the ‘Rivlin Report’ prepared by the U.S. Department of Health, Welfare (1969).
In the same manner as Althoff prepared the codification of Alsatian law, or in his application procedures to establish the ‘Althoff System’ of university management, the CCHE lined two co of policy proposals alongside one another to determine precisely where the similarities and delay. The method was most effective as means of determining the context through which profes could be made, refined or articulated.

The comparative-historical method has since declined, not coincidentally, at the same time as of social scientists (other than economists) from professional responsibility during the past fo an institutional complex where decision-making is removed from the hands of social scientist comparative-historical method diminished despite – or perhaps, because of – increasing spec comparative-historical method within elite American sociology departments.

Epilogue: Sociology without Professional Purpose

In his well-known address to the American Sociological Association (ASA), Michael Burawoy promoted a manifesto for ‘public sociology’, which would complement existing disciplinary professional, critical and policy oriented sociology. Of the four, perhaps ‘public: most clear-cut – essentially an external outlet for ‘critical’ sociological work. One can envisage Oakland rally fielded by Berkeley graduate students and get the picture right away. Burawoy’s been much debated due to the perceived politicisation of the sociological enterprise (Brady 2005; Holmwood 2007; Lybeck 2011). However, less regularly commented upon is the relativ his distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘policy’ sociology. In the address, ‘policy sociology’ is any sociological research directed toward audiences of policymakers, typically the state. How Burawoy make of the work of the CCHE? Certainly, much of the CCHE’s correspondence was senators and the Office of the President, but the commission equally produced and made poli through their reports – in effect, codifying university policy – which was then replicated and l across the higher education sector by administrators.

‘Professional sociology’, on the other hand, is defined by Burawoy as that which ‘supplies true methods, accumulated bodies of knowledge, orienting questions, and conceptual frameworks
2005: 10). This seems to be another way of saying ‘sociological research’ in whatever way the it. Fair enough. But, what is striking about this distinction is that Burawoy effectively implies ‘professional sociologist’ is a ‘professional academic’ – in other words: sociology is ONLY acac. This is especially problematic in light of the legacy of the historical institutionalisation of soci American higher education noted above. Sociology was established as a ‘remainder discipline leftover social scientific research not already claimed by economics or political science (each 6 distinct and bounded objects in society: the economy and the state). Economics, in particular, impressive (if not necessarily welcome) process of integration and professionalisation in recei (Fourcade 2009). This is undoubtedly one of the leading causes of ‘neoliberalism’ as the logic penetrated a range of non-economic sectors. Sociologists, meanwhile, have retreated inward, either wait for policymakers to (occasionally) call on them; or, as in the case of Burawoy’s ‘pul they take their ‘critical’ lessons learned from radical salad days back to the streets, via Occupy related activist forms of agency. In each instance, the internally-oriented sociological discours outward. But, each is dependent on the prior existence of the crowds to which they address th other words, they are doomed to preach to the choir.

But, whither historical and comparative sociology in this choral movement? On the one hand, historical sociology in the 1970s through the work of Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly, Charles Ra (Skocpol 1984), American historical sociology has become a relatively refined method (Maho1 Rueschemeyer 2003). However, the academic audience and practitioner base of this form of s remains limited to a few elite centres: Yale, Harvard, UCLA, Northwestern, Michigan, Berke and a few others. Much of this research can be remarkable in depth and breadth, as evident ir proceedings of annual meetings of this sub-field, whether at the ASA or Social Science History (SSHA). However, there is no ‘professional’ or ‘policy’ outlet driving this accumulating body o the sub-field is among the most ‘internally-oriented’ forms of sociological research, content tc discussion with one another – like monks rehearsing vespers.

This insularity – which Burawoy would deem ‘most professional’ – is likely the result of two p present in the early days of the sociological enterprise. First, the level of historical knowledge participate in debates is largely absent amongst the vast majority of sociologists, as it is in soc. Unlike in Burgess’s or Althoff’s day, students and academics have not been provided with a be historical knowledge, particularly with regard to Classical history. Contemporary historical so cannot catch non-historical sociologists up on the historical data necessary to make informed the material presented. Historians work around this problem by telling stories, which socioloq similarly ill-equipped to do – perhaps due to the discipline’s preference for ‘bad writing’ (Billi

Second, due to the methodologism of recent decades, the relevant ‘cases’ covered by the sub-f become highly reified and conceptually intractable. ‘Spain’ is defined as an ‘authoritarian’ stat ‘democratic’ in 1978. As if this over-simplification could possibly capture that, or any nation’s particular history? These cases are then put into ‘truth table’ comparisons and various quasi-1 experiments are conducted using Mill’s methods of difference or similarity, despite Mill’s own insistence that these methods were inapplicable to human societies. Consequently, rarely do t comparisons lead to new theoretical development or insight beyond nominalist development – called ‘causal mechanisms’ as the field would have it (Hedström and Swedberg 1996; Maho
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Stinchcombe 1978). Again, these studies may be interesting to a lesser or great degree, but the for what might be called ‘popularisation’ or extension even within sociology itself. They require of collective disbelief in order to pursue what are essentially thought experiments often lacking subtlety, contingency or agency.

This leaves comparative-historical sociology in a difficult position vis-à-vis most of the four dimensions identified by Burawoy. Professionally and policy-wise, the sub-field cannot provide direct insight to policymakers and colleagues up on arcane historical material. Critically and ‘publicly’ engages with alternatives beyond those which have already existed. This means even a Marxist acquainted with historical materialism – would struggle to see the point in debating the cause.

American democracy with a historical sociologist who has a different theory of long-term social leafs little room for contingency and, thus, agency. They could ‘agree to disagree’ at the end of discussion, but for an activist interested in actually changing the world, such debates rightly belong in an academic conference hall. For these and other reasons – neoliberalism, perhaps above all – we can propose a way forward, carving a new range of purposes that extend beyond the present context in which sociology has no such relationship to actual social decision-making that sociologists must retreat into the specialism of comparative-historical sociology as currently practiced.

Perhaps there is reason to be more optimistic, however, in light of Monica Prasad’s recent attempts to encourage the ASA’s Comparative-Historical section to re-orient itself to policy questions and solving (Prasad 2016). On the one hand, this bold claim, and the discussion resulting from it, useful set of questions regarding the potential gains and losses the sub-field might experience if we actively pursue policy outcomes. The debate drew upon a more familiar Bourdieuian notion of ‘heteronomous’ fields (Steinmetz 2017), with the implication being the more autonomy the Undoubtedly – within scholars’ strategic competition with and against administrators, for example – ‘autonomy’ can serve as another word for ‘academic freedom’ and the right to teach and research interests the specialist expert, not the fads compelled by external power.

However, as the cases of Althoff and Kerr suggest, perhaps a more useful way of thinking about connection between professional practice and academic expertise can be drawn from Elias’s notion of ‘involvement–detachment balance’ (Elias 1987). In one direction, the civil servants and philanthropic collaborators were undoubtedly ‘involved’ within the powerful processes they were interpreting as the goals of the research determined by the imperial or federal policy context, but the research was further limited to essentially descriptive purposes. And yet, the comparative-historical sub-field is a means through which the social scientists became more ‘detached’ or ‘object-oriented’ (Elias 1987), a capacity for detachment even within highly-heteronomous conditions enabled Althoff to, for example,
Bismarck’s request to deal with overcredentialisation away from the original anti-communist civil servant’s own agenda in providing permanent fellowships for doctoral students. Indeed, recounted above demonstrates the manner in which the very act of producing handbooks con in itself – a fact well understood by the founders of the historical school of jurisprudence (Sav [1817]).

Thus, a concluding suggestion might be that it is this capacity to remain detached within heterogeneous environments that the comparative-historical method provided. And, perhaps it is this capacity been lost in our retreat into the present, engendering a state of passivity or fear in the face of heteronomous academic environments. We demand more autonomy as our academic freedom regardless of our protestations. Meanwhile, we become increasingly ‘involved’ in heated ideological projects our observations of a hostile world onto our colleagues down the corridor rather than powerful actors and institutions which actually reproduce big systems like capitalism or biopower.

Instead, perhaps we might consider whether increased heteronomy – but, on our own terms, the terms of those agendas imposed from external actors, especially the state – would be a possible step toward producing better and more effective forms of knowledge. For example, we could adapt like the UK’s ‘Impact Agenda’ that compels academics to have greater social impact outside the conference hall – by actually generating forms of social impact that are not simple expression of capitalism. Such work would require greater forms of reflexivity and capacities for detachment necessarily to produce better research outcomes, although this would likely also result – but, encourage more effective and responsible forms of professional practice.

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Notes

1. The contemporary city of Strasbourg, France was annexed by Germany in 1872 and remained part of the German Empire until 1917. During this period the German name ‘Strassburg’ is used, particularly in legal contexts, the university, which was so named: The University of Strassburg. † [#N1-ptr1]

2. Transcripts from Bonn, Geheimnis Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStAPK) VI. F. (Althoff papers), Nr. 1, 117-126 Translations by author. † [#N2-ptr1]

3. Delbrück to Althoff, Althoff papers, GStAPK, Nr 3, 3ô [#N3-ptr1]
4. Althoff papers, GStAPK, Nr 4, 19. Occasionally, he would supplement his lectures with C practicals or, in 1878, he taught one lecture on ‘Civil Legislation in the German Empire’.

5. Von Möller to Althoff, Althoff papers, GStAPK, Nr. 30, 5

6. Agreement on the Drafting of a Collection of Law for Alsace-Lorraine, Althoff papers, GStAPK, Nr. 31, 7

7. Letter von Möller to Althoff, Brassert to Althoff, Althoff papers, GStAPK, Nr. 31, 7

8. Bismarck to Althoff, 7 March 1889, GStAPK, Althoff Papers, 147, 1

9. Bismarck to Althoff, 7 March 1889, GStAPK, Althoff Papers, 147, 4

10. Letter from Burgess to Wilcox, July 1916, Chicago, University of Chicago Library, Small

11. Hoetzsch to Althoff, May 1907, Althoff papers, GStAPK, VI.HA. 419, 72 Translation by at

12. Internal Files, Kerr Memoranda, New York, Columbia University, Rare Books and Manu Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1905—1979 (CFAT), VI.HE, VI.

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