

History and sociology – the First Century

From Ranke to Weber

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Two prefatory remarks

I would like to start with two introductory remarks before I come to my topic.

1. My *first* remark is a historical one concerning the University of Bielefeld. Let me remind you that when our two faculties were founded, the relation between sociology and history as well as their collaboration was an important issue. First, you know of course that the foundation of the two faculties was connected with the launching of two new journals, the *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* and *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, which have been published since 1972 and 1976 respectively, the latter then and now explicitly understanding itself as being of interdisciplinary nature. It is already in the very first issue that we find Niklas Luhmann reviewing Wolfgang Schluchter's book *Aspekte bürokratischer Herrschaft*. But this is not the only proof of the interdisciplinary nature of the enterprise of the two faculties. In 1972 the relation between history and sociology was the object of two large collections of essays with a programmatic thrust. In both cases a scholar from Bielefeld acted as editor, and prominent members of the two faculties contributed to both volumes. Among these I count Norbert Elias, who already had good connections with Bielefeld and later, in 1978, moved to the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (*Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung*, henceforth ZiF) to live in Bielefeld for some years. I am thinking of the two volumes of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the editor of *Geschichte und Soziologie*, published in the widely appreciated NWB series (*Neue Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek*), and of Peter Christian Ludz, the editor of *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte*, published as special issue No 16 of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*. At that time, Ludz was

the political scientist at the Bielefeld Faculty of Sociology. Both volumes were a promise, and maybe the time has come to make good on this promise.

I hope you will not be too disappointed when I leave the 1970s behind and continue instead with the childhood of both our disciplines, that is with historicism and Ranke on the one hand, and Dilthey and the beginnings of sociology as a discipline in the 1890s on the other – all this with a primary focus and emphasis on the development in Germany. Of course I will not ignore Max Weber, but I am saving him till the end.

To add to your possible disappointment, I have to further admit that I have little intention to discuss what is known as »Historical Sociology«, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, with the only exception of Weber, who stands, after all, for the genealogists of »Historical Sociology«, i.e. at the beginning of the discipline. I will also stay out of the lively and programmatic debates about social history versus cultural history, about society and/or culture, macro and micro, structure and agency and so on. These debates – not hidden from the sociologists – have been conducted for two decades by the historical sciences. The Bielefeld *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* has been strongly involved in these controversies. But I want to draw your attention to a research programme which already in the 1880s eagerly promoted the »study of society and history« and which integrated the notion of culture in a certain way. The sociologist feels attracted to it because of the emphasis it puts on the question of social differentiation (cf. Tyrell 2008: 107ff.). And I think social differentiation might be a good topic for the collaboration between historians and sociologists.

I could dwell much longer on the list of things I am going to ignore, but let me stop here and move on to my second remark.

2. After World War II, German sociology declared itself, as René König put it, a *Gegenwartswissenschaft*: rooted in »modern society«, belonging to it and oriented towards »knowledge of the present«. In the same sense Helmut Schelsky spoke of sociology's »categorical concern for the present« and said its main task would be the »diagnosis of the times« (*Zeitdiagnose*).

Confronted with the accelerated modernization of modernity – to use a jargon term – sociology has since then limited its curiosity mainly to the horizon of its respective present and moves on within it. »Historical consciousness« has thus fallen by the wayside as well as the search for contact with the historical sciences. What was then left to the latter – under the name of »contemporary history« – was the collection of all the forgotten diagnoses of the times, of the sociological descriptions of past societal presents.

But – and König and Schelsky were well aware of this – there is also a need to speak of a »categorical concern for the present« felt by the sociologists living around 1900. Think of Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes* (1978, originally 1900), of Durkheim's empirical study on suicide (1951, originally 1897), which was nothing less than a sociological pathology of modernity, or remember Max Weber's plan of an empirical, sociological study on newspapers and associations (*Zeitungs- und Vereinsenquete*), not to mention what he and Sombart dubbed »modern capitalism« whose »irreversibility« was precisely the point. In the editorial of the newly founded *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (1904) we read »that capitalism is a result of a historical development which we cannot undo and which we have to accept unconditionally«.

But in Germany and »under the influence of historicism« (Otto Gerhard Oexle) on the »offspring of the modern European cultural world« – as Weber said – the concern for the present turned inevitably towards the historical and raised the question of where this »modern world« came from. How did something so improbable become possible? »What nexus of circumstances« led to this outcome – at first in a particular corner of the world, but later with global consequences? Since then this question has never been raised in the same passionate vein, with the same claim and perspective on universal history. It was »Max Weber the sociologist« as well as »Max Weber the historian« who put forward this question. To be sure, in view of such questioning one could think that the sociology of knowledge came into play here. But I will leave this aside. With regard to what separates us from Weber I will only mention one point: to use Hans Freyer's words, it is not only remarkable that sociology in this case

was incomparably »saturated with historical knowledge and historical sense«, what I find even more noteworthy is that the political and historical world of antiquity especially is always »present« as a conveniently available model for interpretation and comparison. When Weber speaks of the imperialism of the European national states, at the same time he is speaking about the Delian League.

Even if since 1900 »the light of great cultural problems« has moved on, and sociology – facing the complexities and the speed of modernity – cannot help being overwhelmingly chained to modernity, obsessed by actuality and oblivious to history, it is in my opinion nevertheless worthwhile looking back to the period when sociology and history coincided. I will stick primarily to the classic sociological triad of Simmel, Durkheim, and Weber. Each one of these three has a totally different view of the relation between sociology and history, and only Weber constitutes an unquestionable case of coincidence (cf. Gosh 2008; Firsching & Tyrell 2009).

Ranke and Weber

I am now going to discuss an example of asynchronic historical-sociological collaboration as well as a case of the sociological elaboration and continuation of an historical discovery and insight. Participants in this collaboration were Ranke and Weber. As you can't go wrong with Ranke I start with Ranke, more precisely with his early essay of 1833 »The Great Powers« (*Die großen Mächte*). Here Ranke places in a systematic context an idea that he had implicitly mentioned before in his preface to his first work *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, published in 1824. Ranke imparts to us a discovery, namely that there exists a European system of competing states which continues throughout the centuries and which always reverts into a state of equilibrium despite repeated efforts of this or that »great power« to establish supremacy. One could call this »restoration«. Ranke's finding is confirmed and made interesting by contrasting it in two ways: First, there is a contrast with the contingencies of historical events, to what imposes itself on the observer »at first sight«. Despite the changing historical ac-

tors and circumstances there is – I quote – no »chaotic tumult, warring, and planless succession of states and peoples«. ¹ Instead, the power constellations remain constant in a peculiar way (Ranke 1973: 86).

Secondly, Ranke uses this finding against the contemporary discourses (Pankoke 1984: 1004ff.) on »the social«, on the »social movement« and societal discontinuities, as they had dominated the writings of intellectuals since the French Revolution, both the conservative or counter-revolutionary and the liberal ones. What we see at work here intellectually preceded sociology whose existence as a specific scientific discipline dates back only to the 1890s (cf. Tyrell 1995). This is what Ranke had to say on the matter:

It is almost generally held that our times tend towards, and are capable only of, dissolution. Their only significance lies in the fact that they are putting an end to the unifying or shackling institutions left over from the Middle Ages. They are striding towards this goal with the certainty of an innate impulse. It is the end-product of all great events and discoveries, of our entire civilization, in fact. It also explains the irresistible inclinations to democratic ideas and institutions, which of necessity produces all the great changes which we are witnessing. It is a general movement, in which France merely preceded the other countries. All this is an opinion which can of course lead to the gloomiest prospects for the future. We believe, however, that it cannot be supported by the truth of the facts (Ranke 1973: 98f.).

I have no intention whatsoever to condemn Ranke's reactionary sentiments or to add this statement to the long list of anti-sociological remarks with which fledgling sociology was repeatedly confronted by historians. His criticism of the assumed »irresistibility« and »necessity« of the »social movement« was not wrong. Besides, he had a strong argument, one that – so to speak – lasted till 1945. But I do not want to dwell on this point. Instead, I will show how Max Weber, sociologist, social economist and historian of universal history, took up and expanded the

1 »[...] kein zufälliges Durcheinanderstürmen, Übereinanderherfallen, Nacheinanderfolgen der Staaten und Völker« (Ranke 1973: 86).

Rankean argument, thereby strongly affirming Ranke's discovery, while placing it in a different context.

Once again I am afraid you will have to endure a lengthy quotation, in this case one from a section of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* about »mercantilism«, an economic policy which not only spares capital and capital owners, but actively favors them.

There are two reasons for the fact that »mercantilism« at the beginning of modern history had a specific character and specific effects [...]: (1) the political structure of the competing states and their economies – this will be discussed later –, and (2) the novel structure of emergent modern capitalism, especially industrial capitalism which was unknown to antiquity and in the long run profited greatly from state protection. At any rate, from that time dates that European competitive struggle between large, approximately equal and purely political structures which has had a global impact. It is well known that this political competition has remained one of the most important motives of the capitalist protectionism that emerged then and today continues in different forms. Neither the trade nor the monetary policies of the modern states – those policies most closely linked to the essential interests of the present economic system – can be understood without this peculiar political competition and »equilibrium« among the European states during the past five hundred years – a phenomenon which Ranke in his first work recognized as the world-historical distinctiveness of this era (Weber 1978: 353f.).

I will offer only three short comments on the way Weber expanded Ranke's discovery. As for the first, he did it with a view to his social economics (*Sozialökonomie*). Social economics in the Weberian sense was a research programme which originated from the argument with historical materialism. It relates non-economic social fields, i.e. politics, law, religion and so on, to economics and then asks in what way they are relevant for economics, or in how far they are conditioned by economics. In our case the question is: How did the competition between European states – as a purely political constellation – influence the formation and evolution of »modern industrial capitalism«? As we have already seen, for Weber, this influence was considerable. In *Protestant Ethic* (Weber 1930,

originally 1905), too, Weber dealt with the economic relevance of non-economic givens, in that case religious ones. As for my second comment, in his remarks on Ranke Weber revealed himself as an author who is committed to the idea of social differentiation. We can see this because of his presupposition that there is a difference between politics and economics, a distinction that can and must be made. Suffice it to point to his expression »the purely political«. Of course Weber recognized also the »purely religious« or the »purely legal« and so on. Moreover, it is well known that he attributed different processes of rationalization to all these fields in the long run of history, and these processes underline the autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of law, politics, and science. As for my third comment, we encounter Weber as a world historian and comparative scholar. When Weber highlights the »world historical specificity« of the plurality and competition of European states, he always does so from a global perspective and by comparison. You will never find that Weber speaks simply of »modernity«, all the time he is speaking about the peculiarities of the occident. It is no coincidence that Weber refers to Ranke's idea, above all in his study on China (Weber 1920: 348f., 394f.). After the »period of the battling empires« China emerged as a unified empire and is thereby precisely the classic contrast to Europe. After Max Weber and later Otto Hintze, this »Eurasian« argument was often taken up when the *europäischer Sonderweg* or the »European miracle« was discussed (Jones 1981). Besides, the sociologist cannot avoid pointing to competition as a »social form. Georg Simmel's great *Soziologie* (2009, originally 1908) offered a splendid account of this phenomenon (Tyrell 2007). So much for the affiliation of Ranke with Weber.

**The *Arbeitsgebiet der Geschichte*
and Wilhelm Dilthey's bringing together of society and history**

I am not about to enter into the issues of historicism or of Ranke's famous slogan according to which each epoch is »immediate to God«. What I am going to discuss subsequently is the scope of the – to use Dietrich Schäfer's words – *Arbeitsgebiet* of that academic discipline which, since the 1830s, has successfully styled itself the »science of history« (*Geschichtswissenschaft*). As for its scope, the first question must be whose

history is to be dealt with. Right from the outset we encounter answers which center around the idea of ›humanity‹ or ›humankind‹, and ›world history‹ is thought to be the framework. One humankind, one world, one history: the singular was reigning. Any exclusion of these or those nations/peoples or world regions would be incompatible with this approach, at least in principle. »History is universal by its very nature«, said Ranke, whose own notion of ›world history‹ still heavily depended on ›God‹, in contradistinction to ›the world‹. It is remarkable that Ranke very early on confined himself on the ›inner-worldly‹ level explicitly to the ›Romanic and Germanic nations«. He emphasized their ›unity‹ and their association with each other in their respective developments (*gemeinschaftliche Entwicklung*). This unity, however, had its social environment. Before Ranke turned to the history of those nations, he cast a quick look at their ›external enterprises«, their expansionism. Ranke mentioned three stages of those ›enterprises‹: the migration of nations, the crusades and colonialism (*Pflanzungen in fremden Weltteilen*). So, what we are confronted with here is, as Hans Freyer called it, the ›world history of Europe« (*Weltgeschichte Europas*).

We find similar thoughts when we focus on time. Following the logic of historicism, there is – after having set oneself apart from the most immediate present – absolutely no temporal limit to what historians might become interested in. What belongs to the realm of history, is human life virtually »at all times and in all places«, and in all expressions of life, too, insofar as human remnants are detectable. Antiquarian interests do not know any limits. At some point, however, the distant past will turn into the subject of biology. On the other hand, the science of history in fact confined itself undoubtedly to high, i.e. literate cultures, especially the Mediterranean one. This might be inferred from what we call the period prior to the (early) high cultures. ›Pre-history‹ (*Vor- und Frühgeschichte*) is merely an extrinsic denomination from subsequent time. As far as I know, historians were in opposition to sociology, but never minded the establishment of an academic ›ethnology‹ (*Völkerkunde*) which would be concerned with illiterate cultures. In addition, the subject matter which was being dealt with was a narrow one. Of course, historicism was far

from excluding any sector of human activity from its scope. In fact, however, its main business was politics. To conclude: The 19th century type of the science of history boasted of its »illimitable« subject – as Ranke called it. Within this illimitable realm, however, it dwelled in fact only upon a comparatively small sector, the borders of which were kept more or less open.

The question now is: How does a science whose concern is illimitable fit into the whole range of sciences? How does it fit in with its neighbouring sciences? If the establishment of the science of history is due to the 19th century, how was coexistence possible between this particular science and the other ones? I am certainly not the person to tackle this problem properly. Two points, however, are striking.

First, the science of history certainly has not become the overall science with the broadest scope possible (*Integrationswissenschaft mit größtmöglicher Reichweite*, Manfred Wüstemeyer). Instead – during »the century of the nation states« – it became a science which focused on the fates of nations and states and, in addition, cultivated the history of ideas, oriented towards a sequence of different epochs.

Second, the German success story of historicism from the 1830s on consisted in its having put pressure on several neighbouring disciplines to reinvent themselves and to become historical disciplines as well (Otto Gerhard Oexle). This holds true for jurisprudence, economics, theology, the philological disciplines and the history of art. At the end of the century, Wilhelm Dilthey granted these historicized disciplines a scientific and epistemological status in their own right. He dubbed them *Geisteswissenschaften*, translated now as »human sciences«, in contradistinction to the *Naturwissenschaften*, the »natural sciences«.

Dilthey is, as you see, the very man who opened up a grand vista of cooperation between history and sociology. In 1883, his *Introduction to the Geisteswissenschaften* (Dilthey 1962) presented itself in the subtitle as an »attempt at the foundation of the study of society and history« (*Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte*). History on its own and in the singular would not do any longer. Let us put this with

Shakespeare: »Society is the happiness of life!« It is important that the notion of »society«, which Dilthey linked to the notion of »history« and which accompanied it, did not exclude the notion of »state«, as it did, for instance, for Robert von Mohl. Rather, Dilthey's notion of »society« included the political order. It signified a certain whole, a social totality, and the notion of »history« likewise signified a whole, a chronologically structured totality.

As for the subject matter of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, Dilthey talked about a »historical-social reality« (*geschichtlich-gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit*). The earlier focus on the fates of nations, states and their epochs was dismissed here, for the notion of »society« was combined with the idea of *differentiation*. What was brought home to his readers through this shift of focus was, beyond the political order, the social fields or spheres of law, economics, religion, arts and science, their respective evolutions, their separation from one another, their increasing autonomy. Dilthey used the expression »cultural systems« (*Kultursysteme*). The *Geisteswissenschaften* themselves are seen as being reactive to the differentiation of such cultural systems in order to grasp this very process on a theoretical level.

The differentiation of the particular social sciences thus did not come about by means of the theoretical intellect and its efforts to approach the socio-historical world as an object to be investigated by means of methodological analysis. Rather, the differentiation was brought about by life itself. Whenever a distinct sphere of social influences was formed and that sphere yielded a set of facts to which the activity of the individual was oriented, the conditions were present under which a theory could arise. The vast process of the differentiation of society, in which its marvellously complex structures have arisen, contained in itself both the conditions and the demands that allowed each sphere of life that had achieved a relative independence to be reflected in a theory.²

2 »Die Aussonderung der Einzelwissenschaften der Gesellschaft vollzog sich [...] nicht durch einen Kunstgriff des theoretischen Verstandes, welcher das Problem der Tatsache der geschichtlich-gesellschaftlichen Welt durch eine methodische Zerlegung des zu untersuchenden Objektes zu lösen unternommen hätte: das Leben selber vollbrachte sie. Sooft die

As if this quotation were not already sufficient, I should once again like to let Dilthey speak for himself in order to spell out the idea of differentiation. There is a passage of great emphasis to bear in mind. In this passage, we hear about something »sublime«:

What a process of differentiation in which Roman law split off the sphere of civil law, in which the medieval Church helped the religious sphere to gain full autonomy. From the activities which serve man's reign over nature to the highest creations of religion and art, the human spirit has always worked on separation, on the formation of these systems, on the development of the society's outer organisation (i.e. the state). An idea not less sublime than that which natural science can design of the origin and structure of cosmos. While individuals come and go, each of them is nonetheless a carrier and co-developer of the immense building of socio-historical reality.³

Ausscheidung eines gesellschaftlichen Wirkungskreises eintrat und dieser eine Anordnung von Tatsachen hervorbrachte, auf welche die Tätigkeit des Individuums sich bezog, waren die Bedingungen da, unter denen eine Theorie entstehen konnte. So trug der große Differenzierungsprozeß der Gesellschaft [...] in sich selber die Bedingungen und zugleich die Bedürfnisse, vermöge deren die Abspiegelung eines jeden relativ selbständig gewordenen Lebenskreises derselben in einer Theorie sich vollzog« (Dilthey 1962: 39).

- 3 »Welch ein Vorgang von Differenzierung, in welchem das römische Recht die Privatrechtssphäre absonderte, die mittelalterliche Kirche der religiösen Sphäre zu voller Selbständigkeit verhalf! Von den Veranstaltungen ab, welche der Herrschaft des Menschen über die Natur dienen, bis zu den höchsten Gebilden der Religion und Kunst arbeitete sich so der Geist beständig an Scheidung, Gestaltung dieser Systeme, an der Entwicklung der äußeren Organisation der Gesellschaft. Ein Bild nicht weniger erhaben als jedes, das Naturforscher von Entstehung und Bau des Kosmos entwerfen kann: während die Individuen kommen und gehen, ist doch jedes von ihnen Träger und Mitbildner an diesem ungeheuren Bau der geschichtlich-gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit« (Dilthey 1962: 87).

You will not find any research program superior to this noble and cogent vision of how the sciences of history and sociology may be bound together.

When I say »sociology«, I mean a science which centers around the notions of »society« and »differentiation«. That type of sociology, however, which Dilthey had in mind in his own time, i.e. a sociology à la Comte and Spencer, was *not* accepted by him in the circle of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The socio-historical roots of that type of sociology lay – Dilthey was very clear about this – »in the upheavals of European society since the last third of the 18th century« (Dilthey 1962: 90). What excluded that type of sociology from being a *Geisteswissenschaft* was its nomothetic approach (*Generalisierungswut*). The fundamental duality of sciences from the point of view of German historicism – with history and sociology not only being separated, but located on opposite sides of that duality – starts here, too. Furthermore, the idolatry of progress was something that Dilthey disapproved of under the title of *Geschichtsphilosophie*. Sociology and »philosophy of history« in that sense were later on mentioned like twins. Still, Dilthey did not oppose Simmel's sociology which started – unquestionably in the vein of that of Spencer's – with a book on social differentiation (Simmel 1890). Dilthey had no difficulties with the »historical school of national economics«. There was room for what this school had to contribute to an elaboration of the »social question« within the range of his *Geisteswissenschaften*. We have got Gustav Schmoller's own testimony to this in his positive review of Dilthey's »Introduction«.

Sociology since the 1890s

In the second half of the 19th century, especially towards its end, we experience in Germany on the part of the historical and political sciences an astonishing hardening both against the attempt to put the social and the material on the intellectual agenda, and against a disjunctive way of thinking which was keen on separating state and society, and particularly against socialist ideas. In this context one has – regarding the relation between historical and social sciences – spoken of the »German schism« (*deutsches Schisma*). Representative of this situation was Treitschke's fierce

criticism of Robert von Mohl's project of a *Gesellschaftswissenschaft* in its own right and in opposition to political science (*Staatswissenschaft*). Treitschke insisted on *unity*: »the state is one nation [*volke*] unified in living together. There is not even a distinction of reason between nation and state in concept.« With similar fierceness the historian Dietrich Schäfer opposed the project of a *Kulturgeschichte*, proposed by Eberhard Gothein, who let himself be inspired by Dilthey and Jacob Burckhardt. Gothein had no intention of disputing the role of the state, but he wanted the »cultural systems« of law, economics, religion and so on to be considered in their own right, too. But Schäfer rejected any intrusion of such »a study of society« into the genuine field of history (*eigentliches Arbeitsgebiet der Geschichte*), whereas he insisted on the scientific primacy of political historiography. It was due to Dietrich Schäfer's blatantly anti-Semitic assessment that Georg Simmel was not given a professorship in Heidelberg. I prefer to keep silent on the horrors of the infamous *Lamprechtstreit* in the 1890s and the ferocious attacks by historians on Sombart's book *Modern Capitalism* (1902). It hardly comes as a surprise that the disputatious political historians had a strong dislike for sociology. For the purpose of illustration I will only mention the word *Wortmaskenverleihinstitut*, which you will, I hope, forgive me for not even trying to translate.

It is now time to talk about the »sociology« which in the 1890s took energetic steps to become a science and discipline by its own legitimacy. Some evidence for this is offered by the projected journals of the time. There is Durkheim's review *L'Année sociologique*, which got under way in 1898, but also Georg Simmel's failed plan to initiate an international and polyglot quarterly with the title *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*. For years it was one of his most favourite projects (Rol 2009). What is, first, interesting for us is that the sociological developments of that time were scarcely affected by the already mentioned horrors of the *Lamprechtstreit*, raging among the historians, although the dispute turned on the question of »the social and collective conditions. There are reasons for this which amongst other things are connected with the »internationality« of the sociology of that time. Indeed, the last decade of the 19th century was the most international by far in the history of the discipline, and there were

probably also quantitative reasons to account for that. Another explanation would be that sociology did not primarily try to distinguish itself from history. It was not history as an already established discipline with which the newcomer, conscious of its own and different merits, wanted to be of equal standing; for Durkheim it was psychology.

Sociology's ambition to be acknowledged as a science and an autonomous discipline was, especially in Germany, tantamount to separating itself from the narrow notion of the »social«, as it was connected with the »social question« or socialism, and to giving the notion a more general and broader meaning. Simmel achieved this by means of his category of »interaction« (*Wechselwirkung*), and it was characteristic that he planned his future journal to be free of all contents concerning »practical social policy«. Of course, this did not preclude a whole and important chapter in his *Soziologie* (2009) from being dedicated to »the poor«. The interaction type of sociality was not Durkheim's cup of tea, what he was interested in was »the social« as something collective or as a society which integrates everything social. But thereby sociology had added another problem, one of the kind that – as I have mentioned before – also applied to the historical sciences, although with a more temporal emphasis. If sociology declares itself to be qualified to treat »the social«, everything social, it burdens itself, to use Ranke's expression, with the illimitability of its scope on the one hand, and on the other with the problem of the extent to which it is compatible with the other human and social sciences which also deal with social conditions, like law, politics or economics. How did both authors face the problem? I will now briefly sketch the very different solutions proposed by Durkheim and Simmel, and I will do this with regard to the historical sciences. One thing, however, is for sure: none of these solutions took refuge under the roof which Dilthey erected for the study of society and history.

As for Simmel, the solution he found in 1894 for »the problem of sociology« and which he thought to be internationally acceptable was a modest one, carefully fitted to the question of how sociology could peacefully coexist with other scientific disciplines. He settled on a less ambitious notion of society, and it was one of his main concerns not to

intrude »into the subject matters of established sciences« (Eberhard Gothein). Sociology does not lay claim to subject matters of its own, to content which can only be addressed by it, instead it is a science of »second order«, a »processing« science which deals with »the results of historical research, of anthropology, statistics and psychology as if they were only semi-manufactured products«.

Such processing is achieved by means of the distinction between content and form, so that the analysis of the forms of social interaction (i.e. competition, power, division of labour etc.) is the core business of sociology. As all this is well-known, I can leave it at this point. Just one final remark: Simmel's sociology has certainly made its impact, but there were almost no direct successors to it.

Regarding historiography, whose methodology Simmel treated separately, I will make only three points: Firstly, there is plenty of historical material in Simmel's sociology, material he extracted from relevant literature but used mainly for illustrative purposes. This almost playful approach to history was rather resented by his contemporaries. There was one thing he could have done to give his sociology a stronger historical turn, but which he did only rarely: he could have historicized the forms of interaction in a more prominent way. To go in this direction might have been a promising enterprise. Secondly, formal sociology does not allow what Durkheim and Weber took for granted: the elaboration of a sociology of law, religion or the family and the description of longterm processes in the respective fields. For this we only find scattered hints in Simmel, and it takes a certain effort to put them together. Of course this does not apply to the *Philosophie des Geldes*, although the book was not intended to offer a sociology of economics. Thirdly, the sociology of forms puts the conception of social differentiation back to second rank, there remains, however, enough of it, especially in the *Philosophie des Geldes*. Here the historian could reap a rich harvest.

Now let's turn to Durkheim and the paradoxical case of an author who has the reputation of being an ahistorical theorist, but whose sociological school has nevertheless left its marks on the historical sciences; in this context I am thinking especially of Marc Bloch and the *école des annales*.

And most importantly, Durkheim was the student of a historian whose main concern was the history of the institutions. I am speaking of Fustel de Coulanges whose famous *La Cité antique*, published in 1864, deeply influenced his student. Even in his late sociology of religion Durkheim cannot deny his intellectual roots. Furthermore, Durkheim was a sociologist who – with regard to society as a nation – attributed an important task to history: »Its function is to place societies in the state of remembering their past; this is the eminent form of the collective memory«.

On the other hand, conspicuously the Durkheim School avoided any contact with historiography by turning to ethnology, a tendency which has increased since the turn of the century. Durkheim's book on religion dealt with the natives of Australia. Far removed from »religious evolution« or the history of religion, the natives were meant to bear witness to »an essential and perennial aspect of mankind«. You see: the relation of Durkheimian sociology to history is manifold, but it remains nevertheless detached. For the rest, Durkheim was so convinced of his sociological mission that he refused to accept history and sociology as two different and autonomously coexisting disciplines. In the case of religious studies, too, he proclaimed »that history ceases to be itself and becomes a branch of sociology. It merges with dynamic sociology.«

Max Weber once again

Nevertheless, Max Weber is a totally different cup of tea, here sociology and history become unified in one person. Which does not mean that they merge, on the contrary, they remain distinguished from each other, but they are also each other's complement. It was only in his last decade that Weber understood himself as a sociologist, and he continued to put social economics first (cf. Tyrell 1994). If he believed that there was one discipline which sociology had to be distinguished from, this discipline surely was history.

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