

THE IMPACT OF TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM ON EARLY GERMAN AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

Dmitri N. Shalin

The impact of German idealism on twentieth-century European social thought is well established (Rickert [1902] 1962, pp. 8, 102; Royce 1919, p. 55; Lukács [1922] 1971, p. 176; Marcuse 1961, pp. 323–388). Much less appreciated is the extent to which transcendental idealism influenced early American sociology. Yet this influence was far from negligible or spurious. A number of American social thinkers—Mead, Park, Small, Thomas—studied in Germany, where they obtained philosophical training similar to that received by the likes of Weber and Simmel (Gouldner 1970; Rock 1979; Shalin 1986a). Many substantive ideas developed by these and other American scholars (e.g., Baldwin, Cooley, Ellwood) bear the imprint of transcendental idealism. To be sure, the German idealist tradition underwent serious revisions on American soil, but its formative role in the genesis of early American sociology cannot be denied.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the connection between nineteenth-century transcendental idealism and early twentieth-century sociological thought in Germany and the United States. Its central thesis is that the idealist perspective on reason and reality as mutually constitutive is endemic to

Current Perspectives in Social Theory, Volume 10, pages 1–29.

Copyright © 1990 by JAI Press Inc.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

ISBN: 1-55938-063-2

the German tradition of cultural science and early interactionist sociology in the United States. An argument is also made that there is an ideological affinity between early American and German sociological thought, which reflects its proponents' ambivalence toward modernity and desire to find a middle path between the political extremes of the right and the left.

A few words on the nomenclature adopted in the paper may be useful. Grouping together such diverse authors as Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer and the young Marx is sure to raise some eyebrows. Bringing all these authors under the heading of "German idealism," "*Identitätsphilosophie*," "romantic philosophy" or "transcendental idealism," is not intended to minimize the diversity of their respective views. Nor do I consider inconsequential the differences between Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert, Simmel and Weber as exponents of the cultural science tradition in German social thought. The same goes for Cooley, Mead, Thomas, Park and Znaniecki, who are treated here as representatives of interactionist sociology in the United States. The emphasis here is on what these authors share, and particularly, on the common stance they took against classical rationalism and the radically new way in which they approached the problem of order. The usefulness of the proposed nomenclature will ultimately depend not on how well it mirrors ontological reality ("thing in itself," as transcendental idealists would say), but on the insight it affords and further research it could foster.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

"The object severed from the subject is dead" (Hegel 1948, p. 303). This Hegelian formula is a cornerstone of all transcendental philosophy. Romantic idealists would repeat it again and again, accusing each other of not being radical enough in carrying out its implications. It roused idealist imagination. It called for action. It became a battle cry for those refusing to disclaim responsibility for the world out there. Above all, it marked a break with the dualism of the classical rationalist tradition. The question that concerned transcendental idealists was whether the process of knowing enters into the knowledge–reality equation as an independent variable, or whether it is a constant whose value is irrelevant to the fundamental relationship between knowledge and reality. According to the mechanistic philosophy, the knower's presence in the world is irrelevant for the world's objective being. The subject's preconceptions or idols may disturb the picture of reality but they do not affect its objective status. For transcendental idealists, objective reality is always informed by the subject. A thing in itself is objective to the extent that it becomes an object of human activity, an object of knowledge:

What things may be by themselves we know not, nor need we care to know, because, after all, a thing can never come before me otherwise than as phenomenon (Kant [1781] 1966, p. 211).

The thing is nothing in itself: it only has significance in relation, only through the ego and its reference to the ego (Hegel [1807] 1967, p. 791–820). Nothing could ever come to exist independently of us, for everything is necessarily related to our thinking (Fichte [1794] 1970, p. 71).

The subject is thinkable only in relation to the object, the object only in relation to the subject (Schelling [1795] 1911, p. 17).

It is only through my activity that any being is possible for me (Novalis 1960, p. 294)

The whole of this world . . . is only object in relation to the subject, perception of the perceiver. . . . The ego is the ground of the world or of the non-ego, the object (Schopenhauer ([1819] 1969, pp. 3, 33).

Transcendental idealism, also known as *Identitätsphilosophie* or the philosophy of identity, was built around the assumption that everything we discern in the world bears the primordial mark of our own subjectivity. It is only insofar as the self identifies itself with a not-self, according to transcendentalists, that the latter comes into existence as a meaningful object. This idealist thesis may present some difficulties for natural scientists, who are accustomed to thinking of matter as antedating mind, but for the student of society it poses no insurmountable problem. To say that social reality is objective insofar as individuals identify with it, that there is no social object without a subject, is almost to state a truism: roles, classes and institutions commonly found in the social domain have no existence apart from the individuals who identify with them. Slaves and masters, noblemen and commoners, workers and capitalists—all these social species exist because humans follow institutional prescriptions and identify with social roles. When they don't, the objective order of society is bound to crumble.

It is this remarkable fit between the premises of *Identitätsphilosophie* and the ways of human society that led Rickert ([1902] 1962, p. 102) to speculate that transcendental idealists derived their general problematics from the social domain, which they afterwards universalized and extended to nature at large. Whether or not this conjecture is valid, there is no doubt that transcendental idealists were fully aware of the broader political significance. The idea that objective reality is of our own making, that the subject is responsible for the world out there, took shape in a specific socio-historical context. Transcendentalist abstractions were conceived at a time when people began to question the traditional social order. The French Revolution cast serious doubt about feudal institutions and their inherent rationality. It rendered transparent the historical nature of the social order and illuminated the relativity of the individual and society. It also inspired the idealist metaphysics that returned to man authorship over the historical script. Royce (1919) elucidated the political significance of this idealist metaphysics:

When the Revolution came, many institutions which long seemed to be things in themselves, showed that they were nothing but phenomena. And when new constitutions and social orders had to be planned, the spirit of the age emphasized the fact that, at least in the social world, it is the office of human intelligence to impose its own forms upon the phenomena, and to accept no authority but that of the rational self (p. 277).

What makes transcendental or romantic idealism interesting for the present inquiry is its distinctly sociological dimension. "In a very definite sense we can speak of this philosophy as one which is social in its character" (Mead 1936, p. 147). Indeed, transcendental idealists often talked about the subject, the ego, but they conceived of it not as an individual self but as part of a larger social or absolute self, which transcends the idiosyncrasies of particular individuals and bears the clear mark of society. The individual is judged fully rational when he places himself in the perspective of the whole and acts as its representative. The transcendental a priori in terms of which the individual frames his thoughts and actions is binding on all member of the community of rational beings. Every time the individual attempts a universal judgment, according to Kant ([1790] 1951, p. 137), "he disregards the subjective private conditions of his own judgment . . . and reflects upon it from a *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by placing himself at the standpoint of others)." In the words of Schlegel (Kluckhohn 1925, p. 5). "*Gemeinschaft*, pluralism, is our innermost essence." What these statements point to is that sociality and rationality are dialectically intertwined. To generate and successfully maintain objective social reality humans have to ground their actions and thoughts in some transcendental a priori, which, in turn, they possess (or as post-Kantian idealists would rather have it, acquire) only as members of a human community. Reason and society are mutually constitutive. The ego or self is a monad, a microcosm, that reflects the relations with other individuals and carries within itself a symbolic code of the social universe as a whole. The self's seemingly unique identity is patterned by society, while the unity of society is sustained through the self-identities of its members. The self and society are parts of the same continuum, polar images of the ongoing process of production of social reality as objective and meaningful. As such, they depend on each other for every moment of their historical being. When severed from each other, they turn into vacuous polarities:

. . . This world has an existence only in reference to the knowing subject's consciousness as its necessary supporter. Thus everyone in this . . . regard is the whole world itself, the microcosm. . . . And what he thus recognizes as his own inner being also exhausts the inner being of the whole world, of the macrocosm (Schopenhauer [1819] 1969, p. 162).

The self perceives itself at the same time that it is perceived by others. . . . Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself . . . by the very fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or "recognized" (Hegel [1807] 1967, pp. 661, 229).

. . . Only by meeting with, so as to be resisted by, *Another*, does the Soul become a *Self*. What is Self-consciousness but to know myself at the same moment that I know another, and

to know myself by means of knowing another, and vice-versa (Coleridge [circa 1820], quoted in Coburn 1974, p. 32).

Society is nothing but social life: an invisible, thinking, and feeling person. Each man is a small society. . . . The folk is an idea. We have to become a folk. Each fully developed man is a folk in miniature. The true folk-mindedness is man's highest goal (Novalis 1960, pp. 431–432).

Above all we must avoid postulating "Society" again as an abstraction *vis-a-vis* the individual. The individual is *the social being*. . . . Just as society itself produces *man as man*, so is society *produced* by him. Activity and mind, both in their content and in their *mode of existence*, are social: *social* activity and *social* mind. . . . Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual . . . is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society for itself (Marx [1844] 1964, pp. 137–138).

The picture of society implicit in these statements contrasts sharply with the traditional image of the social whole symbolized by the Leviathan—a super-organic body with a mind of its own, sacrificing humans at will and enduring indefinitely, as its members, oblivious to the life of the whole, come and go. Nothing could be further from the idealist vision of man in society and society in man. The Leviathan is a reified abstraction; endowed with a power to coerce, it easily passes for a thing in itself, yet it is only an abstraction, and a historical one at that—it derives its being from the constitutive power of the historically-situated individuals. Whatever reality social objects have, they owe it to the work of understanding. Whatever generative power is found in mind is due to society. The relationship between mind and society is a dialectical one. Society derives its objective reality from its members' conscious activity, while consciousness performs its constitutive work because it relies on a priori schemes furnished by society. Mind and society are mutually constitutive: mind is the subjective being of society; society is the objectified activity of mind.

"Man is the world of man, the state, society," exclaimed Marx ([1841–1842] 1967, p. 131) in one of his romantic moments. What he meant, though, was not that man is free to impose himself on others, do what he pleases, but that he is responsible for the fate of the social whole, that nothing should be allowed to pass into objective social being without the test of reason. All too often social reality fails to pass this test; it grows oppressive, unresponsive; it becomes increasingly reified. The romantic idealists of the second generation, those who experienced the revolutionary tide of the 1830s and 1840s, were acutely conscious of this fact. The question they urged upon every rational being was, "What [do] I allow to be made of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the law, the state" (Stirner [1845] 1971, p. 55). This was a truly revolutionary question, insofar as revolution is a crisis of objectivity precipitated by humans refusing to abide by the customary identities handed over to them by society. And because the structure of society is identical with the structure of the self, a change in one implies a change in the other. The act of revolutionary transcendence is an act of self-transcendence, a liberating endeavor

that breaks the yoke of circumstances and establishes the individual as a self-governing, free, or to use a favorite romantic expression, “species being”:

. . . One good consequence which I expect from revolution is that individuals will see the necessity of individual effort, that they will . . . purge off . . . the error of attributing to governments a talismanic influence over our virtues and happiness, as if governments were not rather effects than causes. It is true that all effects react and become causes, and so it must be in some degree with governments; . . . governments are more the *effect* than cause of that which we are (Coleridge [1798] 1948, p. 330).

Circumstances make men as much as men make circumstances. . . . The materialistic doctrine concerning the changing circumstances and education forgets that circumstances are changed by men. . . . The coincidence of the changing circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can only be comprehended and rationally understood as revolutionary practice (Marx [1845–1846] 1963, pp. 29, 197–198).

Bold and defiant as these statements sound, they should not be taken as a call for the violent overthrow of the contemporary social order. Transcendental idealists eschewed any appeal to force, other than the force of reason, as a means of social reconstruction. The dialectical form of expression characteristic of this philosophy was indicative of its proponents’ desire to avoid the political extremes of the right and the left. It reflected the profound ambivalence of contemporary thinkers toward the world ushered in by the French Revolution—the world that did away with the illiberal tradition of the past but brought about new forms of bondage—economic, social and political. Transcendental idealism could be seen as a conscious attempt to mediate between the radical thesis and the conservative antithesis, with dialectics serving as a convenient device of safeguarding (at least in theory) the truth that the conflicting ideological agendas of this revolutionary era had to offer. Hegel’s ([1821] 1977, p. 10) famous formula, “*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational,*” hinted at the possibility of transforming reality by transforming the underlying rationality. If reality’s objective status is contingent upon the subject’s unreflexive commitment to certain a priori categories, then transcending the present order requires not the destruction of the world out there, but critical self-reflection and a thorough reappraisal of the rational grounds of one’s conduct. This idealist emphasis on the curative powers of reason and the living continuum of mind, self and society found its expression in early twentieth-century German and American social thought.

THE CULTURAL SCIENCE TRADITION IN GERMANY

The rise of interpretative sociology in Germany coincided with the revival of interest in transcendental idealism. In the late nineteenth century, Dilthey subjected the idealist heritage to a thorough reexamination with the express purpose

of developing a program of cultural studies. An intimate familiarity with the works of transcendentalist predecessors was also common among Dilthey's followers. Simmel wrote a dissertation on Kant. Windelband published an influential text on the history of philosophy. Weber, just as did nearly every other interpretative thinker, frequently quoted the romantic idealists. Rickert ([1902] 1962, p. 8) studied transcendental idealists at length and vigorously contended that "the German idealist philosophers have already provided the cultural sciences with fundamental concepts." Why did early twentieth-century cultural scientists pay so much attention to transcendental idealism? The answer to this question had much to do with the ambivalence toward modernity that they shared with their philosophical predecessors.

The proponents of the cultural science tradition were acutely aware that bourgeois liberalism ushered in by the French revolution did not live up to its promise. Capitalism and classical liberalism proved to be fully compatible with economic and political bondage. In some respects, the plight of the workers in a capitalist society turned out to be worse than it had been under the feudal conditions of legal bondage. Economic progress failed to alleviate economic ills, giving credence to the socialists' claim that the capitalist order must be dismantled altogether if the social question was to be solved. The multiple failures of capitalist society were very much on the mind of the German intellectuals who founded the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*. The founders of the Verein were convinced that "the unrestricted play of contrary and unequally strong private interests does not guarantee the common welfare, that the demands of the common interests and of the humanity must be safeguarded in economic affairs, and that the well-considered interference of the state has to be called upon early in order to protect the legitimate interests of all" (Herbst 1965, p. 144). In their attempt to advance a more equitable political and economic system, members of the Verein eschewed the political extremes of the radical left and the conservative right, showing the distinct pattern of ideological ambivalence. Their ultimate objective was, in the words of Hughes (1958, p. 294), "to achieve by more conservative means the social justice at which the Marxists aimed." The desire to advance the cause of social reconstruction by conservative means is clearly visible in the works of interpretative thinkers. It can be seen in Weber, himself a member of the Verein, who rejected the "ethics of ultimate ends" with its belief in the efficacy of "the last violent deed" and embraced the "ethics of responsibility" (Weber 1946, pp. 120, 122). It looms large in Simmel's (1950, pp. 64–84) critique of "negative freedom" and the dialectical-mediatory way in which he treated social conflict. And it is palpable in Rickert's steadfast refusal to endorse the platform of the political right and the political left. The ambivalence toward modernity so common among interpretative sociologists is evident in their concern with the leveling tendencies inherent in democratic politics and the ossifying proclivities of the bureaucratized social orders. The critique of bureaucratic rationalization that occupied so much place in the works of interpretative

thinkers was a continuation of the idealists' fight against reification and alienation. The diagnosis in both cases was essentially the same: reason's unreflexivity is the ultimate source of human misery and bureaucratic ossification. The human spirit discerns as external and alien what is in effect the product of its labor; humanity must, therefore, assume responsibility for the way things are. It is in the power of reason to reclaim its authorship over the world out there, to break out of the "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationalization. Whatever else interpretative sociologists sought to accomplish, they were searching for an answer to the burning question of the day: How to transform society via rational discourse. This question led them to the rich legacy of transcendental idealism and a profoundly novel way of treating cultural phenomena in conjunction with the historically situated human agency.

Simmel (1971, p. 6) asked—"How is society possible?"—in his famous essay of the same title, and the very form of his question harks back to Kant's ([1783] 1950, p. 65) query—"How is the nature itself possible?" "The *objective* validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively upon the ordering of the given reality according to categories that are subjective in a specific sense, namely, in that they present the *presuppositions* of our knowledge" (Weber 1949, p. 110). This is exactly the message transcendentalists sought to convey when they claimed, "Had I not harbored the world within me by anticipation, I would have remained blind with seeing eyes. . . . The highest wisdom is to realize that every fact is already a theory" (Goethe [1826] 1907, p. 125; 1949, p. 124). We read in Dilthey (1976, pp. 201, 195) about "the human-social-historical world." "the mind-constructed world," "the objectifications of life," and are inescapably reminded of Schleiermacher ([1800] 1957, p. 62), "A man belongs to the world he helped to create; his will and his thought are all absorbed in it." Obvious as these parallels are, they should not be taken to mean the interpretative thinkers applied idealist categories to cultural phenomena mechanically. The Kantian question—"How is the unity of nature possible?"—yielded a different answer when applied to society. For the unity of the social whole is not just a theoretical construct produced by the sociologist's synthetic categories, but also a concrete historical product generated by individuals comprising a given social universe. Unlike the natural scientist, the social researcher deals with objects that happen to be subjects, sense-making creatures, capable of communicating with others, comprehending society as a whole, and guiding one's actions with reference to it. Society is reflected in its individual members, and it is only because it is present in individual minds that it is a truly human society:

Societal unification needs no factors outside its own component elements, the individuals. . . . The unity of society is directly realized by its own elements because these elements are themselves conscious and synthesizing units (Simmel 1971, p. 7).

Society owes its objective reality—its structure, unity and purpose—to the mind. But the structure of the human mind is, in turn, informed by society. This does not necessarily mean that the subjects are aware of the a priori assumptions in terms of which they mold the world around them. It is the peculiarity of the transcendental domain that its content, while crucial for generating a unity, escapes the light of consciousness, that “the synthesis of ‘social being’ ” (Simmel 1971, p. 18) is accomplished without individuals being aware of their constitutive powers. A fine-spun network of a priori assumptions and categories serves as a ground plan, following which the understanding generates the social order. This order presents itself to the mind as a bare fact, yet its facticity is apparent: social facts and the social orders they comprise are brought into being by the work of our understanding. Humans continuously mold themselves into social objects by subsuming each other under familiar categories, and in doing so, they generate a social reality. When the individuals withdraw their commitment from this reality, when they refuse to abide by the time-honored classifications and identify with customary roles, the social reality loses its objectivity. Expressed in the language of transcendentalism, the social order is not a thing in itself or *noumenon*, but a thing for us or *phenomenon*—an object in relation to concrete historical subjects.

This essentially idealist outlook entailed a vision of society that contrasted sharply with the classical one. According to the traditional view, the individual is a full member of the social body to the extent that he renounces authorship over his actions and surrenders his right to follow his own judgment. He is an actor, a role-player, carrying out the will of society. The true author here is the *stare*, the Leviathan, who owns the actions of its subjects and assures their compliance with the demands of the whole. For the interpretative sociologist, by contrast, “society is certainly not a substance, nothing concrete but an *event* [and] one should properly speak, not of society, but of *sociation*” (Simmel 1950, pp. 11, 10). Interpretative social science demanded that all macro-social phenomena be reduced to their microscopic substratum—individual actions. “. . . Such concepts as ‘state,’ ‘association,’ ‘feudalism,’ and the like,” insisted Weber (1946, p. 55), “designate certain categories of human interaction. Hence it is the task of sociology to reduce those concepts to ‘understandable’ action, that is, without exception to the actions of participating individual men.” “The large systems and the super-individual organizations that customarily come to mind when we think of society,” concurred Simmel (1950, p. 10), “are nothing but immediate interactions that occur among men constantly, every minute, but that have crystallized as permanent fields, as autonomous phenomena.”

The vision of society entailed in this interpretative mode of reasoning is “generative,” meaning society is pictured as a historical product, whose being is contingent on the ongoing efforts and interpretative skills of its members. The opposition between the external, objective being of society and the internal,

subjective being of the individual is thereby removed, or at least mitigated: “The ‘within’ and the ‘without’ between individual and society are not two unrelated definitions but define together the fully homogeneous position of man as a social animal” (Simmel 1971, p. 17). This is not to say that the state and society are ephemeral and can be wished away at will. Once generated, they “attain their own existence and their own laws, and may even confront or oppose spontaneous interaction itself” (Simmel 1950, p. 10). But the appearance of “thinghood” that society exhibits is misleading: social institutions owe the obdurate qualities to the mind’s interpretative labor, to the continuous flow of individual action grounded in a culturally framed and historically transmitted *a priori*. When action stops, society loses its existence as an objectively meaningful whole: “A ‘state’ . . . ceases to exist in a sociologically relevant sense whenever there is no longer a probability that certain kinds of meaningfully oriented actions will take place” (Weber 1964, p. 118).

An important aspect of the interpretative approach is its circularity: the properties of the social whole are explicated here through the prism of its parts, while the properties of the part are derived from the whole. The individual manifests himself as a living incarnation of society, while society is presented as the generalized expression of the individual life. Social institutions stand and fall within individual’s readiness to grant them objectivity, but the ability to impose a rational structure on the world, to unify it into a meaningful social whole, is itself a product of society. In Simmel’s words ([1907] 1978):

The mind creates the world—the only world that we can discuss and that is real for us. . . . But on the other hand, this world is also an original source of the mind. . . . The mind with all its forms and contents is a product of the world—of the world which is in turn a product of the mind” (pp. 112—113).

And again, “Man, as something known, is made by nature and history; but man, as knower, makes nature and history” (Simmel 1971, p. 4). Similarly, Dilthey (1976, pp. 181–191) argued that the social world is produced by understanding, that cultural reality is “a mind-constructed world,” that the individual is its sole producer, and at the same time, insisted that man is a product of his era, “determined by his position in time and space and in the interaction of cultural systems and communities.” To understand man’s being in the world, therefore, one had to grant causality to both and explain each in terms of the other:

Thus the method works in a dual direction. Directed towards the particular it moves from the part to the whole and back from it to the part. . . . The whole must be understood in terms of its individual parts, individual parts in terms of the whole” (Dilthey 1976, pp. 190, 262).

The circle involved in this reasoning is not accidental. It can be understood as a special case of what Schelling ([1799] 1978, p. 18) called “the circle of

knowledge” or what is better known under the name popularized by Schleiermacher ([1805–1833] 1977) as “their hermeneutical circle.” The term refers to a circular path the mind is forced to travel in pursuit of knowledge, for example, from the elementary components of the text, to its overall design, to a historical tradition in which the text was conceived, and then back to the elementary units of sense:

Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge that is scientific must be constructed in this way (Schleiermacher 1978, p. 113).

The precept applied to all objects shaped by the human mind, which, for the post-Kantian idealists, meant entire nature. Interpretative sociologists explicitly extended this insight to social reality. Their theory retains the dialectical circularity endemic to transcendental idealism, in that society is treated here as an artifact produced by individuals’ interpretative activities, while these activities are accounted for as fundamentally social in their origin and form. Interpretative theory requires that the research follow a dialectical path, explicating the whole through the interaction of its parts, and the part through its relation to the whole. This, in turn, necessitates a shift in the focus of sociological analysis from macroscopic (institutional, structural) givens to the microscopic (dispositional, conscious) processes. Society as a whole does not thereby escape interpretative analysis, as Weber’s theory of Western capitalism would readily testify. Rather, it is systematically reduced to the predicative activities and interpretative practices of its members, meaning, conscious beings endowed with the power to impart rational—logical qualities to social reality.

The shift in sociological analysis from external social structures to their “aprioristic conditions” (Simmel 1971, p. 7) posed a host of new methodological problems. The chief among them was that the object of interpretative sociology did not lend itself readily to traditional observational methods. The content of the transcendental domain could not be readily seen, touched or measured; it is not a “fact” in the classical sense, a thing out there subsisting independently from the subject. In the transcendental domain, “every fact is man-made and, therefore, historical; . . . it is known because understood” (Dilthey 1976, p. 192). The realization that cultural objects are different, that their very existence is contingent on the a priori forms of mind, compelled Dilthey’s famous distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. Whereas the natural sciences are based on nomothetic procedures and logico-deductive methods, the human sciences favor idiographic procedures designed to assist in penetrating the aprioristic foundations of cultural realities. Once again, we can trace this distinction to transcendental idealism, whose proponents were the first to criticize the nomothetic mode of reasoning prevalent in natural science, and specifically its rationalist tendency to sacrifice

the particular to the universal. Our ideas, wrote Kant ([1781] 1966), are but inventions, for they

are not derived from nature, but we only interrogate nature, according to these ideas, and consider our knowledge as defective as long as it is not adequate to them. We must confess that *pure earth, pure air*, etc. are hardly to be met with. Nevertheless we require the concepts of them (which, so far as their perfect purity is concerned, have their origin in reason only) (pp. 436, 427).

It is hard to miss the affinity between this statement and Weber's (1949, p. 90) notion of the ideal type, which "is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct." The advice that Müller ([1809] 1922, p. 16) had to offer to the students of society was even more specific, as he insisted that social reality has to be "*personally experienced [erlebt]* and not just *externally apprehended [erkannt und erlernt]*" and that, consequently, the researcher must cultivate "a feeling for value and meaning." We find similar claims in the proponents of cultural science, who believed that "values always attach to cultural objects," that "the presence or absence of *relevance to values* can thus serve as a reliable criterion for distinguishing between two kinds of scientific objects" (Rickert [1902] 1962, p. 19). Or as Weber (1949, p. 74) put it, "In the social sciences we are concerned with psychological and intellectual (*geistig*) phenomena the empathic understanding of which is naturally a problem of a specifically different type from those which the schemes of the exact natural sciences in general can or seek to solve."

Although they acknowledged the peculiarity of cultural sciences, interpretative thinkers refused to endorse the dichotomy of *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. "There is *nothing* [in the cultural domain] that could be exempted as a matter of principle from an investigation of the kind specifically conducted by the natural sciences," maintained Rickert (1962, p. 13). Weber's (1964) memorable "one need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar" is another expression of the skepticism about the need for special empathic skills in the cultural scientist. An emphasis that became increasingly prominent in the works of Dilthey's successors was on "the verifiable accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of a [cultural] phenomenon" (Weber 1964, p. 91). Still, their methodological disquisitions were undoubtedly influenced by Dilthey and the transcendentalist message he imparted to his disciples, namely, that knowing is an active process and that the scientist must make a special effort to recover the a priori assumptions underlying his theories.

The champions of cultural science failed to formulate clear methodological guidelines for studying cultural phenomena. Their search for a compromise

between idiographic description with its rich texture, graphic details and historical sensitivity, and nomothetic procedures emphasizing generalization and abstraction proved inconclusive. But the basic arguments the proponents of cultural science fashioned in their methodological polemics had a considerable effect on twentieth-century sociological discourse, both in Europe and the United States.

INTERACTIONIST SOCIOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES

The idea that early twentieth-century America, with its self-consciously pragmatic spirit and democratic ethos, owed something to nineteenth-century German idealism might strike one as unorthodox. Mead ([1929–1930] 1964) for one, argued that we

cannot dream of that philosophy interpreting the relation of the American individual to society. . . . The American . . . did not think of himself as arising out of a society, so that by retiring into himself he could seize the nature of that society. On the contrary, the pioneer was creating communities and ceaselessly legislating changes within them. The communities came from him, not he from the community (pp. 381–382).

Mead was right, of course, when he stressed the disparity between the historical conditions in early nineteenth-century Germany and the United States: there was an ocean of difference between the pervasive fear of mass movements in post-revolutionary Europe and the longstanding commitment to the democratic process in the American political tradition. And yet, he was also wrong, as his own numerous contributions readily testify. The ideological ferment of the Romantic era nourishing transcendental idealism was very much at work during the Age of Reform in American politics, which found its philosophical and sociological expression in pragmatism and interactionism.

Summarizing the spirit of the Progressive era, Conn (1983, p. 1) stressed its “profound internal dialectic,” its longing for a compromise “between tradition and innovation, between control and independence, between order and liberation.” He found the Progressive tradition ridden with “backward-looking images and ideas contesting with the voices of prophecy, the reactionary coexisting with the subversive.” Indeed, the sense of ambivalence is at the very heart of the Progressive spirit. The progressives longed for radical change, yet they abhorred violence; they placed themselves squarely on the side of progress, yet saw in it the return to the American democracy’s historical roots; they deemed themselves liberals, yet they denounced the liberalism of the preceding century. These contradictions faithfully reflected the time in American politics when the conser-

vative right was increasingly challenged by the radical left, with the progressives seizing the middle ground in this political struggle.

The progressive movement could be seen as a belated attempt to grapple with the unanticipated consequences of laissez-faire capitalism. At the turn of the century, the free enterprise system in the United States came under fire. Character, effort and enterprise seemed to many much less relevant in a world dominated by giant corporations. Small businessmen and farmers, swamped by the market forces beyond their control, bemoaned the passing of free enterprise and the loss of opportunity. The concentration of capital and the parallel growth in the power of the plutocracy upset the middle classes, which loudly complained about big business' corrupting influence on the political process and the decline of democracy in the United States. The plight of the working-class people attracted wide attention, with the social critics calling for national standards of social decency. Popular uprisings on the scale comparable to the 1894 Pullman strike were rare, but the continuing labor unrest in the early 1900s and the prospect of a labor-socialist alliance alarmed many observers. In this context of the growing political tensions, the progressives formulated a program designed to avoid the twin dangers of conservatism and socialism.

The progressive platform was fully endorsed by American interactionists, many of whom took active part in the Progressive movement. Thus Robert Park tried his hand at muckraking journalism and for a number of years served as secretary of the Congo Reform Association. William Thomas distinguished himself as an advocate of women's suffrage and actively supported child labor legislation. Charles Cooley urged equalizing economic and social opportunities, and George Mead had an illustrious career as a Chicago reformer, which included the presidency of the City Club, mediation of labor-management disputes, and tireless work for the cause of progressive education in Chicago and the state of Illinois. I cannot examine here at any length the interactionists' involvement with progressive reforms (for details see Rucker 1969; Carey 1975; Diner 1975; Deegan and Burger 1978; Shalin 1986a, 1988). The point I would like to make is that the progressivism of American interactionists is at least partially responsible for an affinity that their ideas have with nineteenth-century transcendental idealism and early twentieth-century sociology in Germany. Of course, I can only talk about "elective affinity," not direct influence. Still, this affinity is not to be taken lightly. To understand its historical import, and what, specifically, draws these diverse intellectual movements together, we have to backtrack a bit and examine the political transformation that transcendentalism underwent on its path to America.

The first generation of German transcendentalists was too close to the French Revolution, too traumatized by its bloody excesses, to place its stock in democratic politics. The reactionary climate of postrevolutionary Europe could not but blunt romanticism's liberating component. Not surprisingly, Hegel's dictum, "what is rational is actual, what is actual is rational," read at the time, "what is,

is right," while the romantic insistence on the organic unity of the individual and society was taken to mean that the individual must submit to the state. The second generation of romantic idealists, on the other hand, was much more willing to accentuate the emancipatory character of romantic idealism. Emboldened by the increasingly revolutionary mood in Europe, the romanticists of the 1840s were drawing radically democratic implications from the transcendentalist teaching. Hegel's formula was given a revolutionary interpretation and now read: "What is rational, must become actual." By the same token, the organicist premise of transcendental idealism was recast and taken to mean that man is a species being, coequal in importance with the social whole. Man-the-species-being was not a hero in this interpretation, a superman, but any rational member of the republic. At the same time, the beloved *Gemeinschaft* of romantic idealists ceased to be modeled after an idealized state of the feudal past and was refurbished as an ideal for the democratic community of the future.

Emerson, whom American progressives held in the highest esteem and whose bona fides as a transcendental idealist are well known, was a good example of how romantic transcendentalism could dovetail with the American democratic creed. "The root & seed of democracy," Emerson ([1834] 1964) contended

is the doctrine Judge for yourself. Reverence thyself. It is the inevitable effect of that doctrine . . . to make each man a state. . . . It demands something godlike in him who cast off the common yokes & motives of humanity and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaker. High be his heart, faithful his will, vast his contemplations, that he may truly be a world, society, law to himself (pp. 342, 283).

In Emerson's writings of those years, one can discern a theory of democracy that derives its principles from transcendental idealism (and which, I might add, bears strong resemblance to the utterances of the young Marx when he was still under the strong influence of Fichtean and Hegelian idealism). It is wrong, in Emerson's view, to treat society as if it were an entity, a superorganism impervious to change. This view strips man of his responsibility for and vital stake in the affairs of society:

Society is an illusion of the young citizen. It lies before him in rigid repose, with certain names, men, and institutions, rooted like oak trees to the centre, round which all arrange themselves the best they can. But the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no such roots and centres; but any particle may suddenly become the centre of the movement, and compel the system to gyrate around it (Emerson [1841] 1961, p. 403).

According to the transcendentalist theory of democracy, society is the social intercourse of individuals and the individual is a society conscious of itself. Society built upon this premise is *Gemeinschaft*—a brotherly community of free human beings engaged in a direct discourse with their equals. The true *Gemeinschaft* is necessarily a democratic community. To be organic, a society must

be democratic, meaning it must shift the locus of control from an external authority to the individual members of the community, every one of which is, in a sense, a sovereign, a species being. The contemporary society was of course a far cry from this ideal; it was split down the middle by “a standing antagonism between the conservative and the democratic classes, between those who have made their fortunes and the poor who have fortunes to make, between the interests of dead labor . . . and the interests of the living labor” (Emerson, [1850] 1903, pp. 223–224). Characteristically, Emerson refused to push the argument to its radical extreme: he did not exhort the masses to expropriate the expropriators and to overthrow the government, as Marx would have it. Rather, he moved in the opposite direction, tempering his romantic idealism and eventually emerging as a champion of the melioristic approach that relied on politicians, clerics and intellectuals to contribute their effort to improving the lot of their less fortunate countrymen. This made Emerson a progenitor of the progressive movement in America (Aaron 1962, p. 98).

In the same manner as his New England Predecessor, John Dewey began as an avowed idealist. Even later, when he jettisoned his early allegiance, he acknowledged “the continued working of the Hegelian bacillus of reconciliation of contradictories in me, that makes me feel as if the conception of process gives a basis for uniting the truths of pluralism and nominalism, and also of necessity and spontaneity” (Dewey [1903] 1964, p. 307). Like Emerson, Dewey held fairly radical views in his formative years (at one point he accepted the editorship of a socialist weekly which, for various reasons, failed to materialize), but as did his predecessor, he chose to channel his passion for freedom and justice into liberal reforms. Dewey’s radical democratism, intermeshed with a heavy dosage of romantic idealism, was already evident in his early writings ([1888] 1969):

The animal body is not the type of an organism, because the members, the organs, have their life, after all, only as parts, conditioned by their external space relations. . . . The organic relation is incomplete. But human society represents a more perfect organism. The whole lives truly in every member, and there is no longer the appearance of physical aggregation, or continuity. The organism manifests itself as what it truly is, an ideal or spiritual life, a unity of *will*. If then, society and the individual are really organic to each other, then the individual is society concentrated . . . the localized manifestation of its life . . . its vital embodiment. And this is the theory, often crudely expressed, but none the less true in substance, that every citizen is a sovereign, the American theory, a doctrine . . . that every man is a priest of God. In conception, at least, democracy approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization: that in which the individual and society are organic to each other (p. 237).

Notice the way in which the democratic creed is wedded here to romantic organicism: society is truly organic when its every member is an “embodiment” of the social whole, while democracy truly lives up to its concept when the individual and society are “organic to each other.” Democracy without the organic bond between men is an impossibility, as is the organic community

outside the democratic framework. A feudal state, on this theory, clearly is not an organic body, insofar as it locks its members in estates; nor is any society for that matter which maintains sharp class divisions, for

if society be organic, the notion of two classes, one of which is inferior to the other, falls to the ground. . . . And there is no need to beat about the bush in saying that democracy is not in reality what it is in name until it is industrial, as well as civil and political. . . . A democracy of wealth is a necessity" (Dewey [1888] 1969, pp. 238, 246).

Charles Peirce, although ambivalent about the transcendentalist legacy, also acknowledged his debt to it. In 1892, he invoked the memories of Concord transcendentalism whose "cultured bacilli," he lamented, were "implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, . . . come [.] to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigations" ([1892] 1955, p. 339). The social component implicit in transcendental idealism is clearly visible in Peirce's theories, in his radical view that "the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY" ([1868] 1955, p. 247). Peirce's political sensibilities were equally consistent with universalism and democracy implicit in romantic idealism. It is in the nature of science, insisted Peirce (1931–1958) that it

inexorably requires that our interests shall *not* be limited. They . . . must embrace the whole community. The community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond the ideological epoch, beyond all bonds (Vol. VII, p. 398).

The impact of romantic idealism was most palpable in George Mead. It was his teacher, Josiah Royce, who "opened the realm of romantic idealism" to Mead (Mead 1917, p. 169), then a student at Harvard; who taught Mead that "the idea of myself, as empirical Ego, is on the whole a social product" (Royce 1894, p. 532); and whose famous Harvard course on the Spirit of Modern Philosophy (Royce 1892) served as a model for a seminar on romantic idealism that Mead taught for decades at the University of Chicago (cf. Mead's *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*). Royce's work sensitized Mead and his colleagues to the paramont sociological significance of transcendental idealism. Here is one excerpt from Royce's (1919) writings demonstrating his awareness of romantic idealism's strong bearings on the social sciences:

The idealists have been much ridiculed by their critics for their use of the term "The Absolute." It may interest us to learn that one of the chief motives for substituting the term "Absolute" for the term 'self' as the name for the principle of philosophy, was interwoven with motives furnished by the social consciousness. For whatever else later idealism proved to be, we shall find that it included, as one of its most notable parts, a social philosophy. And

whoever wishes to understand modern social doctrines, will do well to take account of the contribution to that sort of thinking which was made by idealism (p. 55).

Idealism and pragmatism merge in Mead's (1936) writings in a manner that makes it difficult at times to tell where one ends and the other begins.

The objects about one are all implements. The universe is a field of action. It is organized only in so far as one acts in it. Its meaning lies in the conduct of the individual (pp. 89–90).

The last statement sounds like a typical passage from a pragmatist text; in fact it is Mead's description of Fichte's philosophy. "Nothing can be an object in experience unless action is directed toward it, and nothing is an object without the self of organism being also an object." This idealist dictum does not come from Fichte or Schelling, but is extracted from Mead's pragmatic theory of objects (Mead 1938, p. 160). I do not mean to suggest that Mead's philosophy (and that of other pragmatists) was a replica of transcendental idealism, or that pragmatism itself was a monolithic movement. Peirce, the least romantic of all pragmatists, had reservations about the constitutive powers of reason, which he effectively denied toward the end of his life, emphasizing instead that the scientifically established picture of reality is independent of the individual's assumptions and personal efforts. By contrast, James grew increasingly radical in his views, pushing the principle of subject–object reality to extreme and fully endorsing the idea of multiple realities. Dewey and Mead occupy a place between these two poles: acknowledging the emergent nature of objective reality and the multiplicity of possible universes, they stressed that the selection among alternatives descriptions of reality is a social process, a collective undertaking regulated by a community and therefore not an arbitrary, subjective matter. Regardless of their specific emphasis, however, all pragmatists owed idealism some of their insights, and at the same time, differed from idealist philosophers in important ways.

Pragmatism, in the words of James ([1909] 1970, p. 133), represented "a new *Identitätsphilosophie* in pluralistic form." Its proponents resolutely rejected the tendency of romantic idealists to treat the subject as a unitary phenomenon and to reduce human practice to cognitive activity. Whereas romantic idealists identified knowledge with speculative thinking and practice with the confrontation of abstract universals in the Absolute Mind, pragmatists predicated knowledge on instrumental conduct of the organized members of human community, who are forced to adjust their universalizations to the exigencies of practical situations. In Dewey's ([1925] 1958, p. 68) words, "idealism fails to take into account the specified or concrete character of the uncertain situation in which thought occurs; it fails to note the empirically concrete character of the subject-matter, acts, and tools by which determination and consistency are reached." To counter the idealist tendency to ignore the practical nature of human activity, pragmatists

turned to post-Darwinian science. Pragmatism could be seen as a Darwinized romanticism, or if you will, romanticized Darwinism, insofar as it conceived of man as a being both shaped by and continuously reshaping its world. The idealist principle of subject–object relativity turned up in pragmatism as the principle of the relativity of organism and environment:

There is a relativity of the living individual and its environment, both as to form and content. . . . The individual and environment—the situation—mutually determine each other” (Mead [1924–1925] 1964, pp. 278, [1908] 1964, p. 86).

The process of knowing, correlatively, was recast as a practical endeavor. One could not grasp reality without acting upon it, for knowing is doing, and the very mode of handling things is part and parcel of their objective meaning. With this turn of the argument, the problem of meaning moved to the center stage of philosophical analysis. This problem occupied the same place in pragmatism as the problem of transcendental a priori in idealist metaphysics. The question at issue in both cases was the objective structure of the world, the source of its meaningfulness and orderliness. Both idealists and pragmatists agreed that “all meaning of life depends upon living beings, beings with eyes that paint the world in its colors, with ears that give it its resonances, [that it] is the world that arises out of the individuals that live in it” (Mead 1936, p. 90). However, pragmatists went far beyond their German counterparts in situating the meaning–giving activity in the real life settings and experimental activity of science. They were also much more forceful in unveiling the social roots of meanings. Pragmatist philosophers should be credited with rendering fully explicit the sociological dimension of transcendental idealism, its profound insight that the mind derives its a priori schemes from, and owes its constitutive power to, society. The latter point was developed with particular force by George Mead.

The radical manner in which Mead welded together mind, self and society is the strongest evidence of his debt to *Identitätsphilosophie*. There is no human society without selves, according to Mead, and no selves without human society, for “human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members” (Mead 1934, p. 227). Human society makes its way into objective being through the self-consciousness of its individual members, who incessantly take social roles, assume the perspective of various social groups, adopt the attitudes of the generalized other, and in the process of doing so, generate society as a meaningfully objective whole. The transcendentalist thesis, “reason is social, society is rational,” is thus upheld, though a peculiarly pragmatist twist was added to it: “and both are historically and situationally emergent products of practical activity.” This updated transcendentalist formula is at the heart of interactionist sociology that received the impetus early in the twentieth century from Baldwin, Cooley, Ellwood, Dewey and

Mead, and that was fully institutionalized in the 1920s in what became known as the Chicago tradition in sociology.

American interactionists accepted the idealist premise that one could not understand the dynamics of social being without understanding the dynamics of social consciousness. Any attempt to explain social institutions without recourse to self-conscious transactions between individuals is in danger of posing a false dichotomy between the individual and society. For social institutions only appear to be impersonal and Leviathanic; in their practical existence, they remain contingent upon the sense-bestowing acts performed by concrete individuals. “And institution is, after all, nothing but an organization of attitudes which we all carry in us” (Mead 1934, p. 211), “the ‘apperceptive systems’ or organized attitudes of the public mind” (Cooley [1909] 1962, p. 314), which means that “social science cannot remain on the surface of social becoming, where certain schools wish to have it float, but must reach the actual human experience and attitudes which constitute the full, live and active social reality beneath the formal organization of social institutions” (Thomas [1918–1920] 1966, pp. 13–14). The interactionists’ attack on sociological realism bore more than a fleeting resemblance to contemporary social thought in Germany, where Dilthey’s successors struggled to delineate the proper subject matter of cultural sciences. The echo of the German debates is clearly visible in the following statements:

The world in which the action happens is not ‘nature,’ that rigid and schematized, rationalistic extract of the original world of human experience. It is the *cultural* world, full of meaning, containing innumerable objects which have no material existence at all, or merely a symbolic nucleus of materiality, and yet are real to the human agent as any mountain or tree. . . . The object is real, as we know, not because of the mere fact of its existence within the domain of actual or possible experience, but because of the significance which this existence has both for active thought and for other objects (Znaniecki 1919, p. 143, [1925] 1967, pp. 307).

Following uncritically the example of the physical sciences . . . social theory and social practice have forgotten to take into account one essential difference between physical and social reality, which is that, while the effect of a physical phenomenon depends exclusively on the objective nature of this phenomenon and can be calculated on the ground of the latter’s empirical content, the effect of a social phenomenon depends in addition on the subjective standpoint taken by the individual or the group toward this phenomenon and can be calculated only if we know, not only the objective content of the assumed cause, but also the meaning which it has at the given moment for the given conscious beings (Thomas [1918–1920] 1966, pp. 272–273).

This seems to be exactly the subject-matter of any social science. The human experience with which social sciences occupies itself is primarily that of individuals. It is only so far as the happenings, the environmental conditions, the values, their uniformities and laws enter into the experience of individuals that they become the subject of consideration by these sciences. The environmental conditions [dealt with by social science] exist only insofar as they affect actual individuals, and only as they affect these individuals (Mead [1927] 1964, pp. 309–310).

Again, the sciences that deal with social life are unique in that we who study them are a conscious part of the process. We know it by sympathetic participation, in a manner

impossible in the study of plant or animal life. Many indeed find this fact embarrassing, and are inclined to escape it by trying to use only 'objective' methods. . . . It is their [social science's] unique privilege to approach life from the standpoint of conscious and familiar partaking of it. This involves unique methods which must be worked out independently (Cooley [1929] 1966, pp. 396–397).

Equally tangible in the writings of American interactionists is the hermeneutical principle, according to which one has "to see the whole in the part, the part in the whole, and human nature in both" (Cooley [1909] 1962, p. 57). Humans, interactionists maintain, acquire their capacity to think and act rationally in the process of social interaction, as members of society. The process of thinking and acting rationally, on the other hand, continuously regenerates society as a system of social interaction. The dialectical bond ties together consciousness and society, institution and interaction, self and role—all sociological polarities, which in the last analysis are but aspects in the ongoing process of production of society as objective and meaningful:

The individual and society are neither opposed to each other nor separated from each other. Society is a society of individuals and the individual is a social individual. He has no existence by himself. He lives in, for, and by society, just as society has no existence except in and through the individuals who constitute it Society is of course but the relations of individuals to one another in this form or that. And all relations are interactions, not fixed molds (Dewey [1929] 1962, pp. 85–86, [1897] 1972, p. 55).

We are lead to identify the organization of the individual's personality directly with that of society. . . . Public self is the objective form of organization into which growing personalities normally fall. . . . The growth of society is therefore a growth *in a sort of self-consciousness—an awareness of itself*—expressed in the general ways of action, feeling, etc., embodied in its institutions (Baldwin 1897, pp. 500, 498, 514).

The individual is no thrall of society. He constitutes society as genuinely as society constitutes the individual. . . . The organization and unification of a social group is identical with the organization and unification of any one of the selves arising within the social process in which that group is engaged, or which it is carrying on (Mead 1934, p. 144, 1935–1936, 70).

A separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals. . . . 'Society' and 'individual' do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing. . . . The individual is always cause as well as effect of the institution: he receives the impress of the state whose traditions have enveloped him from childhood, but at the same time he impresses his character, formed by other forces as well as this, upon the state (Cooley [1909] 1962, p. 314, [1902] 1964, pp. 36–37).

The human personality is both a continuously producing factor and a continuously produced result of social evolution. . . . When viewed as a factor of social evolution the human personality is a ground of the causal explanation of social happenings; when viewed as a product of social evolution it is causally explicable by social happenings (Thomas [1918–1921] 1966, p. 11).

It appears, then, that habit and custom, personality and culture, the person and society, somehow are different aspects of the same thing. . . . Personality [is] the subjective and

individual aspect of culture, and culture [is] the objective, generic or general aspect of personality. . . . Within the circle of these two tendencies, man's disposition, on the one hand, to create a world in which he can live, and, on the other hand, to adapt himself to the world which he himself has created, all, or most of the problems and the processes are included with which the student of society is positively concerned (Park [1929] 1952, pp. v–vi, [1938] 1952, pp. 203–204).

The methodological sensibilities of interactionist sociologists were also akin to those of social scientists in Germany. American interactionists rejected the rhetoric of bare facts speaking for themselves. The fact, for them, was something that is grounded in the presupposition of our knowledge and that, consequently, could speak only on behalf of a particular theory.

The great and most usual illusion of the scientist is that he simply takes the facts as they are . . . and gets his explanation entirely *a posteriori* from pure experience. A fact by itself is already an abstraction; we isolate a certain limited aspect of the concrete process of becoming, rejecting, at least provisionally, all its indefinite complexity (Thomas [1918–1920] 1966, p. 271).

Every rational determination of facts is in a sense an artificial abstraction breaking the continuity of the concrete rush of changes and ignoring innumerable bonds which tie every fact with other facts (Znaniecki [1925] 1967, pp. 2–3).

Every public has its own universe of discourse, and humanly speaking, every fact is only a fact in some universe of discourse (Park [1940] 1967, p. 44).

Instead of treating social facts as external and petrified, interactionists urged the researcher to assume the perspective of concrete individuals and illuminate the definitions of the situation that made social facts possible:

We must put ourselves in the position of the subject who tries to find his way in this world, and we must remember, first of all, that the environment by which he is influenced and to which he adapts himself, is *his* world, not the objective world of science—is nature and society as he sees them, not as the scientist sees them (Thomas [1918–1920] 1966, p. 23).

Cooley's ([1909] 1962, p. 7) commitment to “sympathetic introspection” and “dramaturgical” analysis stemmed from the same desire to gauge attitudes and values that propel individual actions. The thrust of the interactionist methodology was decidedly antipositivist, and therefore, consistent with the methodological emphasis of interpretative sociologists in Germany. However, it was also influenced by empiricism, and as such differed from the methodology adopted by proponents of *verstehen*.

Interpretative thinkers tended to perceive the cultural a priori in static terms. Values appeared in their writings as well-defined, fixed for a given time and place, and comprising an autonomous sphere insulated from the exigencies of the situation. This account left unexplained how the cultural a priori changes or how

the individual behaves when a conflicting set of values vie for his attention. This treatment was in line with the neo-Kantian tendency to separate cognitive activity from other forms of human practice. The interactionist approach, by contrast, was closer to the Hegelian notion of human agency as a time-bound, tool-aided, matter-transforming labor—the notion that migrated into the interactionist theory via pragmatist philosophy. Consciousness, for interactionists, is a phase of practical activity, which has the power to shape and reshape reality not only in the mind, through selective attention and inattention to its various properties, but also materially, instrumentally and behaviorally. What this means is that the aprioristic (or attitudinal) domain could not be separated from action; it reflects the somewhat unpredictable course of real interactions, and it must therefore be grasped in situ—in practical situations where the definitions receive continuous feedback from the actions of other people. The individual is not chained to a given a priori scheme, any more than he is doomed to bow to some external laws; rather, he manifests himself as a self-conscious being, capable of critically assessing one's definitions and attitudes and practically reconciling them with the demands of the situation through the choice of a particular self. Mead (1934) pointed out that

Human society does not merely stamp the pattern of its organized social behavior upon any one of its individual members, so that this pattern becomes likewise the pattern of the individual's self; it also at the same time gives him a mind. . . . And his mind enables him in turn to stamp the pattern of his further developing self (further developing through his mental activity) upon the structure or organization of human society, and thus in a degree to reconstruct and modify in terms of his self the general pattern of social or group behavior in terms of which his self was originally constituted (p. 263).

This emphasis on the individual's ability to reevaluate both the situation and one's attitudes is indicative of the interactionists' predilection for reform. Society appears here not so much as a static product of preset definitions and attitudes but rather as an ongoing process that continuously brings into being (and takes out of existence) social objects as meaningful things. Which is what Cooley ([1929] 1966, p. 396) sought to convey in this famous line: "Any real study of society must be first, last, and nearly all the time a study of process."

The emphasis on social process suggested a different research agenda for interactionist sociology. Whereas German sociologists were content with arm-chair theorizing and speculative analysis of aprioristic schemes, interactionists favored the direct involvement with the producers of the social world. They showed healthy respect for obdurate, empirical qualities of social reality that could not be simply inferred, but must be observed and experienced in the real world. The classic study of the Polish immigrants conducted by Thomas and Znaniecki offered the first glimpse of the direction in which interactionist research would grow. This pioneering work inspired a generation of Chicago sociologists, whose skillful use of participant observation and documentary

analysis demonstrated that studying the world of culture need not be a purely theoretical endeavor and that it applies to historical as well as contemporary scenes. The idealist insight into the constitutive role of reason thus was shown to have direct bearings on empirical research.

CONCLUSION: CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY AND THE IDEALIST LEGACY

“Not merely TO KNOW, but according to thy knowledge TO DO, is thy vocation,” Johann Gottlieb Fichte ([1803] 1960, p. 94) urged his countrymen. He had little use for a philosophy that failed to rouse people to action. Fichte’s teaching, which he at some point billed as the philosophical expression of the principles underlying the French Revolution (Shalin 1986b, p. 82), contained a thorough critique of dogmatism and a clear rationale for the reappraisal of traditional institutions. Other exponents of transcendental idealism took a more cautious attitude toward the French Revolution, but regardless of their substantive and political differences, they accepted the notion that man is responsible for the world out there. Theirs was a philosophy perfectly attuned to the age of ambivalence that was finding its way between the obsolete institutions of the ancien régime and the emerging capitalist order. Transcendental idealists placed a great trust in the power of reason to become self-reflexive, to reclaim authorship for the way things are, to navigate safely in the sea of change that threatened at any moment to erupt into the violence of the radical left or the oppressive reaction of the conservative right. The same ambivalence toward modernity and the longing for orderly change marked the conditions in much of the Old and the New Worlds on the eve of the twentieth century. The age of democratic revolutions ushered in by the fall of the Bastille was finally coming into its own, and it was bringing with it a renewed interest in the socially-minded abstractions of transcendental idealism.

The philosophical precepts of transcendental idealism found a new lease on life in the cultural science tradition, whose German adherents, alarmed by the consequences of laissez-faire liberalism, expressed sympathy with the ideals of social democracy. Pragmatist and interactionist thinkers voiced similar dissatisfaction with unrestrained capitalism and joined forces with progressive reformers. In both cases, the idealist legacy played an important role in the formation of substantive concerns we now identify with interpretative and interactionist sociology. What early twentieth-century sociologists learned from their transcendentalist predecessors was that consciousness and society are not separate entities but parts of the same continuum, that one cannot understand society without understanding the self-identities of its members, and that the self-reflexive nature of human agency provides a unique opportunity for directed social change. Modern heirs of this sociological tradition are equally indebted to

philosophical idealism. When Berger and Luckman (1966, p. 73) argue that "society exists only as individuals are conscious of it [while] individual consciousness is socially determined," they speak the language of transcendental idealism. When Goffman (1974, p. 563) points out that "in countless ways and ceaselessly, social life takes up and freezes into itself the understandings we have of it," he echoes Schelling's [1799] 1978. p. 11) claim, that "presentations, arising freely and without necessity in us, pass over from the world of thought into the real world, and can attain objective reality." Along with substantive insights and ideological preferences, however, modern interpretative thinkers and interactionist sociologists inherited from idealism certain biases, both substantive and ideological.

With all their public mindedness and commitment to social progress, transcendental idealists avoided challenging head-on the status quo. The dialectical stance they adopted provided them with a convenient excuse for not engaging in the political quarrels of the day. Surveying the battlefields of contemporary politics from his ivory tower, the dialectical philosopher could reasonably claim that neither side is right, that each contains a kernel of truth, and that in due course a safe synthesis of the conflicting claims would be found. The very spirit of mediation they favored absolved them from the need to take sides in what was pronounced to be partisan disputes. By the same token, transcendentalists underestimated the weight of obsolete social institutions and at the same time overestimated the subject's ability to change the objective order by the force of reason alone. There is something almost cavalier about the romantic disdain for objectivity and structures, which were supposed to crumble as soon as the subjects, roused by idealist exhortations, would take the scalpel of critical reflection to them. It is not that idealists were oblivious to the deadening grip of the obsolete social order: they surely knew how oppressive the institutions of the feudal past could be. Yet they preferred to treat the matter as evidence of unreflexivity that could be done away with as soon as the light of critical reflection is brought to bear on the reified products of human understanding. The concrete historical analysis of the social forces behind the petrified objectivity, the class domination that the entrenched institutions engendered and the power that had to be exercised to prevent meaningful social change, was typically lacking in their analysis.

Now, if we take a close look at interpretative and interactionist sociology, we could see that some of these problems endemic to idealist philosophy are embodied in its scholarship. The structural manifestations of social reality and the power relations behind them are often ignored by the proponents of this sociological tradition. Again, they may well acknowledge that social institutions present themselves to the subject "as possessing reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact" (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 55), but the facticity and thingness of these institutions is judged to be apparent. The power machinery that helps to sustain a given

institutional order is not exposed. This is particularly true of interactionist research, which focuses primarily on the situations where individuals reveal themselves as masters of their destiny, self-conscious beings freely shaping their environment. The reverse determination that flows from the socially defined situation to the individual, meaning the constraining power of objective circumstances is, more often than not, left out here. Much as social structures depend on individual's interpretative activities for their reproduction, however, they also determine what people think and what they actually do in concrete situations. That is to say, constraint is very much a part of social life, and structures possess a definite measure of systemic autonomy from the will of particular subjects.

Does this all mean that interpretative and interactionist sociology, as some commentators insist (Huber 1973; Reynolds and Reynolds 1973; Ropers 1973), is inherently conservative? I do not think so. Whatever can be said about its proponents' failure to grapple with the issues of power, domination, and vested interests, there is nothing "inherent" about it. The case in point is the work of Jurgen Habermas, who seeks to combine interactionist and interpretative sociology in a project of emancipatory social science that traces its roots to the idealist premise that "we are capable of reflecting upon our own history, as individuals and as members of larger societies; and of using precisely this reflection to change the course of history" (Giddens 1985, p. 125). Whether contemporary interactionist and interpretative sociologists are prepared to follow Habermas's lead, I cannot tell. But when the interactionist tradition of first-hand involvement with everyday life is combined with the theoretical acumen and emancipatory agenda of German interpretative scholarship, we may witness the true renaissance of idealism as a theoretical, practical and research endeavor.

REFERENCES

- Aaron, D. 1962. "Emerson and the Progressive Tradition." Pp. 85-99 in *Emerson. A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by M.R. Konvitz and S.E. Whicher. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Baldwin, J.M. 1897. *Social and Ethical Interpretation in Mental Development*. New York: Macmillan.
- Berger, P.L. and T. Luckman. 1966. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Doubleday.
- Carey, J.T. 1975. *Sociology and Public Affairs. The Chicago School*. London: Sage.
- Coburn, K. 1974. *The Self-Conscious Imagination. A Study of the Coleridge Notebooks in Celebration of the Bi-Centenary of His Birth 21 October 1772*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Coleridge, S.T. (1798) 1948. "Letter to George Coleridge." Pp. 329-331 in *Anthology of Romanticism*, edited by E. Bernbaum, New York: Ronald Press.
- Conn, P. 1983. *The Divided Mind. Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898-1917*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooley, C.H. (1909) 1962. *Social Organization*. New York: Schocken Books.
- _____. (1902) 1964. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Schocken.
- _____. (1929) 1966. *Social Process*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Deegan, M.J. and J.S. Burger. 1978. "George Herbert Mead and Social Reform: His Work and Writings." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14:362-373
- Dewey, J. (1903) 1964. "A letter to William James." P. 307 in *The Thought and Character of William James*, edited by R.B. Perry. New York: Harper & Row.
- _____. (1925) 1958. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover.
- _____. (1929) 1962. *Individualism, Old and New*. New York: Capricorn Books.
- _____. (1888) 1969. "The Ethics of Democracy." Pp. 227-249 in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882-1889*, Vol. 1. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- _____. (1897) 1972. "Ethical Principles Underlying Education." Pp. 54-83 in *John Dewey. The Early Works, 1882-1898*, Vol. 5. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dilthey, W. 1976. *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Diner, S.J. 1975. "Department and Discipline: The Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, 1892-1920." *Minerva* 13:514-553.
- Emerson, R.W. (1850) 1903. "Representative Men." *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. IV. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- _____. (1841) 1961. *Emerson's Essays*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- _____. (1834) 1964. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Vol. IV: 1832-1834, edited by A. R. Ferguson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Fichte, J.G. (1803) 1960. *The Vocation of Man*. La Salle: Open Court.
- _____. (1794) 1970. *Science of Knowledge*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Giddens, A. 1985. "Jurgen Habermas." Pp. 121-140 in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, edited by Q. Skinner, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goethe, J.W. von. (1826) 1907. *Maximen und Reflexionen. Nach der Handschriften des Goethe und Schiller Archives. Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft* [Maxims and Reflections. Papers from Goethe and Schiller Archives. Materials of Goethe Society]. Bd. 21. Weimar: Verlag der Goethe-Gesellschaft.
- _____. 1949. *Wisdom and Experience*. New York: Berglave Press.
- Goffman, E. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Gouldner, A.W. 1970. *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1807) 1967. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. New York: Harper Row.
- _____. (1821) 1977. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. London: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1948. *Early Theological Writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Herbst, J. 1965. *The German Historical School in American Scholarship*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Huber, J. 1973. "Symbolic Interaction as a Pragmatic Perspective: The Bias of Emergent Theory." *American Sociological Review* 38:278-284.
- Hughes, H.S. 1958. *Consciousness and Society. The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930*. New York: Vintage Book.
- James, W. (1909) 1970. *The Meaning of Truth*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Kant, I. (1783) 1950. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- _____. (1790) 1951. *Critique of Judgement*. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. (1781) 1966. *Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Klachhohn, P. 1925. *Personlichkeit und Gemeinschaft. Studien zur Staatsauffassung der Deutschen Romantik*. Haale/Saale: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Lukacs, G. (1922) 1971. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Marcuse, H. 1961. *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. Boston: Beacon.
- Marx, K. (1845-1846) 1963. *The German Ideology*, Parts I & III. New York: International Publishers.
- _____. (1844) 1964. *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. New York: International Publishers.
- _____. (1841-1842) 1967. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right.'* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Mead, G.H. 1917. "Josiah Royce—A Personal Impression." *International Journal of Ethics* 27:168–170.
- . 1934. *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1935–1936. "The Philosophy of John Dewey." *International Journal of Ethics* 46:64–81.
- . 1936. *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1938. *The Philosophy of the Act*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . (1908) 1964. "The Philosophical Basis of Ethics." Pp. 82–93 in *Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead*, edited by A.J. Reck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- . (1924–1925) 1964. "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control." Pp. 267–293 in *Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead*, edited by A. J. Reck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- . (1927) 1964. "The Objective Reality of Perspectives." Pp. 306–319 in *Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead*, edited by A. J. Reck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- . (1929–1930) 1964. "Philanthropy From the Point of View of Ethics." Pp. 392–407 in *Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead*, edited by A. J. Reck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Müller, A.H. (1809) 1922. *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* [The Elements of Statescraft]. Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer.
- Novalis. 1960. *Schriften. Das Philosophische Werke* [Writings. Philosophical Works]. Bd. II. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag.
- Park, R.E. 1923. "Preface." Pp. v–viii in *The Hobo*, edited by N. Anderson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . (1929) 1952. "Sociology, Community and Society." Pp. 178–209 in *The Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park*. Vol II, *Human Communities*, edited by E. C. Hughes et al. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- . (1938) 1952. "Hawaii and the Natural History of World Economy." Pp. 233–239 in *The Collected Papers of Robert Erza Park*, Vol II. *Human Communities*, edited by E.C. Hughes et al. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- . (1940) 1967. "News as a Form of Knowledge." Pp. 33–52 in *Robert Park on Social Control and Collective Behavior*, edited by R. H. Turner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peirce, C. (1868) 1955. "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities." Pp. 228–250 in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, edited by J. Buchler. New York: Dover.
- . (1892) 1955. "The Law of Mind." Pp. 339–353 in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, edited by J. Buchler. New York: Dover.
- . 1931–1958. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vols. 1–8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reynolds, J.M. and L.T. Reynolds. 1973. "Interactionism, Complicity and Astructural Bias." *Catalyst* 7:76–85.
- Rickert, H. (1902) 1962. *Science and History. A Critique of Positivist Epistemology*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- Rock, P. 1979. *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism*. London: Macmillan.
- Ropers, R. 1973. "Mead, Marx, and Social Psychology." *Catalyst* 7: 42–61.
- Royce, J. 1892. *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- . 1894. "The External World and the Social Consciousness." *Philosophical Review* 3:513–545.
- . 1919. *Lectures on Modern Idealism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rucker, D. 1969. *The Chicago Pragmatists*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schelling, F.W.J. von. (1795) 1911. *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* ["I" as a Principle of Philosophy]. Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner.
- . (1799) 1978. *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

- Schleiermacher, F. (1800) 1957. *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies*. Chicago: Open Court.
- _____. (1805–1833) 1977. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. Missoula, MI: Scholars Press.
- Schopenhauer, A. (1819) 1969. *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol. I. New York: Dover.
- Shalin D.N. 1986a. "Pragmatism and Social Interactionism." *American Sociological Review* 51:9–21.
- _____. 1986b. "Romanticism and the Rise of Sociological Hermeneutics." *Social Research* 53:77–123.
- _____. 1988. "G.H. Mead, Socialism, and the Progressive Agenda." *American Journal of Sociology* 92:913–951.
- Simmel, G. 1950. *The Sociology of George Simmel*, edited by K. H. Wolff. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1971. *George Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by D. N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simmel, G. (1907) 1978. *The Philosophy of Money*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Stirner, M. (1845) 1971. *The Ego and His Own*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thomas, W.I. 1923. *The Unadjusted Girl. With Cases and Standpoint for Behavioral Analysis*. Boston: Little Brown.
- _____. (1918–1920) 1966. *W. I. Thomas on Social Organization and Social Change. Selected Papers*, edited by M. Janowitz. Chicago: Phoenix Books.
- Weber, M. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1949. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- _____. 1964. *Social and Economic Organization*. New York: The Free Press.
- Znaniecki, F. 1919. *Cultural Reality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. (1925) 1967. *The Laws of Social Philosophy*. New York: Russell & Russell.