

**Formes d'État et formes de savoir social.
Les traditions nationales en sciences sociales et la pluralité
d'interprétations de la modernité**

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The social sciences (as well as the historical sciences) have often been portrayed as being bound by their time and social context. A debate in the philosophy of the social sciences, as old as those sciences themselves, was devoted to this topic, which finds a recent incarnation in a version of postmodernism that emphasizes the incommensurability of knowledge claims. The stress on epistemology, however, remains rather neutral with regard to the form and structure this knowledge-shaping 'context' takes. A more specific, and much more historically and politically, rather than philosophically, orientated discussion claimed that the social sciences occur in the form of national traditions, that it is the nation, and in particular the nation–state, that provides the particular context for intellectual-academic concern about the social world. It was, thus, suggested that forms of social knowledge corresponded to forms of socio-political organization, and in particular to the form of the state.

I shall argue in more detail below why the idea of national social sciences can in many respects be regarded as having originated in the romantic reaction to the Enlightenment. Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Gottfried Herder, for instance, saw knowledge residing in language; and in their view it was linguistic commonality that constituted nations. However, the existence of fairly elaborated and consistent national traditions became a common topic of debate only during the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the most familiar of such alleged traditions stem from the period between 1850 and 1930. The emergence and flourishing of the 'German historical school of economics', the 'French school of sociology' and 'American pragmatism', for instance, all fall into these years.

In the following, I will review the background assumptions for the argument that the knowledge of the social sciences comes in national forms. At the end, I will argue that the complications of this case arise from a double feature: on the one hand, national traditions are a *historically contingent* expression of a *persistent* feature of the social sciences, their contextuality. And on the other hand, the variety of national traditions – since it would be pointless to speak of one tradition only – gives expression to the plurality of *interpretations of modernity*, as the most general contextual condition of this form of social knowledge that we call social sciences. While the national form may be largely superseded at the beginning of the twenty-first century, these two features prevail. Concludingly, therefore, we need to briefly ask the question about the contemporary, post-national expression of social knowledge and its relation to political form.

National identities and sociological problematics

Looking at examples from the heyday of national forms of social knowledge, one may immediately note that there are two main versions in which the claim that there are national traditions in the social sciences has been put forward. In its moderate, rather straightforward empirical guise, it notes the existence of national patterns or styles of intellectual-academic work. A number of socio-historical explanations for their occurrence may be attached to that observation. A more radical version (which may explicitly or implicitly include the moderate one) holds that, at least in the social sciences, these national discourses express main features of the practical social philosophy of the respective society, of its socio-political self-understanding.

In that sense, then, the assumption of 'society' as a basic unit in Durkheimian sociology, which was what defined the 'French school', pointed towards both a social realism and a social determinism

that was characteristic of French society after the revolution that hailed equality and fraternity as much as liberty. On those grounds, it appeared natural that this thinking should become hegemonic during the Third Republic. Similarly, the German school of economics, with its emphasis on history and institutions, expressed the rejection of the abstract individualism not only of the mainstream of political economy and neoclassical economics, but also of the Enlightenment. And the American social philosophy of pragmatism was exactly as action-orientated and problem-orientated as was American society at large with its limited sense of tradition and thoughtfulness. Abstract collectivism, cultural collectivism and problem-solving voluntarism were thus turned into indications of national character recognizable in the 'national' social sciences; and often enough it remained unclear whether those social sciences merely expressed such a national character that existed independently of it, or whether they aimed at providing an orientation for a social body that was in search of a direction, a social body that had its institutional form in the nation-state.

After sustained processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation in the social sciences, not least under American hegemony in the first two post-Second World War decades, the idea of national traditions in the social sciences appeared for some time to be fading into an increasingly distant past (for a rather sophisticated version of this argument see Shils, 1965). An era of 'globalisation' may have done away with, for better or worse, such remnants of times when constraints to communication still mattered. In more recent years, however, doubts have reemerged as to whether such debates can really be consigned to the dust-bin of history or, which may amount to the same, be declared of interest purely to historians.

The period when it may have seemed that there was one internationally dominant model of inquiry in the social sciences is long over. The modernisation-orientated social science of the 1960s combined an emphasis on quantitative methodology and behaviorist ontology with the more substantive functionalist-systemic social theory and the economics of growth and development that resulted from a peculiar synthesis of Keynesian and neoclassical elements (see Wagner, 1996a, chapters 7 and 9). In this form, it appeared as truly global and truly modern at the same time; and the opposition towards it, though never silent, seemed to argue from either an antiquated or a utopian position. Already from the late 1960s onwards, however, this international social science started to lose its hegemony. And even though the critical approaches originally were not less globally oriented than the mighty opponent, this unity crumbled the more successful the mission came to be.

In the names of both postcolonialism and postmodernism, the interest in local forms of knowledge revived. And if one sees these intellectual movements in conjunction with the so-called linguistic turn in the human sciences, i.e. the inescapability of interpretation and the ambiguity of language, and with the post-Kuhnian sociology of scientific knowledge, i.e. the need for the impartial, 'symmetric', analysis of knowledge claims, then the issue of the rootedness of knowledge in social life is firmly back on the agenda. While these developments appear to remain predominantly critical rather than become constructive, there also moments in current intellectual debate that claim to contain at least germs of an alternative to any international and hegemonic conception of social science. They proceed in two quite different ways: on the one hand, forms of knowledge are (again) seen as rooted in particular social identities; on the other, the history of knowledge forms is used to uncover and identify a plurality of problematics that need to be dealt with when aiming at making the social world intelligible.

Recent years have witnessed a broad revival of theorizing about cultural identities in the social sciences as well as in political debates (Friese and Wagner, 1999). As part of these debates, views of social science have resurfaced that link forms of knowledge directly to existing social

configurations. A significant example is provided by the renewed interest in the specificity of 'Europe' in social and political as well as intellectual terms, an interest that was bound to clash with Europe's most significant Other for the past two centuries, the United States of America (see Wagner 1999).¹

A vivid debate was unleashed when Richard Münch, a German sociologist of quite international orientation, offered a comparison of sociological styles that, at least in the eyes of cosmopolitan American readers such as Jeffrey Alexander, seemed to revive old stereotypes and to smack of a cultural nationalism which the international sociological community had taken to be superseded. Münch describes the British tradition of sociology as emphasizing class and conflict, the French one as focusing on society and structure, and the German one as developing a dialectical view on the social world. The American one, opposed to all European ones, does not seem to have any substantive core at all, but is characterized by standardisation and homogenisation of scholarly expression (Münch, 1991, 1993, 1995; Alexander, 1994). In the light of such crudeness, Alexander's strong reaction is understandable, even though the charge of nationalism is most certainly not justified with regard to this particular author. At the very least, Münch got himself into analytically troubled waters when he proceeded on the assumption that there were intellectual features specific to, first, each major European nation and, then, to Europe as compared to the US, only in need to be identified, rather than having turned this proposition into a researchable question.

Another recent analysis that also reasons in terms of national traditions in sociology avoids this pitfall. Donald Levine's history of sociological visions identifies seven major versions of the sociological project, six of which carry spatial-cultural denominations, the Marxian tradition being the only exception (Levine, 1995a).² Of the remaining six, the 'Hellenic' one should certainly also be given a special place, since it could as well be called Aristotelian and since it occupies a distinct historical time compared to all other 'sociologies'. For the rest, however, Levine associates specific ways of thinking sociology with existing national cultures during the history of the West between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth century; he talks about a British (which includes both the English and the Scottish), a French, a German, an Italian and an American tradition of sociology.

Compared to Münch, Levine provides a much more subtle and differentiated perspective which, however, shows many of the same contours. He sees British sociologists as elaborating a Newtonian image of the social world. In the search for a secular ethic, the atomic view of nature is transposed into the human world. Individualism and evolutionism (plus organicism) are the predominant theoretical perspectives, combined with a strong concern for measurability. The French approach, which emerges not least in debate with the British, in contrast, starts out from the postulate of societal realism, in which the social formation predominates over natural individual propensities. Society itself is seen as a source of sentiments, and, consequently, a societal normativity as well as a societal morality prevail.³ The German tradition of sociology, to confine our background image to these three national cultures, emphasizes a subject which is interpretive and capable of self-determination as well as to identify and make choices between good and evil. The triple ambition of German sociology then, according to Levine, is to understand the expressive

¹ I shall not take up here those parts of these debates that proceed via a critique of 'Western' social science, or even 'Western' world-views, though they could be included in a broader discussion of 'scholarly styles', beyond national ones. For an excellent example, see Chakrabarty, 2000.

² The fact that the Marxian tradition is the only clear exception to that rule raises questions as to the nature of that particular intellectual project, questions to which we shall return below.

³ We may note already here that both national sociological traditions, if thus conceptualized, rather seem to go against the grain of the predominant national variations of political modernity, as most journalistic cultural comparisons would have it, namely as a counterposition of the French individualism with the English insistence on habits and customs. I will come back to this later.

subject, to recognize the cognitive subject and to analyze the voluntaristic subject (Levine, 1995a, chapters 7 to 9).

If read as a contribution to the historiography of social thought, Levine's account is limited in many respects. However, this may not have been the author's primary objective. He counterposes existing 'narratives' of the development of the discipline of sociology, all of which are 'tunnel histories' in which the past ultimately, and finally inevitably, leads to the achievements of the present, to his 'national' accounts; and this counterposition seems to be a heuristic device to unfold an array of intellectual possibilities to conceptualize the social world. It is in this way that the identification of national traditions serves to underpin the observation of a plurality of ways of dealing with problematics that came to be defined as sociological and, in a second step, to understand those problematics better than one could from any single one of those perspectives.

This reading of Levine may have been overly generous, and even in my brief account the question is left open why problematics should come in national guises at all.⁴ I shall return to this issue below. At this point, one may just note that the idea that the social sciences come in national forms is alive in contemporary debates, but that a good account is still missing as to how that could have historically been the case and how it could still be so today. It is to possibilities for providing such an account that I now turn.

National traditions in the social sciences: analytical possibilities

Let us assume for a moment that there are, or at least have been, national traditions in the social sciences. There a number of quite distinct ways to try to account for this feature. I shall mention three possibilities.

The historical nature of the objects of social knowledge

The major reason for the national form of social knowledge can be seen to reside in the fact that the objects of the social sciences are themselves historical and cultural and in this sense always unique and particular. On the basis of some realist philosophy of social science or correspondence theory of validity, even in reasonably weak versions, one would assume that scholarly knowledge of this social world reflects the particularity and uniqueness of the object. Such a notion would make it understandable that social knowledge will not easily 'internationalise' as long as the forms of social relations do not themselves 'internationalise'.

To explain a national form of social knowledge on this basis, one would have to make the additional assumption that a main feature of these objects is their being themselves of a national extension - like the national 'society' of much of the sociology of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which corresponded to the political institutions of the nation-state - or at least, being a characteristic part of a bigger object that is national, and carrying some of the features of that bigger object.

⁴ In his contribution to the Münch-Alexander debate, Levine underlines that indeed he holds 'that national contexts played an important role in the development of sociology'. But he also stresses 'the international character of sociological discourse in the founding generation of 1890-1914'. For the present situation, he urges to see the current network of theories 'to consist not of national assertions but of theoretically and methodologically diverse orientations' (Levine, 1995b).

For much research and debate in the social sciences, this perspective forms a valid part of an overall explanation as to why there may be national forms of knowledge. In earlier work, I have myself come to the conclusion that the historical forms of the social sciences in Continental Europe, in particular during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, were related to the forms and self-understandings of statehood (Wagner, 1989, 1990). A pronounced national character of the social sciences emerged if and when the sociopolitical orders and the definition of issues they develop differ considerably. For the major Continental nations or would-be nations - France, Italy, Germany - it could be shown that this was indeed visibly the case.

For Italian sociology, for instance, Giorgio Sola explained: 'It is, in fact, national unification, the realization of an independent and united state, the basic process which for Italian sociology has the same role and assumes the same function which for other European sociologies [...] have been fulfilled by the emergence and affirmation of industrial society (Sola, 1985, p. 85). While being a valid observation for Italy, the comparative qualifications are hardly convincing. A closer look reveals that much the same could be said for the activities of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* (Association for Social Policy) in early German social science and that, in modified terms, the same largely holds true for the changing political structure of the French nation-state with Durkheimian sociology as what some have called the 'republican ideology' of the secular and democratic Third Republic which had to assert itself against the resistance of the old aristocratic and catholic elites (for some bi-national comparisons see Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, 1996).

In general, such a finding should not be too surprising, in particular for some of the older of the social science disciplines which had been rather clearly and unproblematically defined by their relation to social practices and institutions during the nineteenth century. History provided accounts of the development of national states and commonly showed a considerable dose of patriotism and nationalism. Law interpreted and systematized national legal systems; it provided them with justification and trained their practitioners. The state sciences - now often considered to be the forerunner to current political science (and still being called by the traditional name in some of the Scandinavian settings and, *mutatis mutandis*, at those US universities that have 'Schools of Government') - aimed at a comprehensive approach to problems of governance and policy-making in and for the existing polities. And geography and demography, whose objects are not national institutions *per se*, but social phenomena that were conceptualized so as to overlap with nations, provided nation-specific accounts of the state of the territory and its population.

The relation between the form of the object and the form of the knowledge about the object, however, while plausible, is insufficient when trying to account for national traditions in the social sciences. In particular towards the turn of the nineteenth century, scholars in these fields felt the need to define their work more precisely in academic terms, an operation that often implied some distancing from the concrete object under study. Partly following the model of the natural sciences, which had so enormously developed during the nineteenth century, partly responding to broader transformations of the university, which reemerged as the institutional locus of systematic research, social scientists devoted much energy to developing a scholarly definition and demarcation of their fields, be it through disciplinary treatises, such as for history and geography, or through the choice of theoretical foundations such as legal positivism in law or the theorem of the optimum population in demography (Rothblatt and Wittrock, 1993).

For our purposes here, two developments were particularly significant. First, it is noteworthy that, despite similar attempts, state/political scientists did not achieve a recognized degree of disciplinary consolidation in similar form (with the exception of the US), and the area suffered from a loss of influence to other disciplines (Manicas, 1987; Wagner, Wittrock and Whitley, 1991). Second, among the disciplines that profited from the decline of the state sciences the most notable ones

were economics, in its new guise after the marginalist revolution, and sociology, gaining a foothold at academic institutions for the first time. Now, at this point I just want to suggest that the rise of these two disciplines at this historical moment may have had to do with their being less ‘national’ and more ‘international’ than law, history or the state sciences or, in other words, with their trying to gain some distance from the concreteness of the economic and social relations that surrounded them. This hypothesis will need to be explored in more depth at a later point in my argument.

The constitutively national nature of social knowledge

An alternative way to explain the nation-specific variation in forms of social knowledge is to look not at the specificities of the objects but at those of the observers and scholars. In this view, regardless of the nature of the objects, social scientists always look from a specific standpoint, and this standpoint influences, or even determines, what they can see. The resources which they use for concept formation are drawn from their own social world and, thus, are impregnated with it, in the sense of the well-known double hermeneutics of social science knowledge, drawing on ‘lay’ knowledge in concept formation, on the one hand, and returning concepts for ‘lay’ appropriation, on the other. This view is clearly compatible with the view on the historical nature of the social world itself, but its focus is different. To put the difference in extreme terms: Even if there was some social phenomenon that was identical wherever it occurred, social scientists would perceive and conceptualize it differently according to the cultural resources they had at hand in their own, particular context.

Again, this reasoning needs an additional assumption to explain why the social sciences should come in specifically national, rather than more generally culturally different forms. This reasoning is provided by cultural-linguistic theories of the social world, which hold that human social life occurs in the form of communities who, most importantly, share a language, but also key norms and values. In its ‘modern’ form, this reasoning emerged in eighteenth-century Germany, not least as a reaction against the ‘French’ Enlightenment as well as, slightly later, against the Revolution that was fought in the name of ‘abstract’ human values rather than culturally grounded ones. It is originally associated with the names of philosophers and theorists of language such as Herder, Schleiermacher and Humboldt and recently revived not least in ‘communitarian’ positions in political philosophy.⁵

As in the case of the first type of explanation, the general validity of the reasoning cannot be denied. However, further questions remain as to the strength, i.e. the determining nature, of the cultural-linguistic constitution of knowledge as well as to, first, the solidity of the connection between culture and language and, second, the identification of any such cultural-linguistic entity with the historically existing nations and nation-states. If these linkages are tenuous, as some cultural-expressivist theorists would grant, this approach on its own does not go far enough in explaining any national forms of knowledge.

National fields of scholarly practices

In a third way of reasoning, the social sciences acquire a national form because they are produced by agents inhabiting a structured field in which certain rules govern and which, for historically contingent reasons, has national extension. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of science has featured such a notion of field and its related concepts, like habitus, position - dominant or dominated - in a

⁵ The probably most articulate contemporary spokesperson for a cultural ‘expressivist’ theory of language, selfhood and community is Charles Taylor, see especially Taylor, 1989 and 1995.

field, and strategy. It has thus opened the way for an analysis of scholarly practices that allows to study intellectual strategies without either presupposing or abandoning ideas of valid knowledge and to approach scholarly interactions in fine detail without making it impossible to relate them to institutional or political dimensions (see, among many other writings, Bourdieu, 1984; and the early programmatic article Bourdieu, 1975).

This approach, while not excluding the earlier two, goes beyond them by introducing agents and institutions - such as socialisation in teacher-disciple relations - into the analysis of changing forms and structures of knowledge. It also assumes that there is always a diversity of positions within a national field - as a force field - and, thus, allows for more fine-grained analyses. Importantly, it opens the possibility, indeed discussed by Bourdieu, of a strategy of importing elements of an external discourse into a national field to enhance one's own position therein. Thus, it is open towards an analysis of relations across the boundaries of national fields. In principle, thus, Bourdieu's field analysis of scholarly practices should allow a study of both the emergence of national fields and their later questioning in calls for 'transnationality'. There are, however, two major deficiencies, or rather: lacunae, in this approach.

First, Bourdieu himself has never provided sociological analyses of knowledge forms that cross boundaries.⁶ It seems that he takes the national extension of the fields largely for granted, thus turning it into an implicit, undiscussed issue, a presupposition for analysis rather than a feature itself to be analyzed. When his analyses proceed historically (and only some of them do), the interest is in the emergence of a new field in a process of separation from pre-existing ones, such as in the case of the emergence of an 'autonomous' field of cultural production, or in the changing constellations within an existing field, such as 'the death and resurrection of a philosophy without subject' in French philosophy and sociology (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1968). In Bourdieu's approach, neither the constitution nor the development of fields are in any significant way shaped by what goes on outside the national framework. For our question here, however, any pre-conceived notion of a nationally confined field is of little use. What is needed, beyond Bourdieu, is an understanding of the historical constellation of fields that implies a notion of the historical moment under analysis and thus is open to a consideration of the restructuring of the boundaries of fields themselves in changing relations of the 'national' to other dimensions of scholarly practices (see Werner and Zimmermann, 2002, for the proposal of a 'histoire croisée').

Second, there is a tendency in Bourdieu's work - though admittedly rather subtly at times - to fully explain the development of academic discourses or other cultural products through the location of the agents in intellectual, political and institutional fields rather than treating such factors as elements in a broader configuration that is not exhausted by them. In a sense, this is precisely Bourdieu's contribution to the sociology of science and an important achievement without doubt. No returns to either a 'great men' theory of the author or a theory of smooth intellectual progress supported by functionally designed institutions should be possible from there. However, this perspective tends to systematically underexplore those aspects of (what I would call) intellectual projects that cannot be explained by the parameters of the field itself. It appears to me to be in the nature of 'cultural production' that, while drawing on the institutional, political and intellectual resources at hand and employing them with reference to the structures of the field, it has the potential to create something not yet available and propose this creation for further use in and beyond the given moment.⁷

⁶ Though some historians and sociologists influenced by his perspective have done so.

⁷ In terms of social theory, this view emphasizes the creativity of action that goes beyond even the most sophisticated explanation by habitus and strategy; see Joas, 1995. An elucidating example for the limitations of Bourdieu's approach is his discussion of 'the political ontology of Martin Heidegger' (Bourdieu, 1991), which is in many respects (though possibly by now superseded) an exemplary study of the social and political, institutional and intellectual issues at stake

In sum, thus, my proposal to complement, rather than contradict, the existing approaches to the question of national traditions in sociology proceeds by understanding the sociological discourses as intellectual projects in their historical moments. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall venture some steps into the direction of such an analysis.

The case against national traditions in sociology

After this exploration of conceptual possibilities, let me then return to the question of national traditions in sociology and the other social sciences and let me try to reassess the case. The argument that the social sciences tend to share some basic cognitive or ideational commonalities within any one major nation and nation–state, and in contrast to other national approaches, has been made in a variety of forms, not without internal dispute among those who hold it. There is no need to go into any detail here, since every restatement of the account would not go uncontested in itself. The two recent versions of this argument, by Münch and Levine, may suffice as a background and point of departure for a more general discussion of the merits and shortcomings of the idea of national intellectual traditions, since they both provide recognizable images of, broadly understood, sociological perspectives in the various countries.⁸ In the following, I shall provide some observations, each further one building on the preceding one, on this kind of argument, which will finally lead to an alternative point of view.

Spaces of tensions

Any construction of a national intellectual tradition tends to portray the national field as a rather homogeneous space or a spot without dimensions, whereas it should be considered as a space of tensions in which indeed actors relate to each other intellectually, though not necessarily in the form of cognitive affinities but also in the form of dispute and rejection.

Any assertion of national intellectual commonalities runs into difficulties when it has to note that a scholarly view-point found its fiercest opponents in the same country rather than elsewhere. This is the case, for instance, for Immanuel Kant, with whom in Levine's view the German sociological tradition originates, but whose conception of freedom and of the subject were most strongly rejected by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel rather than by non-German social philosophers. Similarly, but across a larger time-span, Kant's views on morality were combated by Friedrich Nietzsche possibly more strongly than by anybody else. And Emile Durkheim saw his major opponents not in any British sociologist or German 'cultural scientist', but in the individualistically orientated economists and psychologists in his own country.⁹

These observations, casual as they are, can indeed be taken to confirm the idea of a national field in Bourdieu's sense, a structured space in which a variety of positions are possible. But this very notion entails that the field is heterogeneous, is united by conflictual relations rather than by cultural commonality - though these two features are certainly not mutually exclusive.

in the 'field' of philosophy during the Weimar Republic, but there is very little sense of the substantive aspects of Heidegger's philosophy and its relevance or irrelevance in thought and in politics. It does not provide any means then, for instance, to understand the current sustained interest in Heidegger's work.

⁸ In other words, my ambition is not to criticize Münch or Levine in particular, whose main agendas are likely to have been different anyway. It should also be noted that I will start out discussing the social sciences in general, but will later focus on the specific position of sociology.

⁹ On the neglect of Max Weber's work by the Durkheimian school, see Pollak, 1986; on the Durkheimian strategy see Karady, 1976.

The same point is underlined by the observation of historical oscillations in an intellectual field, i.e., characteristic movements from one pole to another one in a rather clearly structured field. Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis of the 'death and resurrection of a philosophy without subject', already cited above, proceeds in such a way. The authors may certainly be seen to describe a characteristics of French social philosophy, namely its subjectlessness since structuralism and Durkheimian sociology. Such an observation would overlap with both Levine's and Münch's characterisation of the French sociological tradition. At least similarly important in their analysis, however, is the move back and forth between such subjectlessness and highly subject-centered philosophical positions such as existentialism. Thus, they identify less any common substance or perspective than rather a common theme or concern around which different positions are developed whose relative strength varies over time.

The field of the social sciences and its sub-fields

Should, one may want to ask, existentialism be considered as part of any sociological tradition at all, rather than of philosophy? Certainly, this question may justifiably be answered in the negative. However, such an answer would not only prevent us from fully locating that major one of French post-Second World War sociologists who was deeply inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's works, namely Alain Touraine, in the intellectual field. It would also rather beg further questions as to the identification of the location of the social sciences (as well as their subdivisions in the form of disciplines) in the overall field of scholarly practices or, which provides again different dividing lines, in the broader intellectual field.

If we pose this question with particular regard to sociology, then we shall immediately see that the early history of this field was marked by pronounced differences between national institutional situations. We shall first have to note that sociology, the term being coined by Auguste Comte in 1838, was not institutionalized anywhere before the late nineteenth century. To integrate earlier writers into a 'sociological tradition' is not totally unjustifiable, indeed may reveal important intellectual linkages and transitions, but it will also always be marked by some inevitable arbitrariness or by implicit presuppositions as to what sociology is about.

At the end of the nineteenth century then, more particularly, the Durkheimian project in France was formulated, in intellectual terms, as a counter-project to economics and psychology with their individualistic and rationalistic assumptions. The alleged society-centered and 'subjectless' character of French sociology has its origins in this intellectual motivation which proved to be shaping the field. In institutional terms, however, sociology grew under the shelter of philosophy and the *Faculté des lettres*, which helps to understand its persistent proximity to philosophical debates and even to literature. This is what allows to write, as Bourdieu and Passeron do, an overlapping history of both sociology and philosophy in France.

In Germany, in contrast, the term 'sociology' - or even 'Gesellschafts-Wissenschaft', the German term initially coined after 'sociology' - was almost unanimously rejected during the nineteenth century and only reluctantly adopted afterwards. Max Weber, though founding member of the German Society for Sociology in 1909, preferred the term 'cultural sciences'. The social science approach that was dominant in Imperial Germany, as practiced in the *Verein für Socialpolitik*, had closer ties to economics, history and law than to philosophy, and it grew mostly in the *Staatswissenschaftliche Fakultät* (Faculty for State Sciences) rather than in the one for Philosophy. When chairs for sociology started being created in the Weimar Republic after the First World War,

this was hardly any separate institutionalisation at all, since most such chairs carried a double denomination, in law, economics or social policy and in sociology.

In England, Spencer notwithstanding, sociology emerged as an institution-based discipline only after the Second World War, whereas social research and concerns of 'social administration' were widely accepted from the late nineteenth century onwards. The emphasis on measurability that Levine detected may thus not necessarily be a characteristic of sociology as an academic discipline, but rather of an older tradition of institutionalised social research on policy-related issues, not least on poverty.

These observations may lead to the conclusion that the variation across national sociologies can largely be explained by the institutional position sociology gained in academia, its overall status in universities and its relation to other, more established disciplines. This suggestion considerably modifies, or even refutes, the more common idea of seeing prevailing perspectives in the social sciences as some expression of a national culture or of forms of the state.¹⁰

At the same time, however, there are some cross-national similarities in the institutional trajectories of 'sociology', all differences notwithstanding, whatever goes under that name in any given country. When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the other social science disciplines were already relatively well established, sociology was still struggling to come into existence. The particular institutional place of sociology among what we now call the social sciences is characterized by the fact that it emerged relatively late and that there is no specific realm or aspect of social life for the study of which sociologists could claim to have a particular competence.

When it was proposed as an addition to 'philosophy, politics and economics' (as the area is still called at the University of Oxford) as well as to history and anthropology, sociology was meant to study contemporary Western society. It did not claim special expertise for the past, as history did, or for societies elsewhere, as anthropology did. Nor could any field of analysis directly comparable to the relations of production and exchange, as for economics, or to the modes of setting and implementing common rules, as for political science, or to the workings of the soul, as for psychology, be identified for sociology. As a consequence, sociologists sometimes made the claim to provide the most comprehensive study of all social relations, as Emile Durkheim did in France, subordinating all other fields, or, much more modestly, they aimed at providing a necessary complement to the substantive fields of inquiry by studying the mere form of social relations, as Leopold von Wiese argued in Germany. However, the former kind of claim had to arouse the opposition of scholars from other, mostly more established fields; the latter, while more acceptable, could hardly be considered very appealing.

It is a common institutional characteristics of the various sociologies to have been proposed in an institutionally already well occupied and demarcated field at the turn of the nineteenth century. This leads to two further suggestions regarding the particular nature of sociology. First, rather than expressing any hegemonic national culture, it may be an approach to the contemporary social world that runs counter to the 'official' national view as expressed by the existing set of disciplines. And second, if those existing disciplines, owing to their formation in the national educational institutions during the nationalist nineteenth century, are indeed national forms of knowledge, the newcomer, intent to mark a difference, may turn out to be rather more international in orientation. These suggestions will be discussed in the following two sections.

¹⁰ Or, in other words, cross-national intellectual comparisons of 'sociologies', if they are viable at all, are quite uncertain about what it is that they compare, beyond the adoption of the common name.

'Sociology' versus 'national culture'?

If we compare them to history, law and the state sciences, both economics and sociology appeared considerably less 'national' and more 'international' in outlook at the end of the nineteenth century. Certainly, the marginalist revolution in economics had created a truly international discourse with a strong degree of formalisation. Though it did not become dominant everywhere as the accepted core of the discipline, certainly not in Germany, and did not penetrate economics as a more broadly defined field of scholarly practice, even where it was intellectually dominant, such as in England (Tribe 1991), 'neo-classical' economics had at least a virtual presence as the international approach to economics throughout the world.

A similar argument is more difficult to sustain for 'classical' sociology. After all, we are talking here about the period during which, among others, the 'French school' of sociology emerged. Nevertheless, as I shall argue later, a version of such an 'internationalist' view of sociology is tenable.

Let us note first of all, that sociology is a discipline for which an international association, the *Institut International de Sociologie* (IIS), was founded, in Paris in 1893, before national associations were set up - such as the American Society for Sociology in 1905, the German Society for Sociology in 1909, the Society of Japanese Sociology in 1912 and its more liberal counterpart, the Japan Sociological Society in 1923, or the first Russian Sociological Society, with its base in Petrograd, in 1916. Admittedly, the IIS never gained an important role, was eclipsed even in its founding location, Paris, by the rise of Durkheimism, and only now may re-emerge from the secondary role it played since the founding of a competitor organisation, the International Sociological Association (ISA), with the support of UNESCO after the Second World War.¹¹

But secondly, and more importantly, sociologists offered an analysis of the contemporary social world that situated it in its own time, in the historically developed societal configuration, rather than in an essentially unchangeable place. Despite its many variations, most sociologies tended to adopt analytical perspectives which they considered specific to industrial society, or by whatever other name they called the social configurations of their time, and preferred those to ideas of cultural-linguistic determination of the social world, sometimes relegated to a pre-industrial, pre-bureaucratic past.¹² This is one justifiable way of calling 'classical' sociology truly modern, namely as in Baudelaire's sense trying to catch the eternal moment together with and through the fleeting present.

In educational institutions that were not least designed to cultivate and transmit the national heritage, such a view-point could not be expected to be easily accepted. Lacking the depth of time-honoured wisdom and of historical experience, sociology was often seen as flat and shallow. As a consequence, the newcomer was regarded as a parvenu in academic institutions; and its arrival was often obstructed, certainly not much welcomed. In Italy, for instance, the influential Benedetto Croce, often considered the spokesperson for Italian culture during the first half of the twentieth century, spoke for many philosophers when in 1906 he called sociology a 'chaotic mixture of natural and moral sciences; ... another "new science", which as a philosophical science is

¹¹ This story cannot be told in detail here. IIS tried to promote a truly international approach to the study of the social world, but was unable to flourish before the First World War. During the inter-war years, the Italian statistician Corrado Gini, who supported fascism, became its president. The IIS being discredited as a consequence, the new ISA was created as a multi-national rather than international debating club - and fell itself victim to the limits of international exchange during the Cold War, which imposed a quite formal system of intellectual administration.

¹² Certainly, this observation does not hold for everything that was proposed under the name of sociology, not even during the classical era. I shall discuss other approaches in a different context of my argument, below.

unjustifiable and as an empirical science anything else but new. It is new only as “sociology”, that is as a barbaric positivistic incursion into the domains of philosophy and history’ (for more detail and full reference, see Wagner, 1990, chapter 7).

As a consequence, as briefly observed earlier, any characterisation of a national sociological tradition, including those by Münch and Levine, is often at odds with general characterisations of a culture. Orientations towards the individual and to measurement in English sociology contrast with the emphasis on habits and traditions in English culture, in as far as such a statement can be made at all.¹³ If Weber had any strong methodological point to make, it was the one against any rushed use of ‘collective concepts’, in strong tension to accounts of ‘the German ideology’ of collectivism and hierarchy such as provided later by Louis Dumont (1991).¹⁴ And, as mentioned earlier, while Durkheim’s concept of society may resonate with the French revolutionary tradition of solidarity, it runs against the individualism which is supposed to be typical of French culture.

We may conclude from these observations that, to a certain extent, classical sociologies did exactly not express the national cultures in which they emerged, but aimed at gaining some distance from them. It is this feature of sociological discourse that we shall finally explore before summarizing our argument.

Sociological distancing

The activity of ‘thinking’ can generally be described as an attempt to gain distance from the present moment, to liberate oneself from the seemingly continuous flow of time, to create ‘a gap between past and future’ (Arendt, 1978). Obviously, however, thinking does not happen all the time, and its aims are not always fulfilled.

Up to this point, we have identified three elements of the late-nineteenth century intellectual, political and institutional configuration which can be seen as broadly conducive to a distancing exercise. First, a conception of science had developed, in particular in the natural sciences, that made forms of distancing through experiments and conceptualisation constitutive for knowledge-seeking. On the one hand, this conception had been enormously successful during the nineteenth century; on the other hand, its inclination towards specialisation and fragmentation of knowledge was increasingly criticized. In different ways, both evaluations lent themselves to a further distancing scrutiny of the scientific enterprise itself, especially in the social sciences which underwent a formative moment.

Second, to some observers who then turned sociologists it appeared as if a major social transformation was under way that happened in several of the European nations in largely similar form and that could not sufficiently be understood by the established intellectual means. Clearly, these assessments were not shared by many of the university mandarins in France, Germany, Italy or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But it was exactly their combination, a society-transcending change towards a novel configuration, that called for a new science of the social world, for an approach that gained distance from the traditions of thought established in national institutions.

¹³ Crown witnesses are authors like Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott, but also the later, ‘English’, Wittgenstein. Obviously, we shall avoid to make this point explicitly, since its validity would have to rely not on intellectual history but on a comprehensive cultural analysis which in itself is highly problematic (on the theoretical issues at stake see Friese and Wagner, 1999).

¹⁴ While Weber let his early work, such as his inaugural address of 1895, address the German state in a rather unproblematizing way, he became increasingly critical of endowing everyday notions of collective meanings and institutions with conceptual status.

At the time when this new science was proposed, thirdly, that part of the intellectual field that is devoted to the interpretation of the contemporary world was already well occupied by a variety of positions from several disciplines (contemporary history, philosophy, state sciences, but also from medicine and other less obvious disciplines). For the proponents of the emerging sociology this meant, on the one hand, that they had to gain distance from those established positions, and on the other hand, that competition as a form of intellectual exchange was already introduced in this area.

All elements taken together, the ground was certainly prepared for an interpretation of the contemporary social world that distanced itself from the prevailing national culture. This interpretation nevertheless needed to be substantively developed. The question where the would-be sociologists found the resources to develop their views can in many cases receive a straightforward answer: they found them abroad.

It is well-known, but little discussed, that Emile Durkheim spent some time in Germany at the beginning of his career and wrote a series of articles on *La science positive de la morale en Allemagne* for the *Revue philosophique* after his return. His basic concern was well present in these essays: He looked for a renewal of moral philosophy in the light of the social situation of his time, and he surmised that such a philosophy would have to be 'positive', that is studying the specific condition of human social life empirically and historically. He was impressed by the German scholars' sense of historic specificity, unlike the speculative and abstract philosophy prevailing in France. Though his own 'rules of sociological method' should take a different shape later on, the visit to Germany gave him the angle from which to gradually define the novelty of his own project in France.

Max Weber was one of those historically minded German scholars, though he was himself too young to catch young Durkheim's attention. He, however, saw a need to get beyond the unquestioned truths of the Historical School of economics in Germany. His methodological writings are interventions into the 'historians' dispute', the main protagonists of which were the German Gustav Schmoller and the Austrian Carl Menger, himself also one of the inventors of marginalism in economics. Weber tended to side with Menger, but the nationality is here less important than the fact that Menger's position can be described as the 'internationalist' one against the emphasis on historical and cultural rootedness, with regard to both the object and the observer, in Schmoller.

The examples could be continued, but this is not the place for a detailed analysis of 'transfers' in the social sciences.¹⁵ These observations leave us with two new possibilities. As a consequence of these borrowings, sociology could either develop as a counter-discourse to the prevailing one in each national culture; and such counter-discourses could also be nationally specific each. Or these borrowings could have proliferated to such an extent that a truly international discourse of sociology emerged.

Sociology as an international discourse?

The question, then, is whether the multiple reactions to established national self-understandings showed any commonalities. Often quite consciously, though again in a variety of forms, the emerging social sciences of the nineteenth century defined themselves as responses to the economic

¹⁵ No studies comparable to those pursued by the group around Michel Espagne and Michael Werner for transfers between France and Germany in philology and modern languages, or by Peter Schöttler for history, exist for the social sciences. See Pollak, 1986, as one contribution to such a project in waiting.

and political revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Therborn, 1976; Hawthorn, 1978; Wagner, 1998). To this extent, the debates had strong international features.

A particular example of an approach whose sources were supra-national and which was conceptualised as truly international in more than one respect, was Marx's synthesis, as Lenin put it, of historical materialism from three intellectual sources: German idealism, English political economy and French socialism (Lenin, 1966). The Marxian sociological tradition, to use Levine's term, is significant also in institutional terms. While it barely gained a foothold in established academic institutions during the nineteenth century, the Italian ones being one major exception, its alliance with the workers' movement, which it had itself contributed to form, enabled it to organize a 'scientific field' of its own. As the intellectual wing of this movement, the Marxian tradition developed - and reproduced itself - through journals, schools and meetings much like academic social science, but without strong national boundaries in the field (see Wuthnow, 1989).

The internationality of the Marxian tradition is, however, exceptional. Though, as we keep arguing, it is a distortion to portray the social sciences as national traditions, no fully international discourse emerged either. Instead we see intellectual power struggles over the interpretation of the contemporary social situation. And national strengths remain well visible in these power struggles. Let us just note as one example Robert von Mohl's mid-century failure to get the 'sciences of society' accepted as a counterpart to the state sciences in the German lands. His attempt, drawing heavily on French inspiration, gives testimony to an existing internationality and to the strength of national boundaries at the same time (Wagner, 2000a).¹⁶

In general, the opposition to sociology that arose in many countries can be read along similar lines. When historical and cultural scholars in Germany protested against this alleged Western aberration, they were simultaneously making a case for a national tradition, their own, and against an opponent whose nation-transcending potential they well recognized - and feared. While those Germans tended to reject even the name of sociology, intellectual opposition to 'Western' sociology elsewhere, and later also in Germany, adopted the label while proposing organicist or other holistic views of society. This was notably the case in the Southern US and in Japan, where authentic responses to 'Western' modernity were searched for (Ross, 1990; Kawamura, 1994).

These observations may then lead us away from the view that an emerging international discourse strives to overcome national traditions but is only partially successful, towards a conception of the structure of sociological discourse that counterposes this international discourse to a variety of national reactions which, while oppositional, are themselves 'sociological', at least in a broad sense. At a closer look indeed, 'Western' sociology appears less monolithic than its opponents thought, and the alternative proposals less incompatible with it. An overall transformation of thinking about 'society' occurred, in which the recourse to the 'national' and the 'international' was part of an intellectual struggle rather than any unequivocal description of a cognitive position.

What emerged as 'sociology' was an intellectual space which, while recognizably distinct from other ways of thinking about the social world, included a variety of specific problematics for which different solutions were possible. The inability to solve these problematics permanently, leaves room for particularity. Such particularity has often taken national form, but it need not do so. In a final step, a description of this space shall be attempted, together with some observations on the current forms of particularity within this space.

¹⁶ A more friendly inter-national exchange took place, for instance, in the sequence of Tocqueville's reading of American democracy and James Stuart Mill's reading of Tocqueville's reading of American democracy; see Mill, 1994.

Persistent variation in the interpretation of modernity

The emergence of sociology dates to the period following the American and French Revolutions. It is a study of social life that is decisively marked by liberal thinking in the sense that it does not take social order for granted, does not see this order as given by some superior, or even extra-human, authority. At the same time, however, it breaks with the liberal political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century by insisting that there is a social reality between the individuals and the polity. From a sociological point of view, political order is not necessarily to be understood as the result of some agreement between atomistic individuals; its form and substance rather is related to a structure of social relations; to identify and analyse that structure is the task of sociology.

Thus, sociology marked its difference from economics and psychology, on the one hand, and political science and law, on the other, less by carving out a specific realm of social life, but rather by developing a particular perspective. It focused on sociality as a characteristic of human beings and, as a consequence of such sociality, on the emergence of a structured set of social relations between human beings, also called society, a phenomenon which was neither the inadvertent result of multiple independent preferences of individuals nor identical to the formal set of common rules known as law and institutionalized in the state.

To put the issue in such terms meant that sociology was 'modern' in the sense that it accepted the assumptions and outcomes of the revolutions: There was an autonomy of human action that could not be subjected to imposed laws. As a consequence, human social life developed along novel paths; there was a break with earlier human societies. But this did not entail either that the new situation was basically well grasped by individualist liberalism or that it was in principle unknowable because of the unpredictable nature of autonomous action. In contrast to both these views, sociology proposed to make the new set of social relations intelligible through the study of social relations and the emergent social order. In this sense, sociology posed as the science of 'modern society' per se, with its own very distinctive programme.

The outlines of this programme were identifiable early in the nineteenth century, most clearly - though not under the name of sociology - probably in Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's *Elements of a Philosophy of Right*. This text refers to the abstractions of liberal theorizing critically and negatively, but as an inescapable condition that needed to be overcome. While this insight proved valid to the present day, Hegel erred when he thought he could outline the contours of the thinking that overcomes individualist liberalism as a 'philosophy of right'. This is the intellectual space which a variety of sociologies were to struggle about for more than one and a half centuries to come (see Wagner, 1998, 2003, for more detail).

And it is a space that transcended national boundaries. Its emergence can be traced to rather particular origins: early modern political theory around Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau; the American Revolution; the French Enlightenment and Revolution, in particular. But the challenge that issued from these events did not escape observers elsewhere. As a response a number of different discourses were proposed from the late eighteenth century onwards. Between the late eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century, a pool of forms of theorizing social configurations of modernity was created on the diversity of which we basically still draw. During the nineteenth century, there probably were nationally specific patterns in drawing on this pool, and probably even more so attempts to stereotype national responses to the problematics of modernity.

If some of these discourses had territorial inscriptions, however, it is very dubitable whether these inscriptions should be treated otherwise than historically contingent. It is much more important to take the diversity of approaches as an indication for the inability of the ‘originally modern’ discourse to deal satisfactorily with some of the issues it had itself raised. As a consequence, the emerging variety proved persistent, as a variety of interpretations of modernity.

There is no space to discuss here in any detail those ‘modern’ issues that proved inescapable yet unattainable at the same time (see for more detail Wagner, 2001a). Among them are the quest for valid knowledge (the quest for certainty, in John Dewey’s apt phrase), the search for a good and viable polity (the quest for community), and the desire to see oneself as part of an order extending beyond one’s own bodily existence (the quest for transcendence). Under conditions of modernity, human beings have recognized that there are no solid, fixed solutions to these issues, but that they will need some feasible, workable solutions for their own individual or collective lives nevertheless.

Sociology has claimed to be able to deal with such issues by a new combination of empirical and conceptual work. For classical sociology, to return to our key example, it can easily be shown that the search for such new solutions by new, sociological means was a key concern. Later, twentieth-century, social science took those issues to be basically solved and moved any remaining concerns to other realms of discourse, notably epistemology, political philosophy and religion. There were no such solutions, however, and mere neglect was no way out since sociology has historically been constituted by taking this specific stand on these issues. The confinement of those issues to subfields such as the sociology of knowledge, political sociology and the sociology of religion hides this fundamental, constitutive importance.

As a consequence, these issues return in the form of fundamental disputes in social philosophy and in the philosophy of the social sciences. Recent debates about liberalism and communitarianism or about modernity and post-modernity are the latest instances of such disputes. Whoever attempted to reconstruct national contexts for those debates would encounter the same problems our preceding analysis identified: One would locate the emergence of communitarianism in the allegedly most liberal-individualist culture of the West, the USA; one would find the strongest commitment to reason, personified by Jürgen Habermas and his followers, in the land of the dialectics where any such claim had been dismantled many times; and, in contrast, the farewell to reason would appear to be voiced in the country of the Enlightenment.

The counter-arguments to any such construction are too evident to belabour them here. The important insight is the one in the inevitably persistent variety of interpretations of modernity, wherever any particular variety may find a temporary home. And, as our historical sketch was meant to have demonstrated, none of the modes of answering these questions can lay a specific claim to being modern. It is rather the impossibility to give any one superior answer together with the inevitable persistence of the questions that modernity is about.

Formes de savoir social et la condition moderne contemporaine

Such conclusion, though, may be far too inconclusive to be satisfactory. While it can be convincingly ascertained that the national form of social knowledge was the result of a historically contingent circumstances, it remains striking that such form could assert itself so strongly over a major, indeed also a constitutive period of the social sciences. At the same time, and this issue was hardly addressed in this essay (but see Wagner, 1999b, 2001b), there are reasons to assume that the social sciences acquired during their national period a rather limited – and constraining –

conception of the relation between their own knowledge and the political forms within which they were developing. During the post-classical period, that is, from the 1930s, but in particular from the 1950s onwards, social knowledge was increasingly conceptualized as the systematic gathering of empirical information on the state of a society that was considered to be moulded and shaped by enlightened intervention by policy-makers. The national traditions of social knowledge waned and gave way to forms of social knowledge about a national society that was the passive object of external intervention. In the light of such observations, the debates in the recent two or three decades can be seen as entailing a double shift – a renewed understanding of the ‘local’ character of all knowledge, and a re-orientation with regard to the political form to which social knowledge addresses itself.

Like all knowledge claims, first, the social sciences move constantly between particularity and universality. As a knowledge about the social world, any social science knowledge will always have a strong local component. Rather than denying this feature or wishing it away, social scientists may after the experiences of the twentieth century be ready to confront this aspect of their condition. The ability to reflect on one's own conditions of possibility is a strength and not a weakness.

At the same time, the social sciences as a historical project that constituted itself in the context of the American and French Revolutions also have a particular agenda that may be broadened and altered but hardly abandoned. In other words, modernity is the key theme and condition of the social sciences, if modernity is understood as a situation in which human beings see themselves facing the freedom and predicament to give themselves their own laws. This situation has now become global; even those who may want to reject or modify this predicament cannot but see themselves confronted with the modernist claim.

Given its European and American roots, there is always the risk that this concern with modernity will be cast in parochial terms. The classical era witnessed international and intranational strife about this issue. During much of the twentieth century, in particular after the end of the Second World War, the social sciences promoted a particular image of Western modernity. At the end of this century, however, it may be possible to conceptualise interlocking sociocultural and intellectual varieties of modernity instead of either a set of mutually incompatible national projects of modernity or one-dimensional globalisation - even though there certainly is still much to do in terms of a radical openness towards, and a full inclusion of, such varieties.

If this is the case, though, secondly, should we then assume that the debate over the most appropriate interpretation of modernity will in our, post-national era occur without any territorial inscriptions? Should one think about the politico-intellectual competition in this field rather in analogy to the rise of Marxism as an internationally operating alternative interpretation of the modern project? While it is certainly true that strong territorial inscriptions in analogy to the ‘national schools’ of the era around 1900 are unlikely to recur in a period of enhanced global communication flows, interpretations of modernity will always only flourish if they relate to existing institutional forms, in particular forms of the polity, and those forms in turn will have a territorial base, even in the era of alleged ‘empire’.¹⁷

More particularly, it is indeed observable in our period that two major interpretations of modernity crystallize and compete with one another, an North American and a European one, if one wants to

¹⁷ Hardt and Negri (2000) almost certainly overestimate the degree of de-territorialization in current global politics and social struggle.

attach territorial labels to them.¹⁸ At the same time, a return to an opposition between mutually incompatible such interpretations is neither likely nor desirable. In contrast, a review of the earlier experience with competing schools suggest two normative conclusions for a future social science.

First, even though the ‘modern’ social sciences had long embarked on a path of professionalization and autonomization, the history of the twentieth century has ultimately shown that the social sciences can not entirely liberate themselves from ‘constitutional’ issues. One cannot think of a science as something that, once founded, will afterwards no longer have to address issues of its own foundation. All such twentieth-century attempts have proven illusory. But this situation may be much less problematic than some philosophers of social science have taken it to be. The social sciences do not have to lock themselves into their own world of validity claims. If they renew their links to philosophy and history, but also to literature and the arts in general, and live with such open boundaries, then their own strengths will become visible and creative exchange may start again. There is a plurality of ways of world-making, and communication across boundaries can only help understand the specific possibilities contained in each one of them. Not least, it will help them to understand their own embeddedness in the ‘local’ contexts from which they arise.

Secondly, with regard to the relation to the polity itself, the social sciences need to be less intrigued – or flattered – by the expectation for directly applicable knowledge. Being taken to task on their initial promise to provide social betterment through social knowledge, the social sciences periodically witnessed strong demand for their expertise during the twentieth century. Periods of high hopes regarding the usefulness of the social sciences have certainly helped their institutional consolidation, but they tended not to be periods of intellectual productivity and creativity. Addressed to social scientists themselves one may say: As long as their university base is not eroded, they should probably see times of slacking demand as welcome – and needed – times of intellectual recovery. This is a viable proposition however only if science policy-makers on the other side understand that social science knowledge is not a product of ‘just in time’ manufacture. Without the ‘intellectual universalism’ of university life in the classical European tradition (Bourdieu 1992; Wagner 1996b), the social sciences will lose their cultural foundations and societies an essential source of knowledge and self-understanding. Within the European polity, the master-case for a post-national political form, for instance, social science policy-making in the coming ‘European Research Area’ should remain aware of this condition of possibility for fruitful social knowledge.

¹⁸ Thus, despite all crudeness of the argument, Münch had a valid intuition when developing his contrast between European and American traditions of the social sciences; for some ideas for a more cautious distinction of European and North American interpretations of modernity, see Wagner, 1999a , 2000b.

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