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## Tasks for the Political Sociology of the Next Ten Years

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## INTRODUCTION

We here make some suggestions as to how a specifically sociological approach to politics can build upon the course corrections recently made in political and historical sociology, as well as in the theory of action and of social structures. We argue that late-twentieth-century political sociology was led in several directions that were unprofitable. First, this political sociology was characterized by a disproportionate (and largely disappointing) focus on large-scale transitions, like revolutions, or other significant outcomes, at the expense of the examination of regularities in conventional political process. Second, the sociology that *did* treat everyday, lay, political behavior tended to embrace a notion of action that confused the reasons people gave for their choices with the predictors of their actions. Third, there was relatively little attention to the sociology of political elites as members of face-to-face groups with their own imperatives and organizational principles.

Of the many new directions now pursued in political sociology, we propose that two, in particular, are the most promising. The first is characterized by a field theoretic approach to social action, which allows the analyst to examine the interplay between the forms of organization that characterize political actors (on the one hand), and then the wider populace (on the other). The second is characterized by engagement with advances made in social and political psychology, cognitive science, and elsewhere in the social sciences, which allow the analyst to build a more plausible – and generative – theory of social action.

## LOST GROUND

It does not appear that political sociology, narrowly defined, gained much ground in the late twentieth century, despite cumulative progress in the closely related fields of social movements, social psychology, and state formation. To some extent, this may be because we have a sister-science dedicated to the study of politics, and, for quite some time, the two fields were not very different in outlook. But this also, we suspect, came from the influx of students with social movement experience into sociological graduate schools. If they were like most people, they would tend to begin from the assumption that what they and their friends had done was unusually important and worthy of detailed study. But more influential on the post-1960s development of political sociology than any possible tendency toward *me-search* was the general mood of supercilious dismissal of the everyday in favor of the “revolutionary” (usually a self-anointment). To generations of sociology graduate students, the work of Thomas Kuhn was radically misinterpreted to mean that dull people did normal science, and brilliant people revolutionized whatever was in their way.

This spirit, or so runs our empirically underdetermined reconstruction, discouraged students from examining politics as usual, whether the classic voting studies of mass behavior or the examination of legislative or electoral process on the part of elites. This could be left to political science (see Burstein 1981 for this point). Although sociologists continued to study attitudes, political public opinion was largely abandoned to the pollsters – often because of sociologists’ dismissal of its importance as a cause of policy or the reliability of its measurements (Burstein 1998).

Further, the interest in “revolutions” led to a focus on state-building efforts that started with what seemed a reasonable assumption, namely, that we should try to explain large-scale *outcomes*, with inspirational exemplars like the work of Perry Anderson and Barrington Moore. But, we firmly believe, this turned out to be a grave mistake.<sup>1</sup> Given few cases, noisy data subject to endless tendentious reclassification, and, most probably, fragile and stochastic processes (Lieberson 1991), there was almost no chance of analysts finding anything that was both robust and nontrivial. (The one secure finding from all this research seems to be that the best cause of a revolution is the state breaking down, which is a bit like saying that the strongest cause of burning is being on fire.) As Machiavelli (1998) said, “Two persons working differently come out

<sup>1</sup> A similar false lead in explaining outcomes also diverted social movement theory which, correcting the dismissive analyses of the 1950s that understood movements as mere expressiveness as a result of “strain,” took movement goals seriously and attempted to see which were met. But just as with the revolutions literature, the more that was known, the more the generalizations inched toward tautology, leading to a recognition of the need to focus less on outcomes and more on processes – indeed, tedious processes as well as contentious ones (McAdam and Tarrow 2010, 2011).

with the same effect; and of two persons working identically, one is led to his end, the other not.”

The consequence of this overweening prosecution of a revolution-oriented program of research has been that other disciplines in the social sciences have left sociology behind in the development of new knowledge about politics (also see Walder 2009). While there have been numerous important exceptions thanks to a number of political sociologists (e.g., Clem Brooks, Jeff Manza, Myra Marx Ferree, and others), overall, little of the advance in understanding conventional political behavior came from sociologists. The advances that were made do, we believe, indicate well enough the directions for the political sociology of the next generation, and which empirical tasks are most pressing.

We argue that political sociology must grapple with the distinctive theoretical characteristics of politics as a form of social action. Noting the places where politics happens and the people involved, this leads logically to three specific tasks: first, to better understand the logic of political professionals and their relations to other groups of elites; second, to better understand the logic of mass political ideology or, more generally, the cognitive-emotional components of their political action; and third, to better understand the processes linking these two forms of regularity. The first step to accomplishing these tasks, we propose, is a proper conceptualization of political action.

## WHAT ARE POLITICS?

### Form and Content

We suspect that in cases of difficult-to-theorize objects, such as “politics,” the common tactic of beginning by definition is a dangerous one, as it may define out of the realm of observations cases, events, processes, or facts that might be crucial for our conclusions. Because “politics” is a term taken from everyday life, as opposed to a specialist-derived one (such as “population momentum”), there may be, in common discourse, a shared if inchoate understanding of what one means by politics. If there is, our initial task is not to *define*, but to clarify existing ideas and bring them to exactitude where possible and to identify their limits and contradictions where not.

The confusion as to the referent of the term “politics” can be somewhat clarified by making two common distinctions. The first has to do with what sorts of persons it is whose actions we study. On the one hand, we might consider politics as a specific activity undertaken by dedicated specialists, whom we might consider specifically political elites (which does not imply that they are necessarily also elites in other ways). In this light, we would focus on legislators, party leaders, and executives, perhaps bureaucrats or judges, and so on. On the other hand, we might consider politics as something

that involves most citizens, even if their involvement is sporadic, vague, and/or inconsistent. We will return to this distinction between the professional and lay senses of “politics” below.

The second distinction has to do with our analytic approach. As in many other cases, we avoid a number of conceptual confusions if we make a distinction between a *formal* definition of our subject and a *substantive* one. For example, consider the case of “Economics,” which is used both to refer to the *science* of economics (which is a *formal* sense of the term), and to the *goings-on* studied by this science (a *substantive* one). It is the former (formal) sense that allows us to speak of (for example) an “economic” approach to dating; here what we mean is that we are going to treat dating as, say, an equilibrium established by a set of individual choices by agents attempting to maximize their utility. It is the latter (substantive) sense that allows for a *non-economic* approach to want satisfaction, as in the theory of Karl Polanyi. For this reason, we would not call a *Polanyian* approach to dating an “economic theory” of dating.

A similar distinction arises when it comes to politics. It will be our argument that we are most likely to classify an event or institution as political if it satisfies both the formal and substantive definitions, and most of us will see cases in which only one of these two criteria is satisfied as less central. From a *substantive* perspective, it seems undeniable that we use the term “politics” to refer to activities that turn on the *state* as organization. Someone who claimed to know a great deal about politics, but had no understanding of, say, either the structure of parliament or how elections to a parliament were conducted, would strike us as very curious, even if she knew about, say, public attitudes. However, someone who claimed to study politics, and only examined relations between members of parliament, but did not study elections, would not seem as strange.

When it comes to a *formal* perspective, it may at first be difficult to discern a commonality to usage. Yet we may make provisional forays by noting that there seems to be wide consensus that politics involves struggles over some aspect of social structure, usually to control an organization. Thus while an advertising agency may have no direct relations with the state, we might describe a member of this agency’s actions as “political” if they are oriented to taking control of this organization.

One thing that organizations do is create the possibility of certain indivisible goods (Martin 2009). That is because a strong organization – one that has the capacity of acting as a virtual unity, and hence pooling the effort of many people – is itself such an indivisible good. Split into little pieces it loses its capacity, and if there is some sort of difference of interests between members, it cannot be solved by determining the optimum allocation of goods, as can be done with divisible goods such as money.

States by their nature are strong organizations; while they can generate divisible goods (like politically controlled appointments, which can be parceled out as the result of compromises), the control over the organization

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itself tends to outweigh any of the particular goods that it can produce. Thus, all other things being equal, we would expect states to be arenas of politicization.

This is a convenient story, but there are two ambiguities. The first is that, contrary to our usual ways of talking, “the” state is not a single organization, but a network of organizations. Indeed, it might be more truthful to say there is not a “the” state at all. This means that a study of one *aspect* of the state, such as its economic development apparatus (Evans and Rauch 1999) or the culture of its civil servants and political appointees (Bourdieu 1998), in any one *part* of the state, cannot be assumed to offer a synecdoche for the whole. In fact, the institutional logics of state organizations vary widely depending on branch of government, legislative mandate, and public reputation. Differences in the salience of different state organizations for different sets of elites or mass actors, and variation in the institutional logics governing how resources and careers flow through these organizations, prevent the “politicization” of some aspects of the state while hastening conflict over others (see, e.g., Mettler 2011; Laumann and Knoke 1987).

Second, once we orient ourselves to this network of interlaced and interdependent organizations, we may find confusions in delimiting what we mean by the state. In some cases, the armed forces are a nearly independent counterweight to civilian organizations. In others, paramilitary organizations gradually shade into private organizations. So, too, practices of contracting can lead technically private companies to be crucial for the implementation of state policies. Finally, state-owned companies may be functionally independent of the state in most ways.

This suggests the limitations to a purely substantive definition of the object of political sociology. It is significant that we term studies of the army “military sociology” and not *political* sociology, and call investigation of judges “sociology of law.” It seems that we must use some sort of *formal* distinction to bound our object. One approach was taken by Weber (1946 [1918]), in his attempt to divide politics from administration. Is this position a “political” one (which is struggled for via, say, party) or a purely “administrative” one (that is sheltered from party competition by, for example, a merit-based civil service system)?

This seems promising, but has its own difficulties. A position may be the object of partisan struggle, and go as reward to the victor, but once it is captured, the occupant is not necessarily expected to use this position to further political efforts (even if the use of the position is not wholly disinterested). If she is not using this position to weaken opposing alliances, then although the position is a political appointment, it is not a *politicized* position. Politicization, then, involves struggle – but what are the actors struggling *for*? The most common answer is that they struggle for *power*. This notion, however, is at best misleading, because of how we understand this term.

**Political Power, Force, and Violence**

Here we think it important that sociology reject the Weberian notion of politics, which, as Arendt (1958, 1969) emphasized, tended to confuse *force* and *power* – a conflation common to a generation of intellectuals and politicians still in awe of Bismarck.<sup>2</sup> This confusion, as Arendt said, leads to the *destruction* of politics, not its clarification. It is no accident that it was a generation that confused force and power that could find no way to justify its brief experiment with democracy and actual politics.

Force, argued Arendt, has to be understood as making reference to the physical state of persons. Power, on the contrary, is a latent potential of a set of social relations. To say that a politician “strives for power” is therefore a bit misleading. A politician might attempt to create power, or control it, but it is not something that one person can squirrel away, like diamonds. Force causes power to collapse, breaking social relationships and returning us to the world of bodies and material objects. Thus what is most distinctive about politics is that it does *not* involve the resort to force. However, as Clemens (2016: 20) says, this “conception of ‘the political’ as a zone of freedom has been an enduring source of confusion,” and may be misunderstood as a tautological ideal typical thinking at best, blatant apologetics at worst.

First, it is important to distinguish (like Arendt) between force and *violence*. Although, as Clemens (2016: 19f.) notes, the key thing about the realm of the political was its insulation from certain types of coercion, this did not always imply an absence of the use of violence. What it implied, instead, was a presence of a freedom of actors to form or to sever alliances.

Consider a stereotypical picture of organized crime. If one mid-level crime boss makes an alliance with a declining top boss, and then manages to take over his erstwhile ally’s territory, this is, in Arendt’s terms, political action. If instead he simply shot his rival, his act would be outside the realm of politics. However, if he were to terrorize inhabitants of his rival’s territory, to demonstrate his rival’s weakness and therefore cause him to reevaluate his strategy, this is still a political action, as long as the rival trusts that his opponent adheres to the code of never attacking another elite member directly.

The transition from violence as a means to politics to the use of force in place of politics is, for actors, palpable. The normal things political actors *do* cease to make sense; once Nazis began not only brawling in the street but also attacking political elites physically, the political arena began to collapse.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the fact that autocrats often *do* apply force to previous political actors is evidence of this

<sup>2</sup> “‘Peace’ is nothing more than a change in the form of the conflict or in the antagonists or in the objects of the conflict, or finally in the chances of selection” (Weber 1949 [1917]: 27). Clausewitz (1968 [1832]) could not have put it better himself.

<sup>3</sup> Ermakoff (2008: 70) tries to argue against the importance of fear for one’s own safety in the “collective abdication” of the Reichstag to the Nazis, by pointing out that some people did resist, therefore others could have, therefore coercion is an incomplete explanation. We think that such a

understanding, for as Aristotle (*Politics* 1314a20) and Arendt (1958: 202f.) understood, the autocrat is attempting to destroy politics itself, by attacking any capacity for the orientation to free relationship formation between others.

Above we compared our formal approach to politics to the formal approach to economic action. The excision of force plays a similar role in both. No one denies that sometimes people steal from others, or that the reason why we have labor markets in the first place is the deep coercion of “he who does not work, neither shall he eat.” But the mathematicization of economics required the postulate of free action in the “field of competition” (Edgeworth 1881: 17f.). We misremember if we think that the ideologicization of economics came from *this* axiom; rather, it was the claim to find aggregate equilibria of maximum overall utility even in cases that departed from the axioms. Just as we want neither an apologetic economics, one that confuses its formal conditions with substantive claims (and hence refuses to acknowledge actual violence and coercion), nor a meaningless economics that cannot recognize what is distinctive about markets as a form of coordination, so we want neither a Panglossian vision of politics, nor a sociology that cannot comprehend what is important about politics as a form of social organization. Yet the last of these is what we have.

We do not deny that there may be occasional cases that defy easy categorization. But if our response to such complications when they arise is to confuse politics and war, as implied by the many definitions of politics that emphasize “the pursuit of the capacity to force one’s will on others,” we rid ourselves of the chance to investigate one of the most fascinating aspects of state formation and deformation, namely, the transition from one to the other. Rather than politics and all-out civil war being minor variations on a theme, they are, just as Hobbes (1909 [1651]) would have said, antithetical solutions to the same sorts of problems – where there is one, there is not the other. A space for politics opens up only with a kind of pacification, even if that space of politics is used to coordinate war regarding *other* disputes.

Thus, in formal terms, politics is paradigmatically the struggle to achieve control over organizational resources via the manipulation of social relations of alliance (mutual support of some sort). The notion put forward by Schmitt (2008 [1932]) – that politics turns on the identification of enemies and friends – is, we claim, a crucial insight. But the extermination or disempowerment of enemies via force involves a radical collapse of the relations of power inherent in a true polity, and we only hamper our ability to develop a theory of politics if we confuse such applications of force with politics.

Thus, distinctively political action appears to arise in areas cordoned off from the direct application of coercion, where actors seek to make, maintain, and break alliances so as to best other alliances. It is not surprising that we so often use the

tactic (one which basically eliminates the category of coercion entirely) is distracting – once legislators are thinking in terms of fight or flight, they are no longer acting as politicians.

formal notion of politics when it comes to the control of organizations. Because organizations are likely to be winner-takes-all goods, they provoke the formation of alliances. However, there is no reason to imagine that such formally political action cannot take place outside of organizations. Consider the well-studied case of the formulation of marital alliances between lineages. Some of the strategy guiding these actions will strike us as political. Yet someone who works to marry his daughters to the richest possible families, in the hopes of increasing the wealth of his lineage, is not exactly acting politically, the way he would if there were, say, two different alliances of lineages, each trying to squeeze the other out.

In sum, there are both substantive and formal aspects to what we mean by the political. The first involves all those things that seem to be centrally related to the state. Here we believe that the sociology of the past 25 years has done quite well at improving our conceptual apparatus. The problematic view was one of the state as “an” organization, one that could be treated as a “man writ large,” and one that had to be understood as paradigmatically a nation-state, the prototype of which was nineteenth-century France, which was, or so we were told, a contiguous body of land occupied by persons sharing language and culture and facing a common fate, and its state was one that had substituted direct rule for indirect rule. But first, as Evans et al. (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985) emphasized, the state, rather than a single unitary institution, is an interconnected *set* of institutions. Second, as Go (2013) argues, we have unjustifiably attempted to hold on to this view of nation-states as distinct from empires largely by simply disattending to the significant colonial territories of these supposedly contiguous states. The states are not monads, but sets of relations. Third, and continuing with this relational imperative, without denying the utility of the distinction between direct and indirect rule, we find that we often must disaggregate states not only into sets of institutions, but into principals and agents (e.g., Hechter 2000). Even more, we find that modern states distinctly develop a new sort of indirect rule, in which they help to establish and stabilize fields of semi-autonomous action (Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

Thus we think that sociology is now in a good position to make advances in our understanding of politics that were previously blocked by our mis-theorization of the state. However, the weaknesses in our theory of action still interfere with progress in two other key parts of political sociology – an understanding of the logic of elite political action, and of mass political subjectivity. While we see the substantive approach to field theory developed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) as the most promising way forward for the theory of the state, we propose that to make progress on our micro-sociology of political action and cognition, sociology must – at last – rid itself of unfounded assumptions about the nature of action.

### The End of GOFAT

Despite all the evidence against it coming from the neural and behavioral sciences, and despite almost none of their own theorists defending it,

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sociologists still reach back to what, following Martin (2014), Strand and Lizardo (2017), and Turner (2018), we can call Good Old-Fashioned Action Theory (GOFAT) to explain individual actions (this has been recently spruced up for resale, now termed the “DBO – Desires/Beliefs/Opportunities” model, by Hedström 2005). Here, we have goals we are trying to reach, whether they come from our organic desires or transcendent values. We also have beliefs about the world, including beliefs about others’ beliefs (and what they will approve of). Finally, there are constraints and opportunities offered by the situation that we are in. Our action, then, can be explained by the motivation that is formed in a calculus, conscious or not, that precedes the action.

The falsity of this account in literal terms does not prevent it from being a useful generator of predictions in many cases, and it can be enlightening to treat it as a null model, deviations from which point to interesting cases that need to be explained (Weber 1978). However, it is singularly inappropriate for the case of politics. Here, the ascription of motivations is endogenous to the political sphere itself – to say what led someone to do what he did is itself a political act. Given that we cannot adjudicate these disputes via psychological science (because science rejects the core psychological assumptions of GOFAT), we will find that our political psychology necessarily turns into a politicized psychology. Even more, reliance on GOFAT has led us to collect precisely the wrong data. When thinking about a political action (say, the choice of a party to affiliate with), we have taken our knowledge of the *justifications* that adherents give, assumed that such post-factum claims have an ex-ante existence, queried people about them, and used these to predict their choices as if they made their political alliances by completing a spreadsheet.

What we neglect in such situations are two things, one familiar to us – the crudity of our measures of actors’ external positions – and the other unfamiliar – the overly complex and refined nature of our theory of their internal processing. Regarding the first, the one thing that sociological studies of political action, especially when we have individual-level data on the laity, almost always do is to attempt to explain political action or position by reference to variables like income and education, which seem to be proxies for position in “social space.” The effects of these predictors are in line with expectations derived from theoretically strong models (such as those of class-based voting), but they are usually weaker than the stronger theories would imply.

However, given that our measures of location in social structure are famously bad, we cannot take their relatively poor predictive power as a reason to cease attempting to develop theories that tie political action to social position. Instead, there are two tasks for the future that involve a closer specification of position in social structure. The first is to understand how and why regularities in political behavior correlate with an actor’s location in physical as well as social space. Two people with identical co-variates, living

in different places, should not be assumed to have the same propensities to vote one way as opposed to another.

The second task is to improve the precision of our measures. Even if they are in the same place, two persons with identical co-variates are rarely identical. Of course, sociologists have always understood that unobserved heterogeneity gives all of their conclusions a *ceteris paribus* quality. However, we have not widely faced up to the fact that it is quite likely that divisions *within* what we have considered to be our finest categories (such as a three-digit census occupation code) are relevant for political side taking. Some “accountants and auditors” (#080) have the job of helping private firms evade government taxation, and other “accountants and auditors” have the job of catching them when they err. In all cases, recognizing the “natural level” on which the organization of occupations has cultural-political implications (Weeden and Grusky 2005) will require moving away from conventional individual-level survey data to sources that allow us, among other things, to finally examine the explanatory of power of class for vote.

We have thus been overly coarse in our examination of individuals’ location in social structure or social space. But we have been overly refined in our theory of individuals’ subjectivities. That is, we have allowed ourselves to decompose this subjectivity into convenient boxes, things like *beliefs*, *values*, *attitudes*, *opinions*, and *emotions*, and allowed ourselves to spin out fanciful models of their relations (for example that *beliefs* plus *values* produce *opinions*) with little supporting evidence. By attempting to impose a serial reasoning process on our actors – the complement to our spreadsheet vision of their cognitive capacities – we have foregone any disciplined investigation of the ways in which political action relies on the qualitative nature of lived experience. Such an investigation requires, whether we like it or not, accepting that the relation that political actors have with the social objects that they confront is technically an aesthetic one (see Martin 2011). Just as we do not need to *derive* that we detest okra (if in fact we do), we merely react to its quality of being *slimy* (Sartre 1956: 607–612), so too we do not need to make such derivations when we perceive the *sliminess* of a political candidate. The problem we face with such analyses is that we cannot (yet) explain why of two workers in similar nonunion establishments in the same state, one feels threatened by Mexican immigration, and the other not; why one *sees* Bill Clinton as *obviously, visibly* “slimy” and the other *sees* Clinton as “decent, chummy.”

The great task for the future, when it comes to mass politics, involves bringing these two subtasks together – to relate the seemingly vague issues of aesthetic perception to the specific locations of persons in a web of social relations. Already, real advances have been made by moving away from the assumption that there is *one* model that characterizes all political cognition. For instance, Baldassarri (2012) relates the *perceptions* individual voters have of parties and candidates to different cognitive *styles*, or approaches to making decisions about politics – and, in turn, shows that people in different social

positions apply different styles of thought. This is of a piece with a growing literature on political cognition, mostly produced by psychologists and political scientists (e.g., Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010). To a certain extent, an apparent lack of interest in this field can be easily forgiven; some programs of research in this area may seem to lose the sociological impetus and devolve into personality at best, faux genetics at worst. And it might seem simply “cute” that most Americans can predict whether an unknown (white) political figure is Republican or Democrat simply by viewing his picture (and they can; see Rule and Ambady 2010). But important information lies in processes of attitude formation and opinion change, as some sociologists now argue (Wright and Boudet 2012; see also Ojeda and Hatemi 2015). If we are lucky, we will be able to bring such differential processing of sensory stimuli into at least partial agreement with our theories of social structure. If not, we will probably begin to understand what aspects of personality (feel free to call this *habitus*) are orthogonal to social structure, and which ones cannot be ignored.

But it is not at all clear that the same theoretical approach that is most satisfactory for our study of mass political attitudes will be generative when it comes to understanding the action of political specialists. Here there is also a task for the future, but explicating this requires not only that we distinguish between mass and elite politics, but that we understand their relation.

#### MASS AND ELITE

##### Little (Esoteric) and Big (Exoteric) Fields

We have argued that the prototypical case of politics involves both formal and substantive considerations – that alliances are assembled to best other alliances for control over certain portions of the state. Indeed, most states – and not only democratic ones – have organizational components that are *designed* for formally political action. Unlike inside a business or a church, there is nothing untoward when it comes to political action *here* (although there might be in other organizational components of the state).

The insulation of political actors from force allows their actions in this realm to reflect the balance of power *outside* (which may well involve violence). This reflection or mapping may involve a relation of representation, but it need not – returning to our example of the crime bosses, they may meet and conduct political maneuvering among one another based on their capacity to mobilize their followers for violence, as opposed to voting. What is key is that the free exercise of the formal capacity to make and break alliances has additional weight because of the mapping of relations of elites to nonelites.

We propose that the best way to think about these two realms, that of the professionals and that of the laity, is to consider them two fields – fields being the sorts of regularities that mutually oriented free actors tend to induce. Politics thus involves not only what we shall call the “little” (or, following Fleck 1979

[1935], *esoteric*; to avoid terminological fatigue we alternate) political field – that in which the formal and substantive aspects of politics are joined in a protected organizational venue – but also the “big” (or *exoteric*) political field, in which the laity are mapped onto this little field. While the duplication of terminology is generally to be regretted – and the uncontrolled proliferation of field analyses based on Bourdieu’s (e.g., 1996 [1992]) wonderful terminology is widely decried by sociologists – in this case, we think that this division, rather than defining away complexity by introducing new terms, increases the simplicity of our understanding of the relation between mass and elite politics.

A field is a set of actors who are mutually oriented and susceptible in such a way that it becomes parsimonious for them to understand the logic of their action by reference to *position*, where *position* is a continuously variable and abstract concept (as opposed to, say, a slot in a formal organization). Let us sketch an example from an important borderline case of political action – the world of state diplomats. We shall imagine a case in which they are truly nonpartisan, yet not locked into a rigid civil service career system. Rather, they can move up in their world by demonstrating a number of skills, including relational skill (quite reasonable, since a person who is “diplomatic” enough to move ahead in a field can be expected to make a good diplomat!) (Fligstein 2001). Such actors may be oriented to a “field” that is quite independent of what we would generally call “the political field.” Such state fields have been explored by Steinmetz (2008). What is key is that we cannot understand action outside of the context of the set of available positions for elites (Adams 2005).

Aspects of this sort of field are found even for those who are, in Weberian terms, true politicians as opposed to administrators. For example, legislators in the United States must now be popularly elected to maintain their position (ignoring initial appointments to replace those that have had to leave their seats for reasons of death, disease, or disgrace). Yet in addition to the maneuvering to ensure election, there is a little field that is largely independent of partisanship, which has to do with access to coveted committee positions (here see, *inter alia*, Padgett 1990 and Marwell 1967 as well). Persons who were allies on “partisan” matters might be opponents in this career field, and vice versa. Thus actors in the esoteric field actually have two orientations: one to the exoteric field, and one to the esoteric field.

However, in some cases, movement within the esoteric field is conditioned strongly by the nature of the mapping to the exoteric field. The exoteric may be understood as giving a structured set of possibilities that esoteric field actors must seize upon to advance their own careers. Thus we see a path of influence from the exoteric field to the esoteric, but of course, it is also the case that the organization of the exoteric field is made specifically with respect to a mapping to the esoteric field.<sup>4</sup> Groups may struggle with one another or make alliances or

<sup>4</sup> It is not invariably the case that anyone who belongs to the little field also belongs to the big field. For example, in the Ottoman world, the Mamluks often controlled administration, and had a very

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pursue their interests (“material and ideal,” as Weber would say) without this being political. It is political when their struggles with one another are mediated by the members of esoteric field.

There are a number of different theoretical approaches that could be used with equal plausibility to describe the nature of this relation between the little and big fields. A systems theory perspective, such as that put forward by Niklas Luhmann (2000), might consider the larger political field more like an environment for the smaller political field. (Luhmann’s own perspective involves public opinion as such an interpenetrating system, an interesting question which we put to the side for now, as we do his distinction between center and periphery, which we think was a false step.) An ecological perspective might compare the exoteric field to a physical environment, offering certain kinds of niches – possibilities for conduct that leads to survival – for different sorts of creatures. One may, quite reasonably, point out that political figures do much to shape the larger field which is to serve as their environment, but it actually appears that animals do this as well (Odling-Smee, Laland, and Feldman 2003). In addition to those that obviously transform the environment to make homes or to raise crops or livestock as do ants, many discourage competitors by reshaping the environment in ways that seem formally quite like the ways in which politicians may facilitate their continued thriving in one area, both physically and in terms of their position in resource space.

While leaving open the question of whether any of these terminological choices offer technical advantages, we emphasize that we think that theorizing the core relation of the big and the little field requires not so much the adoption of a new terminology as the clarification of a persistent misunderstanding of the nature of fields. This misunderstanding came from Pierre Bourdieu’s emotional orientation to fields as possessing an analytically derivable set of inner principles (*Eigenetzlichkeit*), and his sense that the field was in some respects besmirched when other principles guided action. Thus he tended to see fields as organized in terms of a rivalry between those more committed to the field’s autonomy (playwrights’ playwrights, for example) and those more willing to obey heteronomous imperatives for mercenary motivations (playwrights for the Broadway tourist, to continue the example). As Martin and Merriman (2017) argue, this implied, probably wrongly, that fields could at least in principle exist without this heteronomy. In contrast, argue Merriman and Martin, while participants may indeed differ in terms of their commitment to autonomy, and although heteronomy dilutes field effects, fields require some degree of heteronomy if they are not to explode or collapse.

Thus the fact that political actors must play with reference to two arenas at once, managing their relations to other political actors and to the constellation

clear political field in which they acted. But, since they were technically slaves, they were not included in the free populace of the big field.

of positions that constitutes the “big” political field, does not, in our eyes, lessen the appropriateness of the field analysis. The same could be said for playwrights or chefs (Leschziner 2016).

Further, just as with other fields, there is variation in the degree to which certain positions lead to greater attention to the “audience” and which less, as well as which persons pursue more heteronomous strategies (sometimes miscalled “outsiders”) as opposed to more field-specific ones (“insiders”). If there is anything distinctive in the relation between the little and big fields in politics, it might be that in most polities, party membership is exclusive, leading to a clarity coming from a partition of the laity. However, it is not clear that the attachment of audience members to the hippie jug band the Grateful Dead was less exclusive than that of most supporters of the Democratic Party, especially those in states with open primaries. The distinctiveness of the political field in these respects is an empirical question. Thus we believe that the Janus-faced nature of political action – that the professionals act with one eye toward one another, and another to the distribution of support and resources in the exoteric field – may actually be the modal case of fields, and not an exception. But this takes us outside the jurisdiction of the current work; we return to consider the principles of organization of the exoteric field.

### Mapping and Shaping

We noted that actors in the esoteric field generally must act with one eye trained on their fellows (allies and rivals) and another trained on the exoteric field – their supporters and potential supporters, for example. The great task of a political sociology is in going beyond this generic vision to a more precise statement of the relations connecting what happens in the esoteric field to the nature of the exoteric field.

We may start with a simple, though important, approach, one which may be our sociological common sense – that the polity consists of groups with interests, and these groups clump together to push for candidates or policies. More subtly, we may say that society is divided by “cleavages,” and that these may align with structured divisions between political elites (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Such a vision is natural in cases in which we find “workers” or “Catholic” or “Islamic” parties, and we do not wish to deny the importance of such analyses. Yet even in such cases, we often find complications, for the salience – and in some cases, the categorical definitions – of such seemingly extra-political groupings can be endogenous to the political process.

Given the difficulty of a general theory of the relation between the *substantive* organization of the polity in terms of “types” (now that Labor parties no longer appeal merely to “Labor”), we might be interested in some less grandiose, but perhaps promising, ways of linking the *formal* organization of the polity to formal aspects of the state’s institutional structure. To take a famous example of this sort of reasoning, there is good cause to think that single-representative, first-past-the-post,

districts tend to induce a two-party structure. A two-party structure, further, all things being equal, can be expected to lead to a bifurcation of the population into roughly equal camps of supporters (Duverger 1963 [1954]; Sartori 1976). In addition, where voters can identify a single predominant dimension to make sense of their action, the line of division is likely to move toward the median of the distribution on this dimension (Downs 1957).

A second way in which the little political field shapes the big has to do with the degree of federalism as opposed to centralization when it comes to the flow of collective resources. Polities in which regions, provinces, or states control important resources or make important decisions naturally have different politics from those where local bodies have either less power, or less independence from the national system (Chhibber and Kollman 2004). While to some degree, this relation is fixed, and cross-polity differences in degree of federalism are relatively stable, still, the degree to which resource allocation and extraction takes place in provinces as opposed to centers varies over time according to political actions. In particular, where there is a possibility of federalism, parties that are out of power at the national level tend to work very hard to devolve power to lower levels that they can hope to control.

More generally, the particular features of any state organization shape the sorts of struggles that arise, as they shift some resources into positions where they are objects of contestation, and others not. Thus it is not only the vertical structure of the state (*where* different decisions are made: the local, provincial, or national level, for example), but also its horizontal structure (whether the state controls media, which industries it owns or regulates, and so on) that shape the zones of politicization. Finally, we also cannot exclude the role of other, often competing, structures of organization (for example industry associations, patron states, or the church) in draining politics to other arenas, thereby shaping the nature of the arenas for political organization and action.

These facets of the esoteric organization, coupled with the distribution of types of persons across sociogeographic space, create the space of possibilities for effective mappings of political elites to the exoteric field. And more subtle issues – for example, whether senators are directly elected or chosen by legislatures, or whether nonwhites have greater representation in the House than in the Senate – also may establish conditions for effective political action. But in all cases of modern politics, the key element of this mapping involves a special type of organization: the political party. Understanding the changing nature of such parties is another key task for the future.

## PARTY AND IDEOLOGY

### Parties and Party Formation

We noted that the substantive definition of politics turns on the organizational apparatus of the state. But modern polities generate a second form of

organization that is even more closely identified with political action, namely, the party. While the pivotal role of parties in such polities is hardly in dispute, the same parties appear very differently – and therefore suggest different theories of politics – when they are understood from the top down (as means by which elites mobilize nonelites) than they do when understood from the bottom up (as means by which those with shared interests in the electorate combine forces). Of course, the relative explanatory priority of these two accounts need not always correlate precisely with the relative initiatory capacity of the two sides (top and bottom), and the balance of this capacity may shift over the life span of both parties and of party systems. Unfortunately, functionalist understandings of parties can interfere with a recognition of such changed priority (as they impose the key principles of past organization upon present cases). For this reason, we think that we are best off beginning with an analytic-genetic approach to parties (drawing on Martin 2009: Chapter 8), an account which may also be of use in understanding how parties transform.

There are, historically, two different ideal typical versions of parties. One, often called a legislative party, consists of ties between political elites, paradigmatically horizontal ties of alliance between parliamentarians. These may have ties because they recognize similar interests, because they share certain characteristics (most importantly, regional and linguistic/ethnic), or because they find that for strategic purposes, they need to ally with *some* others, even if their choice of allies cannot be predicted on the basis of previous statuses. In many cases, such legislative parties are found in a more rudimentary sense of “blocs.” These are sets of political elites who act together, but rarely require specific coordination, often because of a natural confluence of interests.

The second ideal type, often called an electoral party, is organized around a vertical relationship (though not always concrete ties) between elites and the lowest relevant level of political actors (again, paradigmatically the mass, but where the mass is disenfranchised, this may be an intermediate stratum, as in the ancient Roman republic). In most of the older democracies, the former (legislative party) preceded the latter (electoral party), and it was only through repeated waves of electoral competition that elites were forced to extend their reach into the populace. (In general, we may say that mobilization of an electorate is always the second choice for elites, taken when they have no chance of triumphing over other elites without the support of nonelites.)

Such electoral parties have something in common with the “factional” organizations that arise among elites where politics turns on control of an indivisible good (such as control over a strong and unitary organization), as opposed to a divisible good (such as tax revenues). Such factions tend to involve coordinated action, but only that required to best another faction. Competition between elite factions can, in some cases, lead to the mobilization of nonelites. When this happens via progressive and alternating extensions of opportunities for political action, we may see parties develop (where the elites already have

preexisting relations with nonelites a sudden increase in interelite competition is more likely to lead to civil war than to party formation).

Such social structures, however, tend to be limited to localities in which most politics can be coordinated by face-to-face relations, and there are subgroups that can be treated as fixed for purposes of mobilization (for example, families, churches, unions) that have corporate existence. Formation of national political structures often involves the formation of horizontal relations of alliance between such sectional parties. However, how this happens depends on whether the party system is a multiparty one, a two-party system, or a single-party system. In a two-party system, the “outs” in one area (those out of power) attempt to take the conflicts of interests between the “ins” across region to ally with the “ins” in a different region, leading to a pattern of alliances of local parties. Once established, such parties then become understood as alliances that take place less across areas of *geographical* space and more ones that take place across *social* space. In a multiparty system, it is possible for a party to retain a stable regional identity and to enter into alliances with parties in other regions that do not imply the emergence of a new identity. In single-party systems, the establishment of cross-regional alliances would actually be more difficult, were it not for the fact that such parties often develop in conditions of struggle, in which they can also use the heuristic of common enemies to establish alliances.

### Modernization and Ideologization

This analytic-genetic account is a low, but stable, platform on which to begin to ask further questions about the relation between elite and mass politics. Most important, there is reason to think that there is a general tendency toward the increased importance of ideology as a way of coordinating political action. In other words, parties that may have begun as sets of multilateral compromises of expediency between political elites (what is referred to as “log-rolling” in American politics) end up with relatively well-developed theories of the alliance system that now appear as derived from first principles. Just as the old modernization theories held, the growth of democratic states, at any rate, seems to be associated with the replacement of divisible with indivisible goods in politics, and hence a transition from particularistic and concrete to more general and abstract ways of making claims, even when parties began “ideologically.”

There was – just as Simmel (1950 [1923]: 256f.) would have it – a transition between the more particularistic politics and the more abstract ones in the form of the “party of incorporation,” a species which played an important role in the development of democratic parties. Such parties go beyond the function of mobilizing votes or aggregating demands, and provide social and economic organization for members. Parties of incorporation were strong in most European states at different times in the nineteenth century, and were generally associated with workers’, peasants’, or veterans’ groups (the

People's Party in some portions of the late-nineteenth-century United States had some of these characteristics). What is distinctive about such parties is that while the absence of crosscutting cleavages may increase the commitment of members to a strong perspective, because there is no difference between “the good” and “good for us,” to the extent that there is ideological development, it tends to occur in the ontological as opposed to deontological register. This, however, may be more true of contemporary parties than we have tended to accept. And this brings us to the last task of future political sociology: to understand the processes of ideological production among the laity.

### Political Ideology

Perhaps the most confusing, but exciting, question that follows from the rejection of GOFAT pertains to the nature of the political ideology of the mass. Most definitions of ideology, as Martin and Desmond (2010) point out, have emphasized principles of *valuation*. Accepting the centrality of such valuation stems from the fact that partisans must *justify* their choices, and sociologists persistently confuse such after-the-fact justifications with motivations that, or so we would have it, precede the actions which they justify (Mills 1940). But, if we bracket the strident claims of political actors to be pursuing this or that value – claims which, while not necessarily false, must be understood as interested and in need of empirical confirmation – we find little reason to think that the core of ideology turns on “values” in anything but the most vacuous sense.

Instead, it appears that what divides those of different ideologies is less their ultimate values and more the ways in which they see the world. Conservatives and liberals in the United States, for example, agree as to the importance of the values of self-reliance, of fairness, of freedom, and of equality. What they disagree about is whether most poor *are* self-reliant or not, whether unions *do* undermine freedom, and so on. Martin and Desmond (2010) accordingly argue that ideology can be parsimoniously understood as a subjective representation of one's position in the political field, and that sophistication is akin to the width of one's field of view over the field as a whole.

Without denying the force of this argument, we can see that it – like most similar theoretical analyses of the relation between spheres of action and subjective orientation – is largely tautological. That is, if indeed we are to speak of political field (in the general sense of Bourdieu), which is to say, a set of positions that actors use to organize their experiences and actions, then it necessarily follows that the subjective side of their action is dual to their position in the field (“dual” in the Spinozan sense of Breiger 2000). We think that, based on the considerations regarding the nature of the mapping between the esoteric and exoteric realms of politics, one can say a bit more. Political ideology does not merely *bring with* it a social ontology, but rather, it is fundamentally a theory of the polity, however rudimentary or fragmentary it may be, and,

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indirectly, a theory of the wider social world.<sup>5</sup> To have a “far right” position in a central European polity now is largely to have a conception of a world pitting older natives against newer immigrants.

Ideology, then, is the theory of the polity held by nonelites.<sup>6</sup> The greater abstractness of contemporary ideologies in contrast to those associated with parties of incorporation has more to do with the challenge of making sense of a multidimensional space without sharp borders and less to do with moving upward in a chain of deductive reasoning. Ideology is, of necessity, a complex and inchoate theory, but it is one that affords the solution of novel problems via the projection of this complexity to a space of reduced dimensionality. In particular, in many cases it is unnecessary for actors to flesh out all aspects of this theory of the field, as it is – like all other theories – designed to facilitate a certain form of action, in this case, specifically political action – the identification of friends and enemies. Thus ideology may have many weak spots and aporia but still be compelling, so long as it can be used to determine this difference between allies and opponents (Baldassarri 2012; Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001). The task for the future, then, is to cease focusing on which of the proffered justifications our subjects pick (when they are forced to do so), and, instead, to understand their conceptions of the sociopolitical cartography, and how they use these to identify friends and enemies.

We already know about some of the *political* ways in which citizens produce these identifications. One is via party affiliation – who is on whose side. Where parties are stable (especially where they extend in corporatist fashion beyond the political arena narrowly defined), this heuristic is so successful that many forms of political reasoning become wholly redundant and may wither away. Paradigmatically, a labor party that is integrated with unions can lead to very simple but successful and ecologically valid forms of portioning (I am a worker

<sup>5</sup> We suspect that it will turn out that many, perhaps all, persons have more than one theory of the polity; they may sporadically update these theories with new information (true or not) – but they may also throw up temporary and fragile constructions for specific purposes, as well as choose among their available theories to best accomplish the task at hand. Further, we emphasize that these theories, as maps for practice, have the same characteristic as old navigators’ charts – they are quite attentive to issues of coast, and relatively tolerant of large swaths of terra incognita inland, where our actors are not going to go anyway. If, as we suspect, too many of the questions that social scientists ask citizens pertain to inland matters, we will have a hard time understanding mass actors’ capacity to successfully navigate the environments they *do* traverse.

<sup>6</sup> We recognize that this seems to imply that political professionals (e.g., legislators) lack ideology. Although one would be mad to deny that many such actors may have every bit as much ideology as could possibly be desired, the nature of this subjective orientation is far from clear, and the flexibility of such actors (i.e., political actors who themselves stand for election), to have a good part of their ideological conceptions shift with changes in the political field, is sufficiently pronounced to forbid us to make convenient assumptions about the subjectivities of such actors. We regretfully see this as a place in which little can be said, except that we must recognize that where people have a material interest in what comes out of their mouths, we must weigh their words quite judiciously before reintroducing a cognitive order that we then impute to them. Perhaps the same can be said for academics as well.

→ I vote Labor → those who do not are my opponents). Where the party system is weak, shifting, or destabilized by crosscutting cleavages, other heuristics may be used, such as coherent issue voting – when actors keep in mind one key issue, and simply throw their support for whomever professes to come closest to their position here.

But more complex are those ways of developing a theory of the social composition of the polity that rely on extra-political experiences, information, and theories. One especially simple class of processes that are likely to be relevant here consist of what Martin and Merriman (2015) call second order judgments – judging the judgments of others. As Alexius Meinong (1894: 45) emphasized, it seems to cause us some unhappiness to judge the judgments of our friends negatively, and ditto to be judged by them. That means that even in a complex world with perhaps many parties, we can partition others into friends and enemies by requiring that they make a public judgment of something which we ourselves can judge. The insatiable demand of Americans that they and all others comment on whatever seemingly irrelevant happenstance arose the previous day (for example, an inarticulate political statement by a television personality) comes, or so we hazard, not because Americans think that they should be guided in their political choices by the reasoning of professional athletes, say, but because this gives an opportunity for actors to determine or confirm their sense of their allies and enemies. The meme of the day is the *tertium quid* that allows us to establish ecologically valid relationships with people about whom we know very little, and whose interests we would be unlikely to discern.

Such isolatable mechanisms are manageable for theorizing, but they are unlikely to explain the most important dimensions of lay cartographies. There may be no shortcut around the compilation of many different studies of how different sorts of people piece together their approximation of the world out there from various sources, of which news media and party pronouncements are unlikely to be the most important. This is perhaps the most formidable, but most exciting, task for the future. We close with some tentative orientations that may usefully guide this search.

## CONCLUSIONS

Henri Bergson (1911), discussing the manifestations of intelligence in nature, gives the example of a wasp that feeds its young on a particular caterpillar that it stings to paralysis. The caterpillar has several nerve ganglia inside its body, and the wasp stings each one in turn as if it had both X-ray vision and a sophisticated theory of neural entomology. Presumably, it has neither, making its action seem as good a proof of theism as one would want. Bergson's point is that the wasp, whose own sensory-motor system has coevolved with that of the caterpillar, can orient itself to superficial features of the worm's anatomy so as to conduct ecologically rational actions that transcend its computational ability.

So, too, mass actors have the capacity to orient themselves to complex political objects about which they have very little knowledge. Even if they had knowledge, it would be quite implausible for them simply to attempt to make “rational decisions” (although we insist that they generally *do* so attempt this, at least, until they tire, and many tire quickly). The implausibility of rationality comes not because mass actors are fools or because they are selfless, but more prosaically, because, given that we do not know the future, we cannot always be sure what is “in our interest.” Further, we can select parties and candidates on the basis of their proclamations and announced policies, but they may not implement these anyway. Most important, though, lay actors in a modernized polity understand that they must give *reasons* to justify their choices, and part of making a political choice is adopting the reasons (including the view of the world) that makes this choice a defensible one.

This has long distracted analysts of political action. Adopting the assumption that one’s political action is “caused” by one’s own opinions – a conception of causality whose fundamental incoherence has been unable to outweigh its attraction given its compatibility with our folk theories – has meant that we have treated mass political action as something that is the result of *reasoning*. To reject this hypothesis – which we certainly must for a great many significant political actions – is not to consign the actors to the ranks of the unreasonable, any more than someone who appreciates a great work of music but cannot analyze it musicologically must be thrown out of the concert hall as an imposter.

Understanding the constitution, organization, and transformation of this ideational field of exoteric politics is certainly necessary if we are to correctly recreate the dynamics of the esoteric field of political action; although the reverse is also true, this has been less problematic, as there are fewer actors there and their actions are (highly) visible. The greatest challenge for the future of political sociology is rectifying our political psychology to understand how actors develop ecologically valid representations of their position in a social world, at least, one conditional on the sort of polity in which they find themselves.

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